

Theodore Wan and the Subject of Medical Illustration

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Article abstract

Theodore Wan, originaire de Hong Kong et établi à Vancouver, a produit une intrigante série de photographies médicales alors qu'il était étudiant de maîtrise à NSCAD en 1977. Ces oeuvres, inspirées par la trope du readymade duchampien, ont servi de média d'apprentissage à la faculté de médecine de Dalhousie et d'une forme d'autoportrait ; elles utilisent un régime visuel associé au traumatisme physique qui permet d'inscrire le traumatisme psychique. L'auteur soutient que Wan a exploité une impulsion expressionniste de la rigueur systématique du domaine de l'illustration médicale qui correspond à une période subjective sur la scène artistique des années 1970 ; qui mettaient en question l'héritage d'indifférence légué par les readymades de Duchamp et épousé par le mouvement conceptualiste. Cette époque marque un tournant important pour le mouvement féministe. Wan travaillait en relation étroite avec les leçons du conceptualisme pour explorer les questions de subjectivité sur lesquelles des artistes, dont Mary Kelly, insistaient et qu'ils légitimaient. La fascinante ambivalence du média qu'est la photographie et, en particulier celle de l'oeuvre de Wan qui est à la fois readymade et traumatique est considérée par Roland Barthes dans *Camera Lucida*. L'auteur se penche sur la façon dont les photographies médicales se fondent en plusieurs voix : le reniement par le conceptualisme de l'art traditionnel et des plaisirs scopiques, l'oeuvre de l'artiste dans le contexte de l'art occidental, l'insertion du sujet colonial et de l'immigrant dans la culture occidentale, ainsi que l'instabilité du genre même.

Theodore Wan and the Subject of Medical Illustration

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Résumé

Theodore Wan, originaire de Hong Kong et établi à Vancouver, a produit une intrigante série de photographies médicales alors qu'il était étudiant de maîtrise à NSCAD en 1977. Ces œuvres, inspirées par la trope du ready-made duchampien, ont servi de média d'apprentissage à la faculté de médecine de Dalhousie et d'une forme d'autoportrait ; elles utilisent un régime visuel associé au traumatisme physique qui permet d'inscrire le traumatisme psychique. L'auteur soutient que Wan a exploité une impulsion expressionniste de la rigueur systématique du domaine de l'illustration médicale qui correspond à une période subjective sur la scène artistique des années 1970 : qui mettaient en question l'héritage d'indifférence légué par les ready-mades de Duchamp et épousé par le mouvement conceptualiste. Cette époque marque un tournant important pour le mouvement féministe. Wan travaillait en relation étroite avec les leçons du conceptualisme pour explorer les questions de subjectivité sur lesquelles des artistes, dont Mary Kelly, insistaient et qu'ils légitimaient. La fascinante ambivalence du média qu'est la photographie et, en particulier, celle de l'œuvre de Wan qui est à la fois ready-made et traumatique est considérée par Roland Barthes dans *Camera Lucida*. L'auteur se penche sur la façon dont les photographies médicales se fondent en plusieurs voix : le reniement par le conceptualisme de l'art traditionnel et des plaisirs scopiques, l'œuvre de l'artiste dans le contexte de l'art occidental, l'insertion du sujet colonial et de l'immigrant dans la culture occidentale, ainsi que l'instabilité du genre même.

I want a History of Looking. For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.

Roland Barthes¹

Roland Barthes's *La Chambre Claire*, well known in English as *Camera Lucida*, is an extended meditation on the nature of photography, in which Barthes seeks the essence of the medium by reflecting upon those photographs that most move him. Setting aside the orthodox methods of his training, the philosopher allows his affective response to take the lead, formulating, rather famously now, two terms to define his reception of the photographic image: *studium* and *punctum*. The first of these is associated with the plethora of images that elicit a general, culturally mediated interest, but where enthusiasm is tempered by emotional distance. This kind of viewing experience engages critically with the intentions of the photographer and may even be pleasurable, yet it remains subject to the will of the spectator to regard or disregard: "I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness."² However, in some photographs this kind of viewing satisfaction is interrupted, punctuated, by the *punctum*, the effect of a barely perceived detail that operates outside the viewer's volition as "that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."³ Against the inertia of the photograph invested with *studium*, the element of the *punctum* "shoots out of [the scene] like an arrow,"⁴ effecting a piercing of the subject that elicits both pain and delight. Barthes's phenomenology, "steeped in desire," is a mournful contemplation of the photograph's essential "pathos," explored "not as a question (a theme) but as a wound."⁵ It is the contingency of the photograph that inflicts this trauma—its indexical relation to the referent before the camera's lens. For Barthes, this is the very magic of photography's chemistry: "From a real body, which

was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me."⁶ What Barthes calls the "that-has-been" of the photograph is the intractable reality that looms as an "imperious sign" of mortality, apprehended as his "future death."⁷ Barthes thus describes two kinds of encounters with the Real or indexical contingency of the photograph—tame or mad—and concludes, "Such are the two ways of the photograph. The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality."⁸

Barthes's inquiry seems to me particularly à propos in considering the work of Theodore Wan, whose intriguing series of medical photographs completed in 1979, one year before the

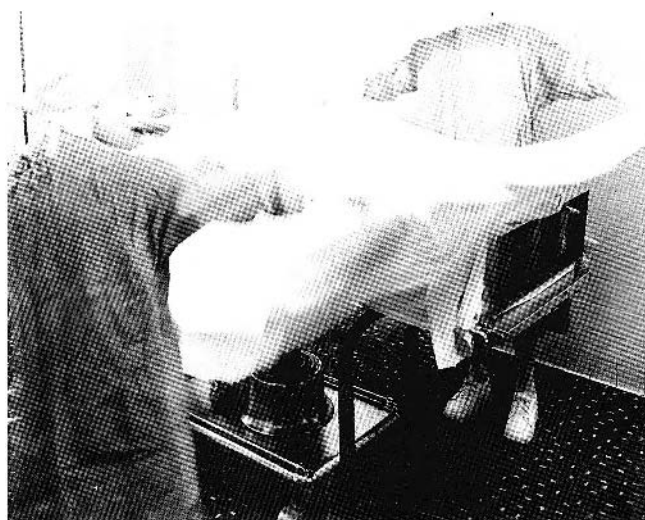


Figure 1. Theodore Wan, *Draping Procedure for Shoulder Operation*, 1977/78. 1 of 12 black-and-white prints. 40.4 x 50.6 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

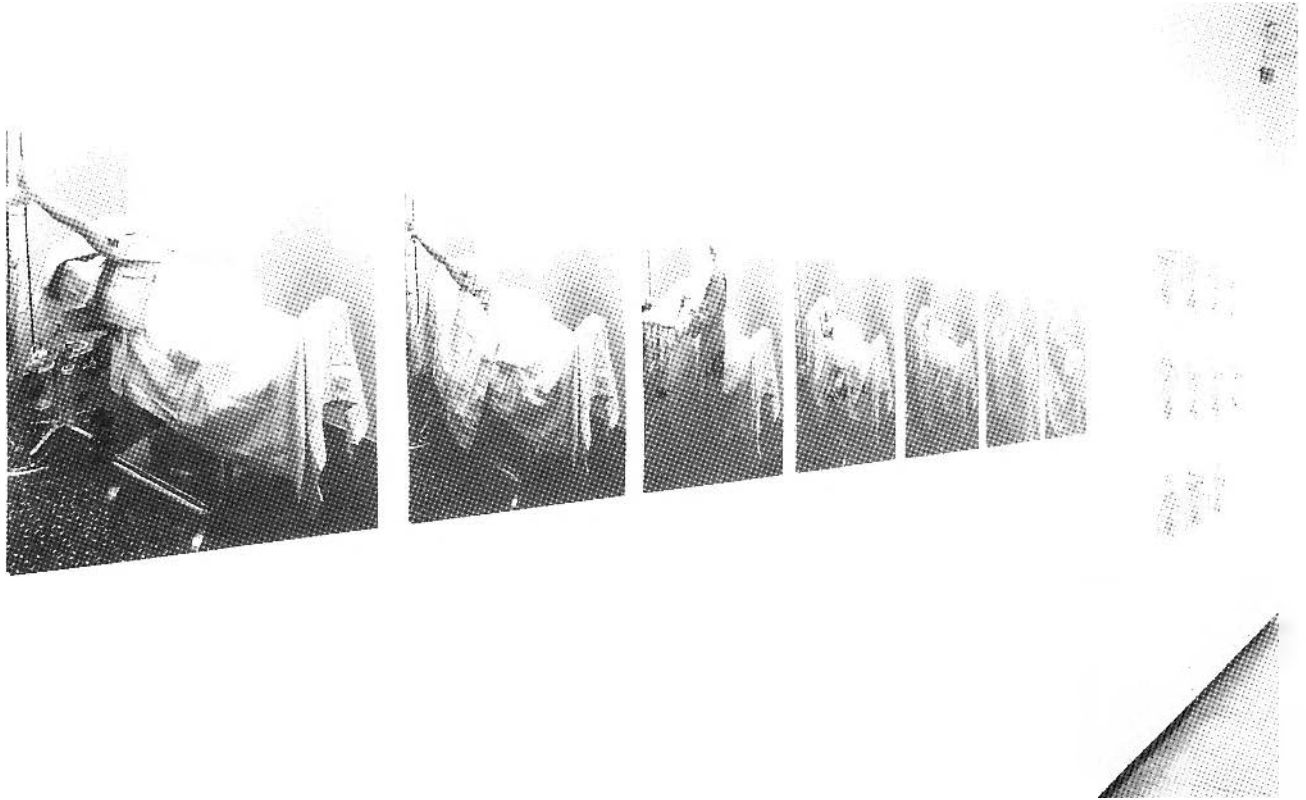


Figure 2. Theodore Wan, *Draping Procedure for Shoulder Operation*, 1977/78. Installation view at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 2005. 12 black-and-white prints, 40.4 x 50.6 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery (Photo: Thomas Svab, Vancouver Art Gallery).

