From: *Janet Cardiff. A Survey of Works Including Collaborations with George Bures Miller*, curated by C. Christov-Bakargiev, exhibition catalog (Rivoli-Torino, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 21 May - 31 August 2003), P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City 2002, pp. 14-35.

An Intimate Distance Riddled with Gaps: The Art of Janet Cardiff

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev

I.

Janet Cardiff's works, including the collaborations with her partner, George Bures Miller, are incurably romantic.[1] Among the most perceptually engrossing, emotionally intense and seductive artworks of recent years, they contribute to a shift in the communicational structure of art from a one-sided confrontation between artwork and audience to an exploration of the conversational dimension - the quiet, private realm of talking-listening.

Sound is the primary focus of Cardiff's practice, although she also shapes visual experience and perceptual realms to create complex works that explore narrative, desire, intimacy, love, loss, memory and the mechanisms of the brain. Reality and imagination are continuous through technology and Cardiff's work explores how technology impacts on our consciousness.

In 1991 in Canada, Cardiff began to create the audio Walks that have brought her to international acclaim. Although known mostly for these Walks, she has produced an art that is extremely variegated. Since the late 1980s she has been making interactive audio, video, and film installations; she has created performances during which she met with strangers to discuss the theme of intimacy *(Intimacies,* 1992); she has played back prerecorded conversations on public telephones

[1] This book is about the art of Janet Cardiff, including her collaborations with George Bures Miller. It does not therefore include references to the many projects that are authored solely by Bures Miller. That leaves a lot of material for another book.

(Conversations, 1998); she has written texts as artworks *(Rumor #11, 2000)*[2]*;* and recently, she even made a sky-writing piece, *Booh!* (2001), in Venice.
Cardiff's Walks are time-based fictional works that are experienced by participants who don a headset attached to a Discman or DV Walkman and follow pre-recorded instructions that lead them into open-ended and ambiguous narratives. Her own voice features prominently in these haunting works as she guides her audience on routes that take them to unexpected places both indoors and out, where emotions such as fear, regret, longing, anger, denial, confidence, and loss are roused.
Because of the intimacy required to experience her art properly, her works often have a limited accessibility. While a large number of people at one time can experience *Forty-Part Motet* (2001) and *The Dark Pool* (1995), other works - including the Walks - must be experienced when one is completely alone.

II. Vademecum

Janet Cardiff was born in 1957 in Brussels, Ontario. She grew up on a farm outside a village of nine hundred people, in touch with rural life as well as contemporary media - the smell of hay and television.[3] She later moved to Western Canada where she met Bures Miller, earning her MVA in Edmonton in 1983. Except for a few years in Toronto, she and Bures Miller have mostly lived in an old white wooden house in Lethbridge, Alberta, with their dog, Helen. In 2000-2001, they spent a year in Berlin, Germany, on a DAAD grant. They currently divide their time between Lethbridge and Europe, having decided to stay on longer in Berlin.
Cardiff was trained as an artist in photography and print-making in the early 1980s, and her first

