
Jeanne Dunning. *VOX, image contemporaine*, Montréal. 3 novembre - 15 décembre 2007

Patrice Duhamel

Number 78, Spring 2008

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/20246ac>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Les Productions Ciel variable

ISSN

1711-7682 (print)

1923-8932 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Duhamel, P. (2008). Review of [Jeanne Dunning. *VOX, image contemporaine*, Montréal. 3 novembre - 15 décembre 2007]. *Ciel variable*, (78), 57–58.

material that has been naturalized through technological engagements into forms that offer viewers insight into both the familiarity and the alien qualities of the processed universe. Gellman and Peters's work, *Impossible Landscapes*, was a video installation in which they processed uninhabited landscape images from television and film into a wholly new and continuously flowing landscape that moved viewers through the work as though they were players in an immersive first-person video game. The sense of movement through the video, which was accompanied by a wordless soundtrack that highlighted the changes in tension and pacing of the imagery, was palpable, and the spaces traversed, though impossible to know, seemed vaguely familiar.

This culling of imagery from familiar sources and its processing into uncommon or unexpected form was also undertaken by Cheryl Sourkes in her *Homecammer* series, in which she grabbed and enlarged still images from personal webcams to the point at which the astonishingly banal acts captured become almost subservient to the painterly effects of the images' dissolution. This aestheticization of content that has become commonplace is also the project of Thomson & Craighead, whose *Decorative Newsfeeds* do just as the title suggests: in travelling curlicues and arcs, fragments from Internet newsfeeds scroll in white text across a dark screen, their visual elegance often at odds with the terse phrasing and dire messages of the news items themselves. These artists process the informational transmissions of the televisual and online environments into accumulations of both meaning (real and perceived) and viewpoint. The content of the news and the exhibitionism of those in front of the web-

cams appear uninflected by the artists who present them; they are shown with remarkable neutrality, and they speak to the capacity for emergence of the poetic in spaces where the manufactured and the real (or apparently real) collide.

This neutrality was present also in the works in *Outlook Express(ed)*, curated by Marnie Fleming for the Gairloch Gardens site. In this exhibition, David Rokeby, Susan Collins, and Lois Andison presented work that addressed the processing of the pastoral through digital means over extended periods of time. The work was particularly resonant in this gallery, situated in a garden overlooking Lake Ontario. Here, the



Gellman and Leslie Peters, *Impossible Landscapes*, 2006, Still details from a video installation

artists' reflection on the natural world seemed to be less about nostalgia for connection to land and place than about an opportunity to investigate the ways in which viewers could be invited to participate in the meditation on meaning and change of the subject sites of nature that were presented by the artists.

Susan Collins's *Glenlandia* presented a landscape image accumulating through a fascinatingly and achingly paced agglomeration of pixels: at the rate of one pixel per

second, an image of a natural-looking but synthetic landscape formation, Loch Faskally in Scotland, is transmitted to the gallery via live webcam. In near-real time from many time zones to the east, an image is built, tracking changes in natural, ambient light such that any full image of the loch is as much in the dark as it is in the light. The image is constantly and slowly overwritten by its own replacement – the same site, the same view, with slightly differing light and weather conditions. In this way, the image, while whole, is always fragmentary, an accumulation of time-affected factors. The pixels accrue as we would read: from left to right, and in rows from top to

bottom, forming an impossible likeness, one that exceeds what could be seen were we to stand in the location of the camera itself.

David Rokeby's work provides a particular contextual engagement with the site of exhibition in that Gairloch Gardens itself is the subject of his work. In *Machine for Making Time*, Rokeby recorded swaths of the gardens using a camera mounted on the gallery building, and then randomized the playback of those stills such that the continuous visual arc across the landscape is

retained, but the narrative flow of content is disrupted across seasons, weather conditions, and time. Conversely, Lois Andison's *time and again* retains narrative in space and time as it replays one calendar year's photographing, at half-hour intervals, of the view from a single window through which we see the anticipated changes of the seasons, and the unanticipated progress of a local building project within the frame of the camera. The opportunity here to contemplate particular views, to have outlooks framed, casts light on the matter of speed in relation to "normal" change; slowed, sped, and discontinuous, these narratives highlight the degree to which human intervention is so constitutive of "natural" change.

In both of these exhibitions, the matter of decision-making is very much at the fore. In equal measure, these artists take close care of their means of selection and also cede much decision-making to either randomized or pre-selected mechanisms that may at one point render the artist's agentic presence almost moot. In the accumulation and expression of outlooks within these exhibitions, the pastoral and the processed are not so much in conflict as they are in cahoots to offer both reflections and refractions of the natural and synthetic worlds that we inhabit contemporaneously.