publication of *La Chambre Claire*, both illuminates and complicates Barthes's dichotomy: tame or mad. Much as our reading of Barthes's solemn reflections is given added poignancy by our knowledge of his accidental death in 1980, there is a melancholy to Wan's medical photographs that is intensified when read in retrospect of his death from cancer in 1987 at the age of thirty-three. However, Wan was the picture of health when he initiated this project in 1977 during his graduate studies at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, in Halifax, and the unsettling qualities of the work were readily perceived by viewers, this writer included, long before any sign of his terminal illness. Given this, I propose that while Wan's medical photographs offer an extended meditation on bodily finitude, the persistence of melancholy in the work issued as much from the concerns of a young artist negotiating his position in the Western art world—ultimately, a negotiation of difference—as Barthes's intractable reality.

Born in Hong Kong, Theodore Wan immigrated to Vancouver in 1967 at the age of thirteen, where he subsequently pursued his art education at the University of British Columbia. Thanks to his training with instructor Fred Herzog, Wan

was already competent as a medical photographer when he arrived at NSCAD in 1975. The large-format, black-and-white photographs that he commenced making two years later mimic the technical precision and visual codes of medical illustration, staging actual diagnostic or preparatory procedures associated with surgery, with the artist himself positioned as the patient. In exchange for access to the operating theatre and facilities of the Dalhousie University Medical School and the cooperation of nursing staff, he contributed a set of prints for teaching purposes. At the same time, the images were viewed in his studio by NSCAD instructors and students, some of whom, like Robert Bean and Roy Hartling, had assisted him. Eventually these became part of his MFA graduate exhibition in 1978, *No Photography Beyond This Point*, where they were installed in series of 16 x 20 inch prints arranged in grids or in sequence. Hence, in addition to being medical illustrations these photographs also functioned as art—specifically, by Wan's own account, as self-portraiture.⁹

The titles of these first works from 1977 are purely descriptive: *Bridine Scrub for General Surgery*, *Arm Placement*, *Basic Surgical Positions*, *Panoramic Dental X-Ray*, and *Draping Pro-*

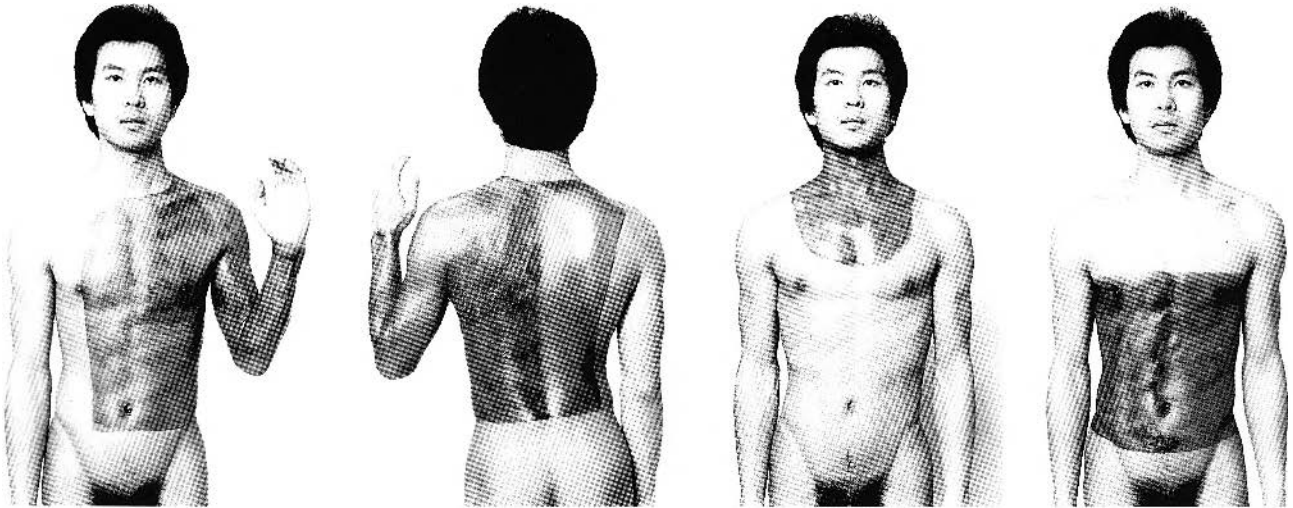


Figure 3 a, b, c and d. Theodore Wan, *Bridine Scrub for General Surgery*, 1977. 4 of 10 black-and-white prints. 50.6 x 40.1 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

cedure for Shoulder Operation, while *Parallel Piece* and *Scanning Electron Microscope Photographs of the Artist's Sperm*, produced in 1978, are more evocative. After his graduation Wan continued to work in the same manner while employed as a medical photographer at the Dalhousie Faculty of Dentistry. There, in 1979, he produced *Dental X-Ray Positions* and the more metaphorically titled *Bound by Everyday Necessities I* and *Bound by Everyday Necessities II*, assisted by Linda Mills, an orthopaedic nurse who appears in the photos. When interviewed in 2003, Mills attested to the clinical accuracy of these photos and Wan's credibility as a promising medical artist, though she also noted that the Stryker Frame and Circ-o-Icetric Bed featured in the images were, even then, already obsolete as modalities of treatment.¹⁰

In modern medical illustration, knowledge of physical pain and mortality is heavily mediated by the strict codifications of the genre. The textbook illustrations that Wan emulated, for instance, are affectively benign in their demonstration of routine preparatory and diagnostic procedures; or, put another way, they are invested with the *studium* of Barthes's reflections. However, quite a different response is evoked by Wan's photographic series, for in these clinically precise images the self-possession of sovereign consciousness is disturbed by the *punctum*, or in psychoanalytic parlance, the activation of the gaze. Margaret Iversen has argued persuasively for *Camera Lucida* as a kind of "fable about photography" given impetus by the "fertile ellipticality" of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.¹¹ Indeed, Barthes refers to Lacan early in his text: "[T]he Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid,

the *This ...* in short, what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression."¹² Iversen proposes a correspondence between Barthes's tame (*studium*) and mad (*punctum*) receptions of photography and the two functions of art described by Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, where the optical function of the eye is distinguished from the operation of the Real in the field of vision that is the Gaze. The *dompte-regard*, or tamed gaze, is that pacifying effect of art that "offers something for the eye and gives the spectator a sense of mastery in relation to the visual field," while *trompe l'oeil* is a "triumph of the gaze over the eye," activated by art that unsettles the codes of "perfect illusions" and animates the desire of the viewer.¹³

It is possible to locate in Wan's medical photographs just such disturbing details, lures for the scopoc drive that signal trauma: the anamorphic stain on the tile wall or the blur of the sheet in *Draping Procedure* (figs. 1, 2), the fine fissures in the solution painted on Wan's body in *Bridine Scrub* (fig. 3), the shadows in *Panoramic Dental X-Ray* (fig. 4), the electrical outlet in *Parallel Piece* (fig. 5). At the same time, such a personal inventory ultimately says more about the viewer than the work. What interests me, however, is how the affect of the *punctum* comes into play with the central conceit of Wan's work: Duchamp's readymade. The anti-subjectivity of the readymade, which Iversen traces to the disinterestedness of Kantian aesthetics,¹⁴ is well known: "The desubjectivizing strategy of the readymade, with its systematic work of negation and testing of the limits of what counts as art,"¹⁵ has been a significant force in the art of the twentieth century, with a legacy in the strategies of conceptual art. Given this, Wan's use of medical photography as self-portraiture would