---

[2] Rumor # 11 by Janet Cardiff: "Rumors are the smallest of germs. These tiny micro-organisms are so small they can pass through most filters, and can usually be seen only with a high-powered microscope. While rumors can be grown in a laboratory, they normally reproduce only in body cells. This makes them difficult to study.
"Most biologists would agree that in general all typical rumors behave like micro-organisms, and where the practical problems of control are involved they must be handled in the same fashion as larger parasitic micro-organisms. Every type of rumor that has been studied exemplifies the three interrelated characteristics of living things: reproduction, variation and selective survival.
"There is much more controversy, however, about the evolutionary origin of rumors. Many consider that rumors *have evolved* by parasitic degeneration from larger forms. Others believe that they *have* arisen from something in the host cell - either from the genetic mechanism in its nucleus or something in its cell protoplasm liberated from normal control and able to get into fresh cells and carry on as an independent being. There are now many instances where an apparently normal person can be shown to carry a rumor indefinitely. The multiplication of the rumor keeps pace with the multiplication of the host cells in so precise a fashion that some form of mutual co-ordination must be postulated. It can be argued that this must mean that a rumor is essentially made of host material, though capable of being set free; or alternatively that a free parasitic organism can become so integrated with its host that it becomes incorporated into its structure. It may well be that rumors have arisen in several different ways and that the qualities that bring them under the definition must not be regarded as signifying that they have a common origin.
“Rumor diseases in humans usually are spread by direct contact or by droplet infection (sneezing or coughing). A few are spread by insects, animals, and birds. Most rumor diseases cause a person to develop immunity against further attacks. This fact is made use of in protecting individuals from a certain rumor. When a rumor vaccine is injected into a person's body, it causes them to develop immunity just as if they had suffered from the rumor itself." Janet Cardiff in *Rumor City - Les rumeurs urbaines/Urban Rumors,* curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Fri-Art, Centre d'art contemporain, Kunsthalle Fribourg, Switzerland, July 2000.

[3] "I like the concept that there is no truth, no one great masterpiece from a subject. There can be one situation and ten realities. I really like connecting with the other realities […] I guess it's escapism: telling stories but being able to use the subconscious to escape into and create another reality. It might be a reflection of my upbringing. When you're in a town with a population of nine hundred, living on a farm, your only connection to the outside world is through fiction and the media. Being out in a world I used to think was fiction, but now is reality, I have to create new fictions" (Janet Cardiff in Deirdre Hanna, "Looking in on Janet Cardiff's Voyeuristic Art World," *NOW Magazine,* Toronto, Ontario, April 10-16, 1986, p. 27.

works were large-scale silkscreens, followed by smaller etchings. In 1983, as a first collaboration, Cardiff and Bures Miller directed a Super-8 film called *The Guardian Angel.* This expanded her field of attention from static, two-dimensional print-making and photographic collage to experimenting with sound, movement, and the collective memory of cinema. This shift would inform all her future work. Even her prints, after 1983, began to address the effects of juxtaposition and montage on narrative sequencing. Apparently an expression of contradictory impulses, she was interested in the old-fashioned tactile qualities of print-making - the layering of different textures - and in popular media and advertising. In her silk screens, she reprinted photographs from fashion magazines and from TV stills. Rather than critiquing these media constructions, her images reflected her own ambivalence - they were her own desires, projections and fantasies. Cardiff's first solo exhibition was held in Toronto in 1987. She showed a number of small etchings, as well as painted and carved wooden works that referred both to conventional tourist imagery of rustic Canadian frontier life and to banal soap-opera situations. These early works verged on the kitsch, and pointed thematically to issues that would become integral to the language, methodology, techniques, and media of her later sound work. In *River-Girl-TV* (1986), for example, a girl is seen watching a natural landscape on a television set that is itself located in a "wild" environment similar to the one depicted on the screen. Boundaries are thus blurred and the fiction is both inside the television set and outside it. The attempt to create a more permeable relationship between interiority and exteriority is also the subject of prints such as *Three Thoughts* (1986). This triptych represents three cutaway views of a person's head, showing the workings of thoughts and feelings inside the brain. Cardiff's references to rustic life through content as well as through the use of plywood panels, wood grain and rough-hewn frames, and the stereotypical images of an idyllic nature, are exaggerated in these works to the point of saturation. A parallel between this saturation and the plethora of cinematic tropes and filmic devices in her later works can easily be drawn. Her recent work also reveals the ambiguities of our contemporary "fictional" selfhood - we are aware of the constructed nature of experience, yet willingly capitulate to its seduction, and even encourage its sweet lies.