Jessica Wyman is a writer, art historian, and award-winning curator who teaches at the Ontario College of Art and Design.

Jeanne Dunning

VOX, image contemporaine, Montréal
3 novembre – 15 décembre 2007



Jeanne Dunning, *Extraskin (subtracking)*, 1999, images fixes tirées du vidéo, DVD, 10 min. 15 sec.

Le tératome est une manifestation rare de la croissance chez les mammifères. Il se manifeste en faisant apparaître les choses au mauvais endroit. Poils, ongles et dents naissent, par exemple, à l'intérieur des organes. Leur présence est discrète. Il arrive qu'on les découvre par hasard lors d'une opération chirurgicale visant à enlever quelque autre tumeur. Jeanne Dunning en appelle à cette sorte d'anomalie anatomique. Dans son cas, elle se serait au contraire extériorisée en une sorte de tuméfaction informe menaçant à chaque instant d'éclater.

Les images sont troublantes et monstrueuses. Elles renforcent la connivence étymologique entre *montrer* et *monstre*. Montrer comme on présente un objet composite, comme on monte, on agence diverses parties dont le cumul échouerait à constituer un tout homogène. Comme si le corps et l'esprit demeuraient irrémédiablement séparés. Comme si le corps portait en lui-même un corps étranger. Encore faut-il démêler certaines choses. Matière, corps, peau, organes tendent ici à se confondre parce que la césure qui s'opère habituellement entre intériorité et extériorité perd toute évidence. L'artiste américaine a créé un parcours simple où des photographies de grand format répondent

à des bandes vidéo présentées à l'aide de moniteurs montés sur des socles. De grands voiles incarnats et translucides sont tendus perpendiculairement à notre déambulation, l'empêchant d'être rectiligne. Ils renvoient également à la matière en jeu dans les œuvres. Dichotomisée, la mise en espace semble nous poser simultanément deux questions: s'agit-il de se faire un corps ou alors de se faire faire un corps? Dans les bandes vidéo, des protagonistes enlissent, bourrent, lubrifient, frottent, nettoient frénétiquement des objets dont la mollesse rivalise avec l'inertie accablante de leur masse. Ces sortes de poches se déversent sur les figurantes des photographies, les couvrent ou sont enla-

cées par elles. Avec une vitesse égale et sans objet apparent, les personnages des autres bandes vidéo enfilent sans discontinuer bas nylons et vêtements faits d'une matière semblable à la masse placentaire.

D'autres pratiques artistiques croisent certains de leurs enjeux avec le travail de Dunning. Les bandes vidéo de Phyllis Baldino, en particulier *Gray Area Series*, montrent un personnage s'acharnant avec des outils de fortune et une frénésie irrépressible sur des objets du quotidien – dont la fonction est incertaine – de manière à leur en donner une nouvelle qui, par ailleurs, ne s'explique pas mieux. Le travail de Erwin Wurm vient aussi à l'esprit. On pense notamment à la bande vidéo *13 Pul-*

lovers où un ami de l'artiste (Fabio) enfle successivement treize chandails, ou encore à *Fabio Getting Dressed*, série de photographies où le même figurant se pare de chacun des vêtements de sa garde-robe. Ces pratiques soulèvent des questions où se mêlent pathologie, fonction des objets et purs problèmes de physique. Ce qui singularise le travail de Jeanne Dunning, c'est la manière qu'il a de renvoyer, par son dispositif, à une interrogation plus aiguë d'un psychisme féminin en crise. En contre-champ des vidéos, les photographies laissent voir la contrepartie d'un phénomène de bipolarité. Face à ce qui se donnait comme des comportements maniaques, auxquels de toute évidence se prêtent bien le mouvement de l'image vidéo et ses mises en boucle, elles présentent des figures étendues, apathiques et prostrées qui suggèrent les signes de la dépression.