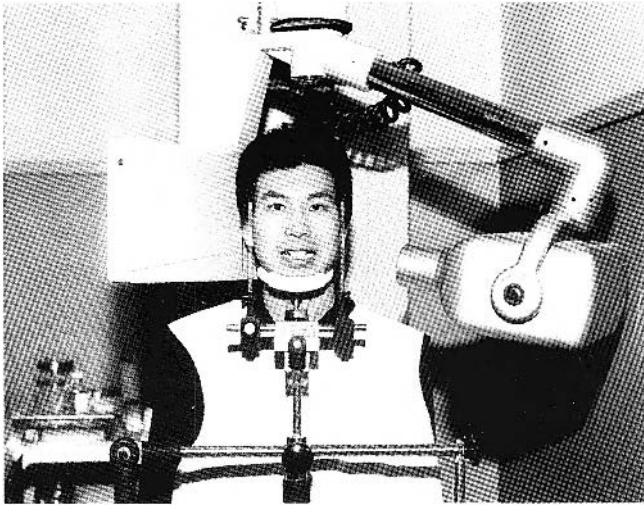


Figure 4. Theodore Wan, *Panoramic Dental X-Ray*, 1977. 1 of 3 black-and-white prints, 27.2 x 34.9 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

seem closer to the later work of Duchamp: the photographic self-portrait as Rose Sélavy or the *Large Glass*, which Rosalind Krauss has discussed as both self-portrait and, with a nod to the subtitle “Delay in Glass,” as a kind of photograph.¹⁶ Some light is thrown on this apparent contradiction by Iversen’s revisiting of Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* in relation to both the readymade and the found object of surrealist photography, where she concludes that “photography is a fascinatingly ambivalent medium: not only readymade/simulacral, but also traumatic/real.”¹⁷

In light of this ambivalence, perhaps Wan’s claim that “the most important artist for my work is Egon Schiele” is not as curious as it seemed to me in 1982, the year I first encountered Wan and his work at the SUB Art Gallery in Edmonton.¹⁸ Indeed, it was the incongruence of Schiele’s expressionist drive with the anti-subjectivity of Duchamp that piqued my interest sufficiently to make me revisit Wan’s work in 2001 and to curate a retrospective exhibition.¹⁹ By this time his entire oeuvre was in the collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, where his papers, research, and unexhibited videos and photographs now comprise the Theodore Wan Archive. In light of this archival material, I would argue that Wan’s harnessing of an expressionist impulse to the systematic rigour of medical illustration corresponds to a subjective moment in 1970s art that challenged the legacy of disinterestedness reinvented by Duchamp’s readymade and embraced by Conceptualism—and I argue further that this was a critical moment opened up by feminism.

The desire to insert personal history and to reference the larger social and political arena beyond art and its languages was not easily accommodated within the conceptualist paradigm that prevailed at NSCAD and elsewhere. Conceptual art’s for-

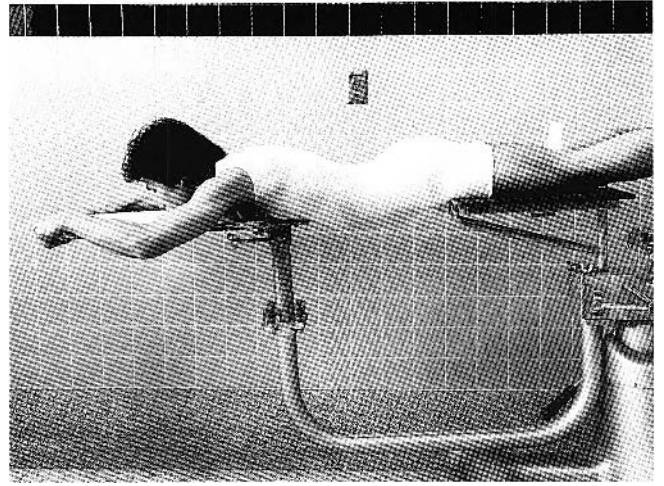


Figure 5. Theodore Wan, *Parallel Piece*, 1978. Black-and-white print, 20 x 25 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery, Theodore Wan Archive (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

mulation of art as a set of analytical procedures had evacuated the subjective moment of art’s production as a site of investigation. This was the blind spot that Mary Kelly, working in the context of British Conceptualism, implicitly critiqued in her *Post-Partum Document*, exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1976: that is, conceptual art’s refusal to include the artist’s subjectivity amongst the relations of art to be scrutinized.²⁰ The grievance here was that the disinterestedness of art masked the very real interests of artists-as-subjects in all aspects of the art world. This evacuation of the subject covered over the presumed male gender of the artist encoded in every form of cultural production and it rendered invisible the heavily freighted history against which women struggled to imagine a genealogy of women artists and, to paraphrase Kelly, to image their own desire.²¹ I do not know if Wan was aware of Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document*, exhibited at the Anna Leonowens Gallery two years after his return to Vancouver, though conceivably it was a topic of conversation at NSCAD given its rowdy reception by a scandalized British tabloid press. I do know that Wan was not intimidated by feminism and felt it opened up avenues for his own work. Fellow NSCAD student Beverly Naidus recalls this receptivity, and indeed her graduate paper on feminism and art is amongst Wan’s papers.²² In brief, I think Wan was operating in this critical blind spot, working in tension with the lessons of Conceptualism to investigate issues of subjectivity that had been given legitimacy and urgency by feminism.

As an undergraduate student in Vancouver, Wan had pursued his fascination with the spectacle of the sexualized body, especially strippers, in photography and other media, and he would resume this direction upon his return in 1979. His in-

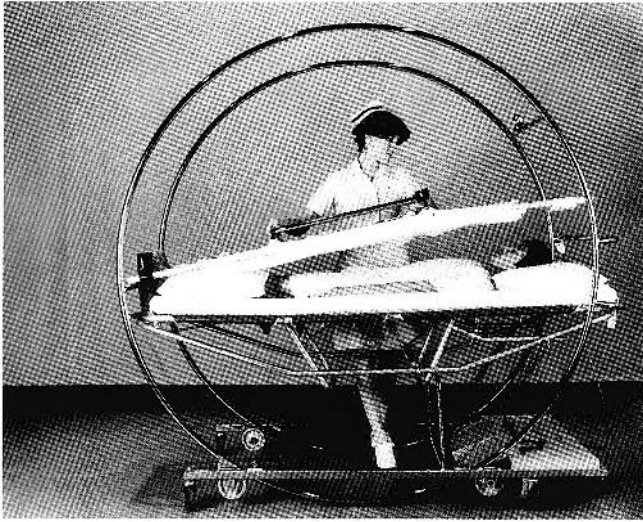


Figure 6. Theodore Wan, *Bound by Everyday Necessities I*, 1979. 1 of 6 black-and-white prints, 40.4 x 50.6 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

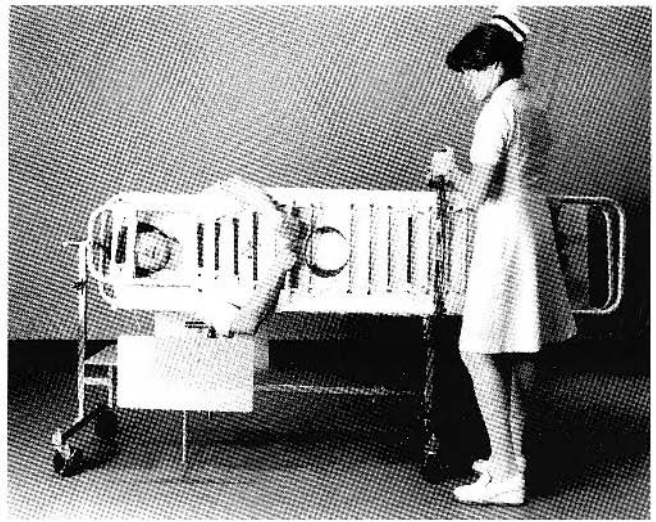


Figure 7. Theodore Wan, *Bound by Everyday Necessities II*, 1979. 1 of 7 black-and-white prints, 40.4 x 50.6 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

rest in medical illustration, however, appears limited to his residency in Halifax and was initiated, I believe, as a means of retaining his investment in the display of the body while satisfactorily negotiating the expectations and demands of the graduate programme at NSCAD, where connections to conceptual art since 1967 had developed an international profile for the college.²³ An early typeset work from his first year in Halifax manages to retain traces of eroticism while conforming to the prevailing use of the linguistic as substitute or supplement for the image. *Untitled (First 10 girls that come to mind)*, 1975, points humorously to Conceptualism's denial of visual pleasure by listing women's first names. Arguably a more sardonic note is registered in another typeset piece from 1976: *Untitled (I would have written this in blood if it would have made any difference)*.

If these works register ambivalence towards the strictures of the school, another work from circa 1976 suggests an acute sense of alienation from the genealogy it advanced. The phototext piece *Untitled (My Artwork)* obliquely references Dennis Oppenheim's *Reading Position for Second Degree Burn*, 1970, as the contemporary master's example that could not be followed. For the latter work, produced by the NSCAD Lithography Workshop and hung prominently in the library, Oppenheim lay on a Long Island beach with an opened book over his chest. Before and after pictures documented his resulting sunburn as a kind of photographic process in which the area covered by the book remained unexposed. However, Wan's text, beneath a colour photo of a beach at sunset, informs us that, being Chinese, he was unable to sunburn after seven hours. This is one of the few works to refer directly to issues of race, deftly pointing to

the exclusions encoded in the normative value of Oppenheim's white body.