Tabl'eau (1988) is one of Cardiff's first multimedia installations. This work incorporates sculpture, painting, sound, and slides. In a shift from her earlier works, *Tabl'eau* involves little gestural mark-making or expressionism. She juxtaposes real water flowing in a sink with a slide projection of dissolving images and texts. It is in this project that the primary character of Cardiff's later work appears for the first time: a young woman in a white evening dress, standing near a sink similar to the real one in the installation appears over and over again in the slides, looking for water with a divining rod. The figure suggests some kind of narrative, with the atmosphere of film noir. She is constructed by media fictions and is strangely desirable, characterized by reverie, fantasy, and forgetfulness. Her world is theatrical, cinematic and nostalgic. *Tabl'eau* was shown several times. In 1989 in Edmonton, it appeared in an expanded form. Two speakers were encased in columns at the height of the audience's heads, emanating the sounds of a pair of voices in quiet, yet fragmented, conversation.

Aside from using slide projections and sound, in 1989 and 1990, Cardiff also experimented with photography. She employed pinhole cameras and extended light exposures to create dark and ambiguous hidden images that suggest memory processes as well as old film stills. She also collaged photographic images together, and then re-photographed the collages to achieve works suggestive of sequential or related events and stories that are ultimately indecipherable. These "plotless storyboards"[4] anticipate the open-ended narratives of Cardiff's later Walks and

---

[4] Linda Generaux, "Janet Cardiff," *Artforum,* New York, November 1990, p. 176.

installations.
Since *Tabl'eau,* Cardiff's indoor installations for gallery spaces have been numerous. They are *Whispering Room* (1991), *An Inability to Make a Sound* (1992), *To Touch* (1993), *The Dark Pool* (1995), *Playhouse* (1997), *The Empty Room* (1997), *La Tour* (1998), *The Muriel Lake Incident* (1999), *Forty-Part Motet* (2001), and *The Paradise Institute* (2001).[5] This last mixed media sound and video installation was made for the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. *The Dark Pool, The Empty Room, La Tour, The Muriel Lake Incident* and *The Paradise Institute* are all collaborations with Bures Miller.
Whispering Room (1991), first shown at The New Gallery in Calgary, Alberta, and currently part of the Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, is an audio installation made up of sixteen speakers on stands from which a number of different voices emerge. Walking through the space, the audience listens to specific pieces of dialogue coming from each speaker, and a story begins to unravel. Various strands flow in and out of the work: a car journey to meet someone, a girl along the road by a river, memories of swimming with someone else and almost drowning. The piece is permeated by a sense of inevitability of action, and of precipitation of events, as if the main character or "persona" is out of control and directed by some obscure destiny. A 16mm film loop of a young girl tap dancing in a forest appears briefly on the wall. As with the best of Cardiff's work, you become lost in a hall of mirrors, in a maze of clues and suggestions held in suspense by some imminent catastrophe. A sense of vulnerability and of the inevitability of a fearful encounter, memories of feeling alone as a child and of being watched, all intertwine. What is most fearful in this work is the sense of loss of control over consciousness, as the primary narrative voice expresses a personality that verges on splitting continuously into various oneiric personas. Bits of conversation emerge, pointing to the private dialogue between a couple, perhaps lovers, that is so characteristic of Cardiff's later installations and Walks. Similarly, time is not linear in the piece, as past, present, and future blur.
Forty-Part Motet (2001) is a recent installation in which Cardiff returns to, and expands, the polyphonic structure of *Whispering Room.* The artist distributes forty speakers on stands in a large space, each playing back one of the forty sections of Thomas Tallis's choral work, *Spem in Alium Nunquam Habui* (1575). The choir voices were individually recorded in Salisbury Cathedral, and Cardiff's audience meanders between the speakers, hearing this voice more clearly than that one, in an ever changing concert. Being part of the audience for this work feels like being an invisible presence, weaving amongst a crowd of singers. You eavesdrop on each of them individually, recalling the angels in Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* (1987).
For ***An Inability to Make a Sound*** (1992), made a year after *Whispering Room,* you also proceed through a constantly changing installation, where you are instructed to don a Walkman and step on wooden planks that form a circuit in the space. As you walk round and round on the planks, passing chairs, a table with two cups and a film loop that turns on automatically via infra-red sensors, you listen to the binaural recording on the cassette tape. Another story unravels, suggestive of a journey backwards through time, of sexuality and conflict. The anxiety expressed in this piece recalls the mechanisms of nightmares. The installation functions like a memory theater, where memories are