Il n'est pas sans pertinence d'évoquer ici la réflexion de Catherine Grenier qui, dans son livre *Dépression et subversion*, fait abondamment état des stratégies employées



Jeanne Dunning *On a plater*, 1999. Ilfochrome monté sur plexiglass. 132 x 85 cm

par certains artistes pour produire des détournements, de l'obstruction. Ainsi, elle nous parle de la pratique de Ugo Rondinone, dont les vidéos – où figurent des clowns affaissés, tristes, aussi inefficaces qu'inutiles – sont des catalyseurs d'inertie en tout point comparables aux personnages de Dunning. L'historienne fait évidemment jouer l'inerte, le déprimé, le malade contre le vigoureux, le sain, le tonique. En rapport d'opposition, ces deux types d'attitudes trouvent un écho dans l'histoire de l'art. Grenier les répartit d'un côté en une avant-garde ouverte à l'informe et de l'autre en un modernisme soucieux de produire des formes. Ce sont des enjeux que nous pourrions élargir à de plus vastes débats, mais que nous allons résorber dans ce qui est également présent dans le travail de Dunning et qui a trait à la beauté. Comme nous le dit Georges Vigarello dans son livre *Histoire de la beauté*, plusieurs normes comme autant d'interdits ont prévalu au cours des époques. Les corps féminins ont été

«aidés» en quelques sorte par des appareillages plus ou moins rigides et complexes visant d'une part à retenir les chairs et d'autre part à focaliser la vision. Plusieurs époques ont privilégié le haut (visage, cou, poitrine) pour abandonner le bas à des artifices qui ne laissaient rien voir ou deviner. Ce que fait Dunning se trouve à l'opposé : pas de forme, monstration, absence de focalisation. C'est pourquoi son travail est sans relation avec celui d'Orlan, par exemple, même s'il ne cesse de défaire et de refaire un corps dont l'intérieur et l'extérieur en viennent à se confondre au point de ne plus être que matière.

—
Patrice Duhamel est artiste et musicien, critique d'art et commissaire. Il a participé à des expositions de groupe et à plusieurs festivals au Canada, aux États-Unis et en Europe.
 —

Greg Girard

New Works,
 Monte Clark Gallery, Toronto
 September 20 – November 18, 2007



Like those of many of his Vancouver contemporaries, Greg Girard's photographs – melancholy, colour-drenched images of Shanghai – are very large, which has the effect of enticing the viewer into a direct relationship with the city's grand architecture and intimate interiors. The images in the exhibition are taken from Girard's latest book, *Phantom Shanghai*, and showcase China's largest city as a dreamlike film set in the midst of a bizarre and beautiful transition.

Originally a fishing town, Shanghai is now the eighth-largest city in the world, with a population estimated at well over 13 million. Though it languished – remaining largely intact – after the Communist takeover in 1949, since 1992 it has led China's new economic growth, resulting in a unique conflation of Old World architecture and lifestyle with the new. Girard has been based in Asia since the late 1980s, covering the region for international publications such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. In 1993, he documented the final years of the Kowloon Walled City in a book titled *City of Darkness*, and in 2002 he co-founded documentCHINA, a picture agency specializing in contemporary photography from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

There are other photographers whose work treads the line between art and documentation – Edward Burtynsky, for example, whose imagery exploits the contrast between vision and knowledge, beauty and tragedy. Girard's work is similarly about social and cultural contrasts, but it's more about finding pockets of interest in the "now," often days prior to a building's destruction. Shooting in natural light at dusk and dawn with medium-format daylight transparency film, with exposures of thirty seconds to five minutes, Girard maintains a

documentary style while imbuing his imagery with a luminosity so unusual as to be almost surreal.

In many images, apartment windows exude warm orange light, while clammy corridors are often bathed in violet tones against the harsh white or bright colours of industry. The blue-green of the damp side street in *Six Hundred Things*, #24 Pinghu Lu (2005), for instance, stands dramatically before a backdrop of smoky white and red neon. Off to one side, a door opens, illuminating the alley further in a greenish hue. Across the way, a single yellow bulb pierces the air. In *House on Zixia Lu*, #14 Zixia Lu (2005), a stunning work that wasn't in the exhibition (but should have been), ochre light ricochets across an ancient, narrow alley lined with stacks of mirrors leaning to each side, while over top, a foreboding red light – not the red of a sunset, but the harsh red of an illuminated billboard – neatly divides the scene in two. In the introduction to the book, Girard says, "These are photographs of the Shanghai that will not survive the vision the city has for itself. That these homes, shops, lanes and buildings survived as long as they did... is by accident rather than design."

The gallery has chosen to exhibit Girard's more atmospheric images that tend to avoid over-sentimentalism, though they speak of Girard's fondness for his adopted home. *Former Cinema Lobby*, #11 Jianguo Dong Lu (2006) is one, in which a storage area filled with blue light features a stately crystal chandelier – a reminder of more elegant times. Another, *2nd Floor, Yan Family House* (2006), which shows leather shoes resting on the worn wooden floor of a migrant workers' building, evokes the intimacy of early work by Girard's friend, the