Wan consistently used humour to critique Conceptualism's anti-subjectivity, as with his exhibition *Two 120 rolls & six 35mm negatives, photographs not by Theodore Wan*, which opened at the Anna Leonowens Gallery in February 1976. The show involved exposed film and negatives of "Glamour Photography" images that Wan had purchased by mail order. A text in the gallery explained how Wan's assistants developed the film and hung the prints so that the artist did not see them until the opening. This elimination of the subjective intervention of the artist was familiar to those acquainted with David Askevold's Projects Class at NSCAD, where students would carry out the instructions of visiting or even absent artists, such as Sol LeWitt. However, the resulting exhibition was not at all like the work associated with these exercises, but a display of soft-core pornography. Wan's perversity pointed to the politics of desire that are covered over by the artist's subjective detachment.²⁴

In contrast to these isolated critiques, the medical photographs cohere as a body of work through a sustained engagement with the trope of the readymade. Wan's play with the photograph's *use* value vis-à-vis its *exhibition* value follows conceptual artists' use of photography to interrogate the status and social function of art in ways that were pedagogical. They rejected aesthetic contemplation for an engagement that made the act of learning explicit as part of its own process of production and consumption. Jon Bird sums this up nicely: "[L]earning via the photograph's ambivalent status as both art object and teaching aid became a new mode of experiencing

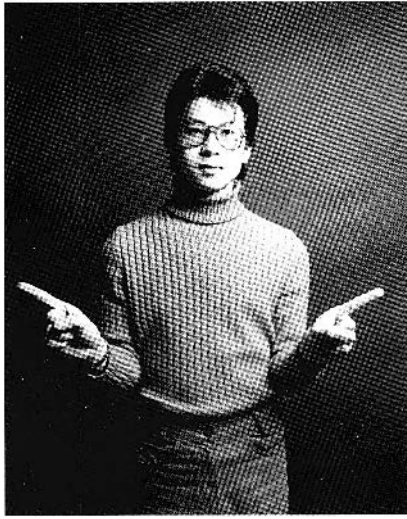


Figure 8. Theodore Wan, *Untitled*, ca. 1977. Black-and-white print, 12.5 x 10 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery. Theodore Wan Archive (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

art.”²⁵ However, there is a catch to this exchange between instructional media and photo art. Michael Newman has argued that the desire that unified the diverse practices of conceptual art and connected them with the first avant-garde, ergo Duchamp, was “the desire to disappear as art object, whether into idea, design or everyday life.” Newman continues, “The paradox, of course, is that the very institution and discourse that permitted the enunciation of that desire prevented it from being fulfilled.”²⁶

Wan’s medical photographs follow the trajectory of this paradoxical desire, beginning with his work at NSCAD from 1977 to 1978 and culminating in his 1979 exhibition *Inversion of the Readymade*. This exhibition, curated by Brian MacNevin for the Centre for Art Tapes in Halifax, involved two simultaneous installations of the series *Bound by Everyday Necessities I* and *Bound by Everyday Necessities II*: as a permanent display in a Halifax hospital and as an exhibition at the gallery (figs. 6, 7). A set of 5 x 4 inch prints, demonstrating the use of the Stryker Frame and Circ-o-lectric Bed, were matted and framed and installed on the thirteenth floor of the Victoria General Hospital, a floor without public access and where these apparatuses were stored. Identical prints in the larger 16 x 20 inch format were hung at the gallery along with a documentary video tape that allowed the audience to *rendez-vous* with the hospital installation. Obviously, the art audience was privileged here—in on the “joke,” as it were. But the difference of scale, as well as location and milieu, also accounts for the reception of this work. The large photographs solicit our embodied response as we physically follow them along in sequence or shift our attention from one

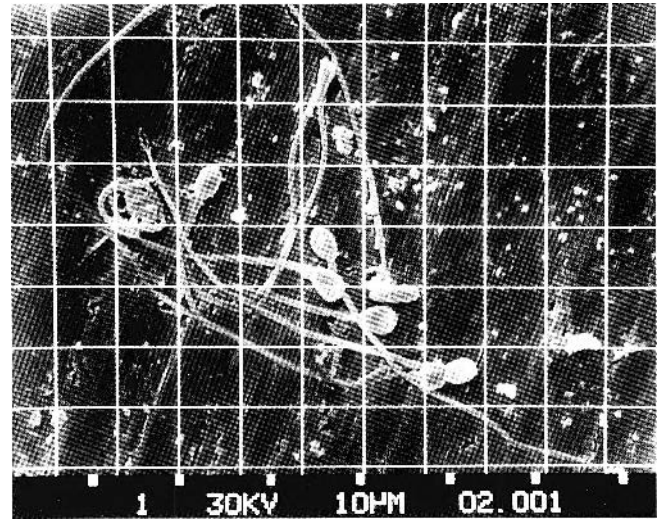


Figure 9. Theodore Wan, *Scanning Electron Microscope Photographs of the Artist’s Sperm*, 1978. 1 of 6 silver gelatine prints on paper, 40.4 x 50.6 cm. Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

to the next, unencumbered by matting and framing, stepping back to see the effect of the series or moving in to look more closely at individual photographs. This was all quite unlike the framed “snapshot” photos that mimic the illustrations in medical manuals such as *Alexander’s Care of the Patient in Surgery* that Wan consulted. Indeed, as far as the hospital staff’s perception is concerned, the photos were sufficiently camouflaged as instructional media that when the thirteenth floor was renovated some years later, they disappeared entirely!

However, *Inversion of the Readymade* also involved a second tape: an instructional video from the Medical Library at Dalhousie, demonstrating the preoperative preparation of the sterile field. Wan edited the tape slightly and presented it as an artwork entitled *Sculpture: Calling Attention to a Space*. In retrospect, this video is both amusing and telling as a revelation of the professional hierarchy of the operating room. The surgeon who demonstrates the correct method of scrubbing, gowning, and preparing the surgical site is presented with a formal frontality that imbues his address with a liturgical aura, while the assisting nurses play acolytes to his high priest. At the same time, this tape was not selected for its usefulness as a critique of the institution of medicine. Featuring an operation on the big toe, it no doubt acknowledged the surrealist Georges Bataille’s ambivalent view, expressed in his essay “Le Gros Orteil,” of the big toe as both repugnant and erotic. I cannot help but recall the vaguely repellent photograph by J.A. Boiffard that accompanied that essay, published in the surrealist magazine *Documents*.²⁷ The routine procedures of medical asepsis, governed by what may or may not be touched, are thus subtly in-

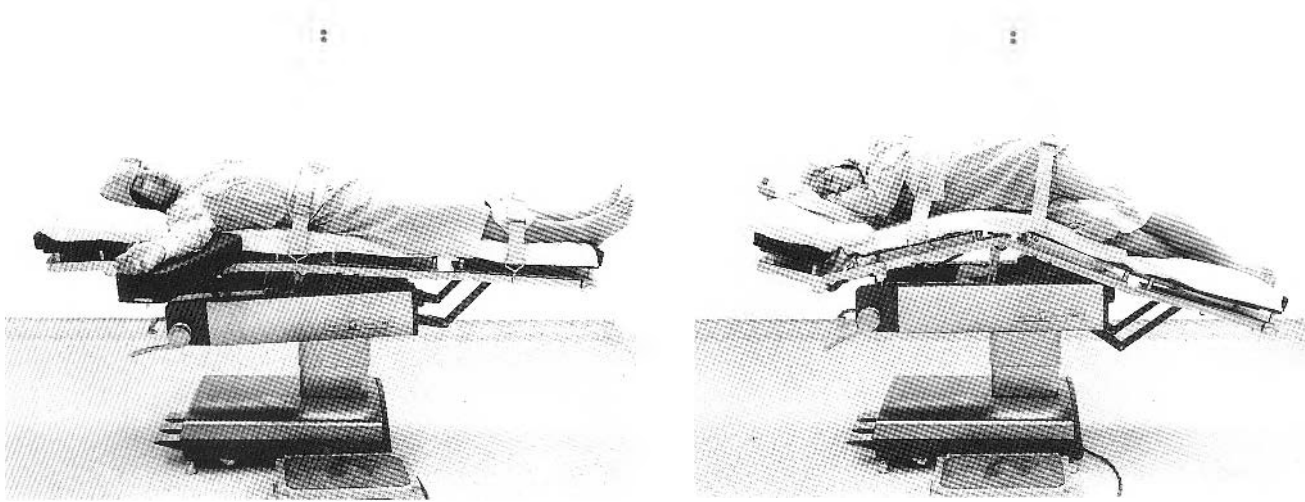


Figure 10 a, b and c. Theodore Wan, *Basic Surgical Positions*, 1977. 3 of 11 black-and-white prints, 40.4 x 50.6 cm. Vancouver. Vancouver Art Gallery (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

vested with the veiled eroticism that ruptures the banality of the surrealist photograph.²⁸