---

[5] Cardiff has also created two robotic "telescope pieces" with pre-recorded video that are located in museum spaces *(Walk Münster II,* 1997, and *Chiaroscuro II,* 1997). They function as views onto the outside, where events appear to take place in the surrounding public areas.

associated with places and images in an architectural structure.[6]

To Touch (1993) reverses the Walk structure by creating a centered focal point around which swirl a series of visions, voices, and sounds. To experience this installation, one enters a darkened room and gently touches the surface of an old carpenter's table, spot-lit from above, which activates overlapping voices and sounds coming from speakers around the room. These suggest imaginary visual constructions in the minds of the participants ("Picture this image" is a phrase that recurs in the piece), while tactility enhances the sensual dimension. Listening becomes an erotic and voyeuristic endeavor. But there is never a climax to the work, never an end; only unstable fragments and diverging viewpoints that open rather than close the narrative structure: images of a man tied up in a bed while a woman watches him; a male voice arousing a woman by telling her imagined stories about her scars; snippets from 1950s movies; the sound of people breathing, and scary music.

At the Western Front Gallery in Vancouver, Bures Miller and Cardiff first showed ***The Dark Pool*** (1995), an installation about mad science. You enter into a dimly lit laboratory/living space that seems to have been abandoned by its inhabitants - a couple of scientists intent on researching a mysterious "black pool." The pool is perhaps a tunnel for traveling through time and for alternative realities. Again, the installation is interactive, the viewer's passage activating fragments of dialogue as well as strands of music. Resonant both of a movie set and of the theme-park experience, the work plays out the way in which memory is activated by specific objects, in a Babel of visions, smells and other physical perceptions.[7] Drowning, losing oneself, and erotic pleasure hover dangerously close in this work. Cardiff describes *The Dark Pool* as a metaphor for the mind and how it works in a hypertextual way. The mind is a dark pool of forgotten, illogical facts and images as much as it is a logical reasoning entity. But it is also about magical places in our imagination that we encounter in our lives maybe for just a brief time."[8]

The theatrical set up of *The Dark Pool,* replete with old objects, furniture, books and pseudo-scientific curiosities, was followed by a much simpler audio and video installation called ***Playhouse*** (1997), shown at Galerie Barbara Weiss in Berlin. This work initiates a series of model theater spaces that Cardiff has explored ever since - *The Muriel Lake Incident* and *The Paradise Institute* being its subsequent incarnations. It was after *The Dark Pool* that the great season of Cardiff's Walks also began, and there may well be a correlation between the two developments: once Cardiff had broadened her scope to the free use of the world at large as her "set" in the Walks, she may have shifted her attitude towards what the "white cube" gallery space could be used for. An artificial construct, the gallery became the ideal place in which to explore the suspended and constructed "spaces" of representation itself - the theaters, playhouses, cinemas, and arcades of spectacle. *Playhouse* is an installation containing a small room, which you enter through red velvet curtains.

---

[6] Cardiff herself has pointed out in conversation how her works may be read as mnemotecnic devices and memory theaters. "In order to form a series of places in memory, [Quintilian] says, a building is to be remembered as spacious and varied a one as possible... The images by which the speech is to be remembered - as an example of these Quintilian says one may use an anchor or a weapon - are then placed in imagination on the places that have been memorized in the building ... We have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through his memory building whilst he is making his speech, drawing from the memorized places the images he has placed on them." Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, England, 1974, p. 3 (1st edition 1966).

[7] This installation has been described as "articulating a desire for mystery in a materialist, over determined and self-conscious historical moment. The controlling theme is loss: the fear and dream of disappearing without a trace - of being, also, elsewhere," David Garneau, "Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller" *(Art/Text,* Los Angeles, Issue 57, 1997, p. 93).

