

*Open fully
smooth on wherever
the heart beats
near the skin.
Anticipation soars
the sublime realization
...*

IN POSITION.

The silver-tongued voice is well digested, gathering into luminous gesture; Use me and/or I'll use you. But buy, sell, save—Want! So it goes, obtuse symmetry of the desirous and desirable.

Now. In another space (bus stop: Toronto) the spectacular voice alters in plea, modulates its utterances and opens onto another persuasion. *Posters Mean Business* the source declares—splashing across a tube of Crest. The medium (media) calls attention to its very power. Promises of commerce displace the promise of passion. A self-reflexive nightmare: advertising space solicits itself. Media striptease; the g-string finally falls in Ontario and exquisite positions are spoken. In suggesting its availability we may now consider having something to sell—Out. To intervene perhaps; ex/Pose and offer a discordial brand of passion.

*Some women lead
extraordinary lives.
For them, Sonia Rykiel has created
7ième Sens.*

So. In transgressing, a direction/voice quavers. Intricately bound questions of cultural geography arise: the form of address, audience positioning, public access, space/history and finally images of power vs. powerful images. Media territory. Into this crowded spectacle enters 'The European Iceberg', *The largest, most ambitious exhibition ever shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario*. Running somewhat concurrently is 'Public Address' (A Space), a series of artworks exhibited within a backlit, glass enclosed sign-space, erected on the exterior brick wall of the building housing the gallery. Both exhibitions set in motion the media/public in radically distinct ways. Becoming apparent, are the differences between a media phenomenon and a deliberately mediated address.

Focused. As an institution the AGO administers mainstream definitions of what constitutes Art. These 'museum fictions' perpetuate the notion of art (practice) as an autonomous object (static), commodiously detached, untainted by stuck-in-the-mud reality in order that it ascend... unto sublime Realization. Through an octopus-like autonomy, the AGO weilds invisible power—a making visible rooted in elitism that (em)-braces the monolithic status quo, successively operating around a principle of exclusion supported by the specialized audience to which it appeals. The appropriation of marginal art into a mainstreamed 'avant garde' (such as the General Idea Pavillion) demonstrates with audacity this power. Through advertising the AGO refashions and legitimizes its knowledge of the rules of the aesthe-

tic field. Thus, the language of Art is spoken from a position of authority; the tentacled efforts of its extremities allowing the inner lizard to bask in an aura of certainty. Media presence confounds the autoecious cycle: host and parasite of the public.

*A Work of Art
within a work of Art.*

In penetrating. Though well-oiled and glib, the unweildy representational apparatus is vulnerable; what of squeaking wheels, displaced gears and zones of friction? In an instant, art defines itself as capable of intervention—a working through/against conditioned ways of looking at art within culturally sanctified 'art space' or, by disrupting the images we encounter in public. Both instances, a shift in the place of reception or undermining from within the institution, subvert the traditional value judgements hung upon art.

Impertinent (outside). We may consider two specific strategies of 'public art'. One, where an artspace simulates an advertising space, such as A Space's 'Public Address' or

EXCURSIONS

London's 'Docklands Project'. An immediately deviant situation arises when artists appropriate an advertising space, such as New York artists' collaboration with the owners of the electronic billboard in Times Square, Toronto's Public Access Project or Optica Gallery's bus project in Montréal. Acutely disruptive, the work must contend with the history of a specific advertising space. Positioned between the before and after of commodification, the work finds meaning/affect therein. The audience is thus expectant, and suspecting. Crucial, when considering these seemingly similar strategies, is that the work is shifted from a contained (predictable) space into the public sphere where an audience arrives by chance; chaotic and in motion.

Dangerous, but worth the risk.

Here. At stake are the circumstances of exhibiting: Who speaks? Who's looking? Powerful images,

images given the name of Art tumble—contextualized. A Space's 'Public Address', representing 'marginal art' by virtue of its parallel position (within the gallery system), consciously crosses fields by mounting this exhibit. The works speak a double-tongue on a troubled edge, both here and there; perverting the 'innocence' (straight-forwardness) of the media while massaging the political conscience of marginal art by repositioning and redistributing (opening up?) its audience. And yet intervention is precisely that which cannot be assumed; in a fatal way, the circumstances of 'Public Address', that which makes the exhibition possible, do not appear to seep into the exhibiting itself.

Generally. The works deal with issues/processes of socialization, but in a manner curiously unspecific to this place/space (i.e. Spadina Avenue, Toronto). Lacking the self-reflexivity that would ground each work as somehow street-wise (site specific?), they rest appendaged to the gallery itself: uninquisitive and already-named. The lack of local immediacy and history is similar to the way in which advertising targets its audience—moves in, dominates and networks (denying local autonomy and difference). The Address is thus from above, not an unearthing and blowup from within and around. Who's looking? Who's speaking? The questions collapse into a single unified address—from the art community to its members. In this manner the circumstances become only that of an art exhibit; non-interference and specialization.

In closing. Simulation of intervention obscures the critical edge disturbing powerful images from images as extensions or affirmations of power (images of power). It is a claim to consistency: cordial speech. The public is both singular, many bodied and only accidentally an 'audience'—responsive to the positioning/ context of an image...if well-placed.

*La femme est une ile,
Fidji est son parfum.*

re: (im)Positioning. Opened fully...between borrowed images and desire the perfumed 'I' loses sense of fantasies smoothed on in a private stroke, as the scent goes public. Unsatiated, the original desire is reconstituted. Impossibly impassioned images. Imaging risks: dances the embrace of institutional amnesia, barely eliding indifference of its positioning/body/effect.

Christine Davis
is a Toronto artist.
Monika Gagnon
is a Toronto writer.
Both are members of the
border/lines collective.

Speaking The Media — Tongue in Cheek

by
Christine Davis
and
Monika Gagnon