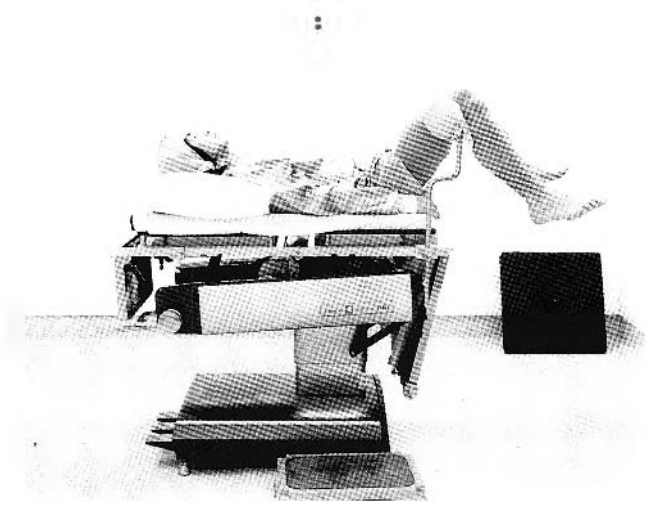
Self-portraiture

Wan's MFA statement is clear: the genesis of the work was an "emotional outburst from personal crisis."²⁹ I must emphasize that the nature of that crisis, whether spiritual, sexual, artistic, or more generally existential, remains as enigmatic as an untitled self-portrait of circa 1977 from the Theodore Wan Archive (fig. 8). By the artist's account, the medical photos functioned as a kind of self-portraiture, as a form of self-investigation, and, at least initially, as a means of objectifying troubling emotional states. Why medicine?³⁰ Wan tells us that the medical field fascinated him as an arena of forbidden knowledge of the body; indeed, the kinship of medical knowledge and eroticism is acknowledged by Michel Foucault in the *Birth of the Clinic*.³¹ Wan explains that he employed a large-format camera and appropriate lighting techniques to achieve the "look and polish" of professional medical photography, because it offered a language that he could refine "to invest the images with extra-medical meanings signifying specific emotional states."³² In short, he used a visual regime associated with physical trauma to register psychic trauma.

Such a project is not without precedent: the photographs of Jean-Martin Charcot famously record female hysteria as a language of the body. In his study of Charcot's work at the psychiatric hospital Salpêtrière, in *Invention of Hysteria*, Georges Didi-Huberman demonstrates the reciprocal relation of psychiatry and photography in nineteenth-century France. Crucially,

he also reveals the collusion of doctors and patients behind the theatre-like spectacle of hysteria that confounded the power of the clinical gaze to read the body symptomatically and thus expose hidden truth. He writes, "[P]hotography was in the ideal position to crystallize the link between the fantasy of hysteria and the fantasy of knowledge."³³ Thus, the invention of hysteria may be taken as a cautionary tale about reading the body and, in relation to Wan's work, a reminder of the performative nature of the self-portrait.

Wan's interest in self-portraiture was already apparent in his undergraduate work at UBC, but medical photography introduced a critical shift that is made clear if we compare two works that were installed together in his graduate exhibition: *Name Change*, 1977, and *Scanning Electron Microscope Photographs of the Artist's Sperm*, 1978 (fig. 9). *Name Change* presents the documentation of Wan's official name change on 1 April 1977 from Theodore Fu Wan to Theodore Saskatche Wan, after the name of a village he encountered on the Trans-Canada highway. The framed documents include an official certificate of name change, a newspaper announcement, and an aerial photo of the village of Theodore, Saskatchewan. Surprisingly, given the obvious humour of this project, Wan viewed the name change as a kind of self-victimization, as publicly branding himself a fool via the classified announcement and opening himself up to ridicule.³⁴ His "Statement" identifies this work as the "genesis" of the self-portraiture that issued from personal crisis, along with *Arm Placement*, *Basic Surgical Positions*, and *Panoramic Dental X-Ray*, while his handwritten list of dates in preparation for his graduate exhibition concurs that all of these were created in April 1977.³⁵ Much can be said about this work vis-à-vis



the immigrant experience and the desire to integrate oneself into a new culture, issues of identity that were not prominently addressed in the art of the decade. Perhaps coincidentally, the project marked the tenth anniversary of Wan's arrival in Canada, an occasion bound up with traumatic memory—the sudden death of his father mere weeks before the family's departure from Hong Kong.³⁶ However, as a strategy, *Name Change* rehearsed familiar tactics. The performance of identity through the use of a pseudonym is reminiscent of Duchamp's alter ego Rose Sélavy and was immediately known to Wan through the projects of General Idea and artists associated with the Western Front in Vancouver. Further, it is a textual operation of documentation characteristic of the Conceptualism that informed teaching at NSCAD.

However, the six prints assembled as *Scanning Electron Microscope Photographs of the Artist's Sperm*, from a year later in 1978, were considered by Wan to be a new kind of self-portraiture. Bereft of textual supplement, they present, to the uninitiated, a kind of hieroglyphics that eludes deciphering. Indeed, the medical series repays the efforts of the semiologist. Here the well-known metaphor for expressionist art as ejaculation is presented literally,³⁷ held in suspension by the combination of laboratory and photographic technique. The visual field is overlaid by the coordinates of the grid, a structure emblematic of modernist art and the hegemony of the autonomous object “that explicitly reject[s] narrative or sequential reading of any kind”—that, in short, represses the biographical history of the subject.³⁸ At the same time, the very fascination that medicine held for Wan as an arena of restricted or forbidden knowledge reminds us of the diagnostic value of these images. More than

eroticism is at stake: among the pages from medical manuals Wan consulted are electron microscope photographs illustrating the various pathologies of spermatozoa. Wan made postcards from his photos and gave them to other NSCAD students. His cheerful note on a card posted to Vancouver—“I am sending you lots of little Theos”—belies the anxiety of masculine potency they register.³⁹ As a system of self-representation, medical photography activates a productive doubling of gazes: the “gaze of the concrete sensibility”⁴⁰ that Foucault tells us is mobilized in the clinician's reading of symptoms and the reciprocal gaze that signals an encounter with the trauma of the Lacanian Real.

Again, Wan describes himself in the early medical photos as a passive victim, being constrained and manipulated into surgical positions, bombarded with x-rays, and subjected to the judgement of others. Even without knowledge of his statement, however, the works themselves invite speculation as to the emotional states they reference. The *Panoramic Dental X-Ray* series seems a model of paranoia, while the constraints in other works or the physical endurance displayed in *Parallel Piece* are persecutory and masochistic. In his Hornby Island performance from 1975, recorded as a series of photographs, Wan assumed a position much like that in *Parallel Piece*, suspended with his hands and feet bound to four posts, for as long as he could stand the pain. In an action reflective of his Baptist upbringing and theological training,⁴¹ he read a well-known treatise from the *Book of Ecclesiastes* on the vanity of all things and human endeavours. Wan was deeply influenced by contemporary body art, especially of the Vienna Actionists and Hermann Nitsch. However, the passion of the latter's modern rituals steeped in pagan and Christian symbolism is subdued by the clinical precision of Wan's photos. He does not abuse his body with marking or wounding. It is the disposition of his body in relation to a location, structure, or apparatus that determines its psychic resonance, such as the cruciform position in *Arm Placement* or *Basic Surgical Positions* (fig. 10). In the case of *Bridine Scrub*, the definition of body zones through medical asepsis evokes a butcher's meat chart. The abuse persists in the *Bound by Everyday Necessities* series, where the humiliation of being fed and relieved of bodily wastes is only partially ameliorated by the presence of the attractive nurse who tends him.

Looking at these photographs, their implicit violence returns me to Barthes's thoughts on the violation of subjectivity at the heart of the photographic portrait:

Photography transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object: in order to take the first portraits (around 1840) the subject had to assume long poses under a glass roof in bright sunlight; to become an object made one suffer as much as a surgical operation; then a device was invented, a kind of prosthesis invisible to the lens,

which supported and maintained the body in its passage to immobility: this headrest was the pedestal of the statue I would become, the corset of my imaginary essence.⁴²

There is some evidence that Wan was aware of the camera's complicity in what feminists would later name, in relation to pornography, the violence of representation.⁴³ Marginalia and underlined passages in his copy of Susan Griffin's *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* suggest that he found Griffin's claim that the camera is an accessory to culture's domination of nature compelling.⁴⁴ However, Griffin's book was published some years later than the photos under discussion here and, I would argue, the overarching polemic of the medical photographs exceeds, even as it may encompass, a political critique of the medium. That is, the objectifying power of medical illustration as an exemplary type of photography is apparent but Wan is mobilizing its effects for other purposes.

The mournfulness of these photographic cycles inflected with narcissistic and masochistic pleasure is not unfamiliar to the student of art. It is commensurate, overall, with the hyper-subjectivity of melancholia, that famous self-castigating affliction of great artists in the Western canon, Egon Schiele included. Indeed, I would venture that the medical photographs coalesce around this very narrative: the production of the artist in Western art. Viewed through the lens of art history the "extra medical meanings" in this extended practice of self-portraiture become a sort of catalogue of every conceivable means of producing the subject in and of art, including, following Barthes, photographic practice itself.