[8] 8 Janet Cardiff, in conversation.

You don a Walkman and sit on a chair in front of a balustrade, as if at the theater. You are the spectator to an opera. The work incorporates a video projection of a corpulent soprano, her tiny size suggesting that the stage is a great distance from you - like Borromini's *trompe l'oeil* architecture accentuating perspective. The binaural recording of chairs adjusting, hushed voices and clothes rustling makes the seated participant feel as if they are surrounded by other invisible spectators. You are instructed by "Janet's" voice to sit down. The work has the aura of "old Europe" and the glamour of a little girl's fantasy, as the opera singer in a sparkling lamé dress sings her German aria. As you watch and listen to her, a voice - seemingly from a woman sitting to your right - suggests that you leave the theater with her, as some crime is about to take place in the theater. But you cannot, and you are left there, in the real world, alone. A sense of impotence overwhelms you as you feel the inevitable loss and fading away of a destiny that was so briefly offered to you from another world - as if you had almost made it through the thin membrane that divides us from fiction.
The multimedia sculpture ***The Muriel Lake Incident*** (1999) was first shown at The Istanbul Biennale. Like *Playhouse,* its physical structure recalls a small theater, but here, you stand in front of it, don a headphone and peer into the miniature cinema, whose molding recalls the architectural details of theaters photographed by Hiroshi Sugimoto. A black and white video recalling film noir (a sexy dark-haired woman dancing,[9] an imminent crime), and Hollywood detectives and westerns (a cowboy by a campfire near a lake), starts on the little screen at the end of this hyper-perspectival space. There are references to Orson Welles and snippets of dramatic music that suggest suspense. Fragments of a song mix with those from Istanbul folk singer Antonio Dalgas, in a hybrid of Western and Eastern cultural references. Along with the film's soundtrack, noises and voices seem to be coming from the space of the audience - your space. These increasingly become part of the fiction. Different scenes are mounted in rapid succession until the menacing tone turns into high drama when gunshots are heard in the theater space. The willful suspension of disbelief joins an almost perverse pleasure of playing with the artificiality of film.
The Paradise Institute (2001) is Cardiff and Bures Miller's most recent installation, and develops the structural principles of *Playhouse* and *The Muriel Lake Incident.* Created for the Venice Biennial, it is a large-scale model theater that accommodates seventeen people in real-sized seats. A balustrade separates you from the hyper-perspectival "theater" space, and you gaze onto a screen where a black and white video, simulating film, is projected. The narrative develops elements of the audio Walk *Drogan's Nightmare,* where a man is strapped to a bed and a woman attempts to save him from imminent disaster. As in the previous "theater" installations, the soundtrack of the "movie" blends and overlaps with the artificial and real soundscape of the auditorium - a ringing cell phone, for example.

III. The Walks

Alongside these installations, Cardiff has risen to prominence with the series of sixteen Walks she has made to date. Her first was *Forest Walk,* created during a residency at the Banff Center for the Arts in Alberta in 1991. Cardiff happened on the idea by chance, when she inadvertently turned on the cassette recorder that she had been using to take notes in a cemetery. As she listened to her own

---

[9] Cardiff has stated in conversation that this character was also inspired by Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960).

voice while retracing her footsteps, she experienced the disjuncture of subjectivity[10] and re-envelopment in a surrogate persona's universe that would become characteristic of her Walks. Realizing that this could be incorporated as a technique for her work, she began to experiment. I have always thought that Cardiff's Walks were somehow related to the particular landscape in and around Lethbridge. The Western Canadian town is located on a high, flat plateau. But the area is traversed by a series of "coolies" (from the French *les écoules).* These are long, winding and narrow valleys produced by thousands of years of streams eroding the soft stone of the plateau. While the "upper level" of Lethbridge is a typical Western American semi-desert environment, with suburban residential neighborhoods, great highways, restaurants, movie theaters, diners, gas stations, shopping malls, and a University campus, this "lower level" of coolies, hidden from view unless you decide to descend into it, is another world. It is a sublime (and subliminal) natural landscape with trees, grass, verdant slopes, beavers and deer. It is a world that runs right through the city, but which is not immediately visible, almost a "geographical" subconscious. People in Lethbridge typically take long walks in these coolies. Unlike with other walks, here you can let yourself completely loose, and never get lost; you are easily guided by the narrow coolies themselves, channels of paths in the landscape. You always emerge somewhere known.

Forest Walk was followed by *Louisiana Walk #74* (1996), made for The Louisiana Museum in Humlebaek, Denmark, where Cardiff was invited to exhibit by Canadian writer and curator Bruce Ferguson within the international group exhibition "NowHere." This was the first major European exposure for Cardiff, which was followed by a number of other projects in Europe and America. Cardiff returned to Europe to create *Walk Münster* (1997) for the outdoor public art project "Skulptur Projekte." Also in 1997, *Chiaroscuro I* was an indoor audio walk made for the exhibition "Present tense: Nine Artists in the Nineties" at SFMoMA in San Francisco. The following year, in 1998, she completed *Villa Medici Walk* (1998) for the exhibition "La Ville, le Jardin, la Mémoire" at the Villa Medici in Rome, and *Wanås Walk* (1998) for Wanås Castle in Sweden. *Drogan's Nightmare* (1998) followed as her participation in the São Paolo Biennial. In 1999, *The Missing Voice (Case Study 8)* was inaugurated as an Artangel public art project in London. This was followed by the indoor *MoMA Walk* (1999) that guided participants through The Museum of Modern Art's collections as part of the exhibition "The Museum as Muse." As a commission, she made the audio Walk *Sleepwalking* in 1999 for a private collection in New York. In 1999, she also began to create video Walks, where people don headphones and carry a DV Walkman on their tour. *In Real Time* (1999) was her first audio-video Walk. She created it for The Carnegie International in Pittsburgh. In 2000, she completed *A Large Slow River,* an audio Walk for Gairloch Gardens, an estate in Oakville on the edge of Lake Ontario. Still in 2000, Cardiff made the audio Walk *Taking Pictures* for the exhibition "Wonderland" in St. Louis, Missouri. Finally, *The Telephone Call* (2001) was Cardiff's second audio and video Walk, created for the exhibition "010101" at SFMoMA.

While most of the Walks last from ten to fifteen minutes, *The Missing Voice (Case Study 8)* (1999) is thirty-eight minutes long. This piece guides participants from inside the Whitechapel Library in London through the streets around Brick Lane and ends at Liverpool Street train station. If the other walks could recall short stories, this one functions like a novel, unfolding in the city of London.

---

[10] This experience of becoming aware of oneself as "other" - typical of individuation processes - is referred to in *To Touch.* An excerpt from *To Touch* describes this experience: "As I walked down the street I was thinking about what to make for dinner when I noticed something on the ground. It was a photograph, black and white, of a woman walking in a crowd. I picked it up. For a moment I didn't recognize myself in the picture. The woman's face just looked familiar as she concentrated on walking through the mass of people. I stood on the sidewalk not able to move, staring at this photograph, this image that said it was me, but not understanding, not knowing, not remembering. Why was it here and who had taken it? I looked over my shoulder to see if I was being watched." It is also part of the plot of *The Missing Voice (Case Study B),* where "Janet" finds a picture of a red-haired woman in the street and follows her.