References to the art-historical repertoire are pervasive. The antiseptic necklace in *Bridine Scrub for General Surgery* (fig. 3c) is reminiscent of the death mask of the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamen. The subtle contrapposto and distant focus of other poses in that series recall the idealized figure of the classical male nude and, for some, the homoeroticism so congenial to Greek culture yet consistently repressed by the homophobia of many art historians. *Basic Surgical Positions* conjures up the surfeit of crucifixion images in Christian art as well as vestiges of the reclining nude: from Giorgione and Titian to Matisse's *Le Bonheur de Vivre*, 1905. In the final photo in that series (fig. 10c) Wan assumes the lithotomy position (used in birthing and in kidney surgery, hence bisexual) adjacent to the fallen ikon in the background—a reference to Malevich that acknowledges the death of spiritual consciousness in art and inserts the artist as the uncertain progenitor of any future revolution.

Many references are to more contemporary practices: *Draping Procedure for Shoulder Operation* (figs. 1, 2) is claimed by the artist to mimic Christo's draping of famous monuments. He notes that the blur of the sheets demonstrates his attention to aesthetic values, possibly those of Gerhard Richter, who would

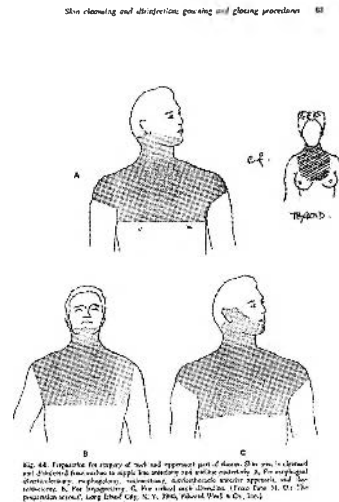


Figure 11. Theodore Wan. drawing on photocopied page from unspecified medical manual, n.d., Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery, Theodore Wan Archive (Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery).

visit NSCAD during the winter term of 1978. But one cannot help but be reminded of Western art's obsession with the draped figure, from the life-drawing classes that instructed medical illustrators to the coded eroticism of the artist/model relationship. Does the isolated bound arm of the artist then suggest the death of drawing? Scott Watson notes the play between art-historical and medical references in his post-mortem article on Wan, where he suggests a correspondence between the Circ-O-lectric Bed (fig. 6) that contains the artist within its circumference and Leonardo's famous drawing of a man in a circle, emblematic of the Renaissance system of proportions. However, Watson argues that Wan's utter reliance upon the mechanical structure and his nurse counters humanism's belief that "man is the measure of all things" with a dystopian view of human invention.⁴⁵ In line with this thinking, Wan's apparent delight in the obsolescence of the Circ-O-lectric Bed and Stryker Frame may link these photos to those of Bernd and Hilla Becher, who recorded the transient existence and function of industrial structures. Hilla Becher, too, was a visitor to NSCAD in 1978.⁴⁶ As for the Stryker Bed, I have often thought of the fifth photo in that series in relation to Manet's *Olympia* (1863), which marked a kind of death of painting in the wake of photography (fig. 7).⁴⁷ Finally, the eleven photos in *Dental X-Ray Positions* can be deciphered as spelling out the artist's name, much as Patrick Kelly, an instructor at NSCAD, used the semaphore signalling system as a substitute for his signature in *Self-Portrait*, 1971.⁴⁸

The play of signification across the cycles of photographs produces the logic of conceptual art's negation of the Western

art tradition: from Ancient and Classical figures, Christian iconography, Renaissance and academic drawing and painting to the myths of the modernist avant-garde. Looking to the only art that Wan made after 1979, we can extend this logic to include photography as well. In his 1981 performance, Wan spent twenty-four hours in a Restricted Environment Stimulation chamber in the UBC Psychology Department, a facility used in the treatment of psychic trauma. Photography is frequently the only document of artists' performances that ensures the performances' status as art—but not here.⁴⁹ In the absence of light, a black postcard replaced the indexical record with the simple announcement, "Only the Mind is Allowed to Wander..." Scott Watson views the trajectory of increasing immobilization that spans the medical photographs and this latter performance as an extended commentary on the alienation of the body by institutional structures, given added resonance by "the Christian tradition of mortification of the flesh and meditation on the spirit."⁵⁰ Pursuant to that insight, what I am arguing here is that the primary institution at issue is not medicine but art. The refusal of scopophilic satisfaction in Wan's postcard arrives at the logical conclusion of conceptual art's anti-aesthetic—the "rigorous elimination of visibility."⁵¹

Posing

Wan insisted upon the ambiguity of the medical photographs, as his text work emphasizes: "Basic surgical positions can be found in medical manuals, but they have no relations to my position."⁵² The crucial difference here is between the patient who is positioned and the artist—who is posing.

Some of this difference is signalled by the aesthetic qualities of the photographs that depart from the textbook illustrations found in the artist's archive at the VAG. Wan observes a strict frontality and symmetry commensurate with Renaissance pictorial space that is not evident in the archival images that were his models and renders the space ritualistic and performative. In *Draping Procedure* the dramatic baroque diagonal similarly plays with the notion of the surgical arena as a theatre. He also avoids the cropping of the patient's body and the obscuring of the face typical of medical models. On the contrary, each pose is carefully considered for the precise disposition of the artist's body. Of course photographers have been posing for their cameras since the invention of the medium; as the exhibition *Acting the Part* at the National Gallery of Canada in 2006 demonstrated, the practice of "staging" theatrical photographic scenes dates back to as early as 1840.⁵³ However, I am suggesting something more specific about the austere formality of Wan's photos; something that is reminiscent of the institutional interiors of Lynne Cohen, who was invited to NSCAD during the 1977–78 academic year, and whose evacuated spaces are infused with apprehension

and dread. I am speaking, as the reader might anticipate, of the scene of the unconscious.

Though I am suggesting that all of the medical series can be construed in these terms, as haunted by the split between conscious and unconscious processes, it is *Bridine Scrub for General Surgery* that speaks most keenly of the subject caught by desire. It is also the work that most complicates the relation to the medical model, in this case a series of diagrams rather than photographs. The two sets of photocopied medical diagrams that Wan used as his guide differ in their application of bridine solution according to gender, though the corresponding surgical operations are themselves much the same. Wan chose the scrub patterns illustrated by a female figure rather than the male, though he omitted the lithotomy, or birthing position, with its full frontal display of the genital area. While the latter might be understood as an act of self-censorship, in anticipation of the work's eventual display at the college and elsewhere, the feminizing of his body, most pointedly in the painted "corset," is curious (fig. 3d).

Wan took the trouble to draw the female model's prep for a thyroid operation alongside the corresponding male model (fig. 11) as if to explain his preference. The aesthetic advantage of the female patterns is clear, not only for purposes of art-historical reference but also for the strange beauty they produce when applied to the body of the artist, the salutary effects of his bodybuilding clearly visible. Yet the bridine pattern is not all that distinguishes the female from the male. There is also their spatial orientation: the man turns his head and lifts his chin while the woman presents herself looking straight ahead. Wan's choice here may have something to do with the conventions of Chinese portraiture. Faith Moosang's essay on C.D. Hoy, the Chinese-Canadian photographer whose portraits from 1909 to 1920 of First Nations, Chinese, and Caucasians document the culture of small-town British Columbia, is suggestive. Moosang comments on an article in the London-based publication *The Photographic News* from 9 February 1884. D.K. Griffith, manager of a photographic firm in Hong Kong, noted some of the "peculiarities" of Chinese photographic portraiture: "a direct front face must be taken, so as to show both his ears, and each side of his face of the same proportions; both feet must be arranged so they are of equal length, perspective being no reasoning power with a China-man. The hands are next arranged so as, if possible, to show each finger distinctly."⁵⁴ Indeed C.D. Hoy's full-length or three-quarter-length portraits, with their subjects' rigid upright posture and prominent hands, corroborate these observations, while their details have an uncanny resonance with Wan's self-presentation in *Bridine Scrub*. Gender is not the only ambiguity. In those images where the artist confronts us with his hand raised, the ambivalence of the gesture that signifies both greeting and farewell reminds us of the cultural specificity

of the body as sign and evokes an encounter with the “other” of radical difference.⁵⁵

Beyond what may be deduced of Wan’s conscious intentions, the feminizing of his body produces a kind of “queering of the image”⁵⁶ that is at once captivating and suffused by pathos. To assume the position of the woman is a form of denigration consistent with the masochism exhibited in the medical photos generally. Yet Craig Owens, in his essay “Posing,” reminds us of the duplicity inherent in the notion of the pose and its use as a tool by artists to undermine the authority of official discourse. For feminists, mimicry becomes a strategy for playing with the visual conventions of femininity, taking on the stereotypical image in order to destabilize it. In this sense posing for Wan may have been a manoeuvre to unseat the stereotypical image of the feminized Chinese male body. Owens opens his essay with a passage from *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, “Whenever we are dealing with imitation, we should be very careful not to think too quickly of the other who is being imitated. To imitate is no doubt to reproduce an image. But at bottom, it is, for the subject, to be inserted in a function whose exercise grasps it.”⁵⁷ This is the condition of the subject of scopophilic desire captivated by the fascination of images—by their power to arrest us. Integral to scopophilia, in Lacan’s account, is not simply the pleasure of seeing but the pleasure in being seen, for the scopoc drive is concentrated on the activity of making oneself seen. It is this inscription of desire in the scopoc field—the desire to be seen—that distinguishes Wan’s medical photographs from their alleged models and is conveyed most acutely in *Bridine Scrub*.

The scopophilic desire in Wan’s medical photographs raises the question of sexual orientation. However, any subtext of homoerotic desire remains a reading of the work unconfirmed by what is known of the artist’s life. The same cannot be said for racial difference; Wan’s visibility as a Chinese man is assured. It is telling that of all the possible types of medical illustration, Wan chose invasive modalities, surgery and x-rays, that are specific to Western practice and have no corollary in Chinese tradition. His bodily subjection to the regimes of a specifically Western medical discourse in these photographs, then, may be read as an insertion of the colonial and immigrant subject into Western culture. Certainly, the archival materials evidence a consciousness on Wan’s part of these dynamics.

The Wan archive holds a series of colour negatives that may have been part of an abandoned project. Again, Wan is posing, this time in playful imitation of a fashion model with a variety of sunglasses that cover over the key signifier of his Chinese-ness. Without prior knowledge of the artist, he could pass for one of the models in the glossy Italian fashion magazines that he passionately collected. There are also a number of photographs of Wan alone and with others in front of the only painting that

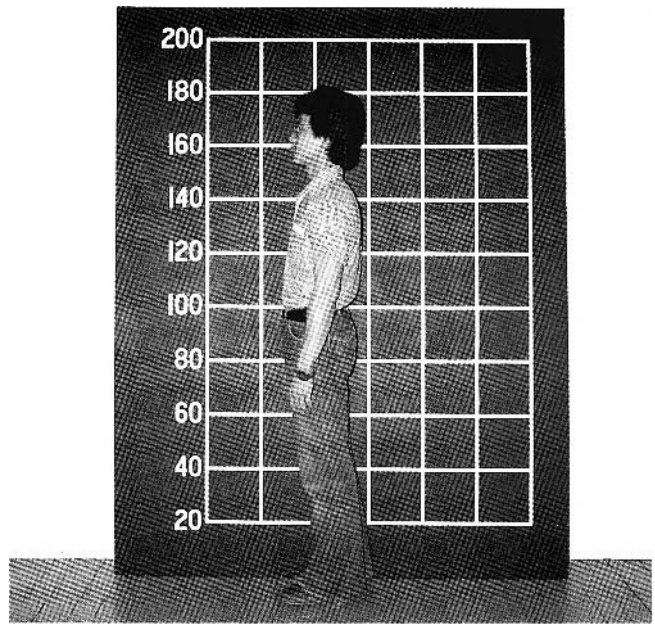


Figure 12. Theodore Wan, *Untitled*, 1978. Digital scan of photograph taken by Robert Bean (Photo: Robert Bean).

he did at NSCAD: a large grey and white minimalist grid that functioned as a photographic backdrop (fig. 12). As such, it is a pointed reference to the Lamprey system of anthropometric photography, a system devised for use in nineteenth-century anthropology for purposes of racial classification, but which also had medical applications. A contact sheet shows the artist standing in front of the grid in the requisite stiff and upright positions: facing outwards, reversed and in profile, though unlike his predecessors of the nineteenth century, he remains clothed. Despite his fascination with medical knowledge, the anthropometric photos suggest a degree of circumspection regarding the historical procedures of medical science and their claims to authority. At the same time these photos suggestively align the grid of modernism with the politics of colonialism, implicating both in the process of desubjectification. Rosalind Krauss is succinct: “Insofar as its order is that of pure relationship, the grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves.”⁵⁸ As if to overwrite the colonial reference, Wan also pictured himself in front of the grid, relaxed and smiling with visiting artists, instructors, and friends.

A final curious aspect of *Bridine Scrub* is the contradiction in Wan’s dating of the work. While the chronology in his “Statement” places it after the series of April 1977 as a work that went beyond his “personal problems,”⁵⁹ his handwritten notes unambiguously date the work to March 1977, placing it at the very beginning of his project. By this reckoning, *Bridine Scrub*

serves as a prelude to the medical series, an incipit to the mournful repetition that finds its dark terminus in *Only the Mind is Allowed to Wander...*

The Subject-in-Process

The concept of the self-portrait is fraught with the danger of collapsing the gap between biography and art. Posing, as Craig Owens describes it, would seem to complicate this relationship. Yet, while effective as a strategy for critiquing essentialism and opening up the fluidity of identity as provisional, the pose plays upon the understanding of identity as a mask. It is important to resist being lured by what Joan Copjec calls the “psychological construction,” which in the absence of documentary evidence fuels fantasies of intention, passion, and even perversions.

[T]he psychological fantasy supposes a subject behind the facts who has unique access to his or her own psychological intentions, who uniquely knows by virtue of being the living experience of those intentions. The psychological fantasy constructs an *inscrutable* subject, a kind of obstacle to all archival work, a question that historical research will never be able to answer.⁶⁰

Copjec argues that there is no subject whose secrets might be deciphered through a reconstruction of experience, because the subject is affected by meanings it never lived nor experienced. This split subject is not self-evident but radically undetermined, a subject of non-knowledge—there is nothing behind the mask.

Theodore Wan’s photographs tease us with precisely this desire to know the truth of the subject. What exactly was the nature of the personal crisis that gave them impetus? (It is conceivable, though, that the artist’s declaration is a fiction.) This question brings us to the heart of Wan’s use of medical illustration as a form of self-portraiture: by his own account, a means of mobilizing narcissism as self-investigation and emotional exorcism.⁶¹ I suggest that if we understand that project not simply as a process of self-revelation, but as an articulation of a “subject-in-process,” then we can begin to see how this work is driven by the problem of knowledge itself.

Julia Kristeva’s notion of the “subject-in-process” derives from her analysis of avant-garde literary texts that destabilize and rupture symbolic meaning through innovative formal strategies (Artaud’s *glossolalia* or Joyce’s *mots-valises*). Kristeva claims such signifying practices point to another economy beyond the split subject discovered by psychoanalysis, the subject instituted by social censoring.⁶² This other economy, beyond discourse, arises through the “process of *signifiance*,” whereby the subject split by language is “only one moment, a time of arrest, a stasis”

that is exceeded by the motility of the pre-verbal drives. The subject-in-process is an effect of this rhythm of expulsion and stasis, mobility and resistance, “animated by the drives of a body caught in the tissue of nature and society.”⁶³ For Kristeva, the function of art as a signifying practice lies not in symbolizing but in this “will to meaning,” the artist’s search for a language that throws the “rules of pertinence, of logical coherence, and so on, which are necessary in normative or scientific signifying systems,” into disarray. Such a mobile subjectivity is driven by the desire for conceptual knowledge of the ineffable.⁶⁴

The trajectory of Wan’s photographic series can be imagined in these terms: an expression of language as gesture punctuated by moments of arrested desire. The codifications of medical illustration provide a system or doxa whose claim to discursive reason is interrupted via the *punctum* of the photograph, that is, by another kind of knowledge generated by the Real of the body. This relationship to the subject-in-process is made clearer by considering one of the visual artists who most effectively mobilized Kristeva’s theory during the 1970s.⁶⁵ Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document*, 1973–79, is a well-known work that engaged the desire to be an artist with the desire to have conceptual knowledge of her (ineffable) maternal experience. Against a history of iconic representations of mother and child that produces them as *objects* of the gaze, Kelly sought to produce the mother as the *subject* of loss and desire within a system of heterogeneous signs. That system comprises six series of documentations representing significant moments in the child’s separation from the mother, commencing with the process of weaning, and culminating in the child’s entry into the education system. As these framed elements are repeated in series, they replay the inevitable moments of separation and loss consequent upon the child’s maturation. The antinomies of desire—the desire for the child and the desire for knowledge—are played out in the semiosis of indexical and symbolic signs that ends with the inevitable ceding of the child to the Law of the Father as the child learns to write his name.

It may seem peculiar to raise the work of Kelly here, as she rejected the very posing that is central to Wan’s work. However, the *Document* is a sustained theorization and material articulation of the artist as a subject-in-process that both illuminates and serves to position Wan’s work within 1970s Conceptualism, for Wan too presents us with a system of heterogeneous signs structured by repetition and loss. Where Kelly used Lacanian psychoanalysis to establish critical distance from the immediacy of the mother/child relationship, Wan similarly discovered in the language of medical illustration a visual system to negotiate the crisis that precipitated the work. Like the *Document*, Wan’s cycles of photographs are structured by the antinomies of scientific and subjective knowledge: the prick of the *punctum* in tension with the anti-subjectivity of the readymade, as scopic

pleasure in the indexicality of the photograph eventually cedes to the symbolic of written language in Wan's one-line postcard.

The subject-in-process is an impossible subject, perpetually in formation. While the stark announcement of *Only the Mind is Allowed to Wander...* appears to mark the disappearance of that mobility, it also opens onto the possibility of another way of imagining art. By 1981, Wan had exhausted Conceptualism as institutional critique and his subsequent projects tended towards a complete dissolution of the border between art and life. While there is evidence that Wan experimented with Kirlian photography⁶⁶ soon after his performance in the Restricted Environment Stimulation chamber in February 1981, no such photographs have surfaced.⁶⁷ His subsequent photography was commercial; his clients were Chinatown businesses, entertainers, and exotic dancers. And even his interest in pornography as another realm of restricted knowledge of the body failed to produce anything that he claimed as exhibition art. The numerous snapshots of strippers in the archive are largely, by Barthes's typology, "tame." Only in his final self-portrait does something of Barthes's intractable reality reappear. Wan evidently recorded his treatment for sinus cancer in a series of dated photographs; unfortunately, only one of these has been located. It is a vivid colour image in which Wan, impeccably dressed and composed, regards the camera, the traces of his radiation treatment just visible around his glasses.⁶⁸

Notes

- 1 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1981), 12.
- 2 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26.
- 3 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.
- 4 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26.
- 5 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 21.
- 6 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80.
- 7 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 97.
- 8 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 119.
- 9 Theodore Wan, "M.F.A. Exhibition Statement," reprinted in Christine Conley, *Theodore Wan*, exh. cat., Halifax, Dalhousie Art Gallery (Halifax, 2003), 90–91.
- 10 Videotaped interview with the author, 1 June 2003, included in Christine Conley, *Theodore Wan (1953–1987): A Curator's View of the Artist's Archives at the Vancouver Art Gallery*, CD-ROM created for the exhibition *Theodore Wan*.
- 11 Margaret Iversen, "What is a Photograph?" *Art History* XVII, 3 (September 1994): 450.
- 12 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 4.
- 13 Iversen, "What is a Photograph?" 462.
- 14 Margaret Iversen, "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph," *Art Journal* LXIII, 2 (Summer 2004): 47.
- 15 Iversen, "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph," 57.
- 16 Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 203–05.
- 17 Iversen, "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph," 51.
- 18 *Wan/Lake*, exh. cat., Edmonton, SUB Art Gallery, University of Alberta (Edmonton, 1982).
- 19 *Theodore Wan* was launched by the Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, in January 2004, and travelled to Ottawa (Ottawa Art Gallery), Montreal (Liane and Danny Taran Gallery, Saidye Bronfman Centre), Toronto (Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto Mississauga), and Vancouver (Vancouver Art Gallery).
- 20 Mary Kelly, "Excavating *Post-Partum Document*," *Mary Kelly: Rereading Post-Partum Document* (Vienna, 1998), 186.
- 21 Mary Kelly, "Desiring Images/Imaging Desire," *Imaging Desire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 122–29.
- 22 During Wan's studies Mira Schor was the only female instructor at the college. She departed in 1978. I am indebted to Beverly Naidus, who was in Wan's graduate student class, for her recollections of the uneasy relation of feminism to NSCAD. Naidus was a teaching assistant for Martha Wilson's course on women and art during the summer of 1978, which marked some accommodation of feminist interests. For an account of Martha Wilson's earlier experience at the college, see Jayne Wark, "Martha Wilson: Not Taking It at Face Value," in *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture and Media Studies* 15, 3 45 (2000): 1–33.
- 23 For an account of this history, see Bruce Barber, ed., *Conceptual Art: The NSCAD Connection 1967–1973*, exh. cat., Halifax, Anna Leonowens Gallery (Halifax, 1994); and Robert Stacey and Liz Wylie, *Eighty/Twenty: 100 years of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design*, exh. cat., Halifax, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (Halifax, 1988).
- 24 Garry Neill Kennedy recounts an earlier occasion when LeWitt's instructions were interpreted in unforeseen ways by students Tim Zuck and Richards Jarden, but these diversions did not question the premise of the exercise. See Barber, *Conceptual Art*, 25.
- 25 Jon Bird, "Conceptual Art History or A Home for Homes in America," *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. M. Newman and J. Bird (London, 1999), 129.
- 26 Michael Newman, "After Conceptual Art," *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, 206.
- 27 Published in the surrealist magazine *Documents* VI (1929).
- 28 See Iversen, "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph," 44–57, for the critical distinction between the readymade and the found object in relation to the surrealist photo.
- 29 Conley, *Theodore Wan*, 91.
- 30 A note in the artist's handwriting in the archive offers another explanation. Tucked inside the case to the video tape *Sculpture: Calling Attention to a Space*, it reads: "my mother always wanted me to be a doctor but I became an artist instead."

- 31 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: an Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York, 1975), 210.
- 32 Conley, *Theodore Wan*, 90.
- 33 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), xi.
- 34 Conley, *Theodore Wan*, 91.
- 35 Handwritten list of dates for works in Wan's MFA exhibition, on file at the Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax.
- 36 Conversation with the artist's brother, Winston Wan, June 2003.
- 37 Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966–1990*, ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 21.
- 38 Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, 13.
- 39 Private collection.
- 40 Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 120.
- 41 Wan completed a course in Systematic Theology in 1971 at the Northwest Baptist Theological College. On the cover of his course book he underlined the first four letters of Theology to underscore the pun with his name.
- 42 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 13.
- 43 See Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Minneapolis, 1986).
- 44 Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (New York, 1981), artist's annotated copy now in the VAG archives.
- 45 Scott Watson, "Theo Wan," *Photo Communiqué IX* (Winter 1987–88): 9.
- 46 Video interview with Gary Wilson, Halifax, 2 June 2003.
- 47 See Isabell Wallace, "Trauma as Representation: A Meditation on Manet and Johns," *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, ed. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg (Lebanon, NH, 2006), 3–27.
- 48 Reproduced in Conley, *Theodore Wan*, 30–31.
- 49 Robert Morris writes, "The easiest way to remove the efforts from being taken as art by others was to have no photographic memory exist." Robert Morris, "The Art of Existence: Three Extra-Visual Artists: works in Process," *Artforum* (January 1971): 30; cited in Nancy Foote, "The Anti-Photographers," *Artforum* (September 1976): 46–54. Photocopy in Wan Archive.
- 50 Watson, "Theo Wan," 9.
- 51 Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* XV (1990): 107.
- 52 This phrase is on a typeset card in the archive and in Wan's notes that cite Edward Weston's *Daybooks*, 16 July 1931: "Peppers are reproduced in seed catalogues, but they have no relations to my peppers."
- 53 Lori Pauli, Marta Weiss, Ann Thomas, and Karen Henry, *Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre*, exh. cat., Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa, 2006).
- 54 Faith Moosang, *Portraits from the Cariboo: C.D. Hoy*, exh. brochure, Vancouver, Presentation House Gallery (Vancouver 2000), 129.
- 55 Wan saved an article from *Scientific American* in which Ernst Gombrich points out the futility of NASA's communiqué designed for the Pioneer spacecraft in 1972, where a pictorial plaque featuring a male figure with a raised hand and his female companion were intended to convey to extraterrestrials the origin of the craft. E.H. Gombrich, "The Visual Image," *Scientific American*, September 1972, 90.
- 56 Richard Fung has noted this queering of the image in relation to the contrapposto position. Round table discussion on *Theodore Wan*, Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto at Mississauga, 9 February 2005: Ian Wallace, Ken Lum, Richard Fung, and Christine Conley.
- 57 Craig Owens, "Posing," *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, exh. cat., New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York, 1984), 7.
- 58 Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," 9.
- 59 Conley, *Theodore Wan*, 91.
- 60 Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 66.
- 61 A curious document amongst Wan's papers would seem to reinforce this view of the photos as both symptomatic and as a "working through." A medical history record of the kind routinely completed by physicians identifies T. Saskatche Wan as the patient. Dated 11 July 1979, it offers a diagnosis of ego convergence based on seeing "Draping Procedure, General Surgical Positions, etc." and recommends treatment to transcend the ego. Though it is enigmatically signed Q. Li, the handwriting is strikingly similar to Wan's, suggesting that it may be part of the artist's own humorous commentary. The duration of recommended treatment is from the date of diagnosis to infinity.
- 62 Julia Kristeva's essay "Le sujet en process" was originally published in *Tel Quel*, no. 52–53 (1973), and in English as "The Subject in Process," trans. P. French, in Patrick French and Roland-François Lack, eds., *The Tel Quel Reader* (London and New York, 1998), 133–78.
- 63 Julia Kristeva, "The Subject in Process," 140–41.
- 64 Julia Kristeva, "The Subject in Process," 165.
- 65 See Julia Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject," *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 October 1973, 1249–50; and "Signifying Practice and Mode of Production," trans. G. Nowell-Smith, *Edinburgh Magazine*, no. 1 (1976), 64–76.
- 66 Kirlian photography is a kind of contact photography using high voltage. It was developed by the Russian Semyon Kirlian who claimed its value for imaging energy flows and the human aura.
- 67 Curatorial notes of Joan Borsa, March 1981. SUB Art Gallery files, University of Alberta Archives.
- 68 Reproduced in Conley, *Theodore Wan*, 56.