The neighborhood is closely connected with tales of Jack the Ripper and other Victorian murders, and Cardiff exploits these associations. There are two "Janets" in this Walk: one "Janet" walks through the streets holding a recorder (just as you do, as walker/listener), while the other 'Janet' is a played-back recorded voice to which the first "Janet" is listening. You flip back and forth between two different periods in time. One "Janet" follows the other, recorded, "Janet" ("I found her photograph in the tube station, beside one of those photo booths. A woman with long red hair staring out at me.") "Janet" is recognized by a detective, or perhaps the Walk is about short-term amnesia and she/you have hired the detective to find the woman wearing the red wig. She/you may paradoxically be searching for herself/yourself. Personal, scary memories of childhood blend with descriptions and narrative fragments. The recorded "Janet" describes being abducted ("I'm blindfolded, my hands tied behind me. I walk naked across the floor. I can feel his eyes watching my body.") She sees her "other" self identified as a dead body in a newspaper. She/you walks you to Liverpool station, where you are left alone, and must find your way back to Whitechapel on your own.

Over the years, Cardiff has learned certain "recipes" for a "good" Walk, and some patterns do emerge. Although narrative is open-ended and fragmented, the **routes** of Cardiff's Walks are rigorously pre-defined, and recaIl the Virtual Reality paths of computer games and Playstations, but set in real locations. Cardiff states that "the routes are designed to give the participant the physical experience of different types and textures of space."[11] They also draw on earlier forms of entertainment such as radio plays, science fiction, "mad scientist" movies, funhouses and the haunted houses of theme parks. At the end of the Walks, a sense of loss and abandonment overwhelms you as you are left in a remote place and must find your way back alone from a bunker, from underground tunnels, from the corner of a library, from the middle of a forest, from the lakeside.

Cardiff layers **sounds** over the real perceptions one experiences while walking in a specific environment. Initially, as her voice firmly guides you, you regress into the blissful state of not worrying about where to go next, typical of childhood promenades with parents. Her voice seems to emerge from within the your own body.[12] You slip in and out of "being her" as the sounds swirl around you. Her own and other voices are layered with sounds - birds chirping, gunshots, footsteps, music and singing - so that the artificial environment produced by the binaural recording blends with the real environment in which the participant is immersed. With binaural recording, it is possible to suggest 3-D space, and therefore the presence of physical phenomena that aren't actually there. Binaural recording is achieved by placing two omni-directional microphones in the position of the ears on a dummy head, and recording in stereo while moving the head through space. Played back on a headset, the sounds seem to come from the actual surrounding. Subconsciously, participants begin to breathe and walk in synch with the virtual body on the tape or CD, blurring the distinction between self and other. Music, usually resonant of film noir, is layered into the Walks only after some moments, once the walker is already drawn into the story by the voices. It fades in and out occasionally, as a signifier of cinema and of the constructed nature of the experience. Usually, further into the work, singing is edited in, sometimes a woman's voice, at other times a man's, occasionally children singing, or even a church choir. This singing is often in the language of the place in which the Walk is located - Portuguese, Italian, German, etc. It suggests relief and pleasure, and recalls distant and seductive locations - Europe, at the Opera, in an old Church.

---

[11] Janet Cardiff, in conversation.

[12] The movie *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999), though released long after Cardiff's first Walks, is based on a similar idea of entering into the body of another person.

Cardiff thus shapes space acoustically to help construct a narrative, create a mood, define a character, much as a sound technician would for a movie.

Cardiff's work can be seen as an ecology of sound. She acutely perceives the excess of noise in most urban environments as a sensory overload, and she finds the cacophony painful. By layering her meaningful binaural soundtracks over the environmental noise, she literally shapes sound, and her Walks restore a sense of auditory pleasure, reawakening senses that had become numbed.[13]

Improvisation is an important part of Cardiff's process. She writes minimal scripts for her audio Walks, and there are no shooting scripts, nor story boards, for her video Walks. In a similar way to South African artist William Kentridge's process-oriented and associatively generated animated films, Cardiff achieves her fragmentary, incomplete and open narratives thanks to her "amateur," desk-top attitude towards her material - where intuition and free association play an important role. Cardiff first finds an interesting route in the site. Then she writes an initial script, records, and begins editing. Here, things change and shift, and she will often rewrite her script and record more. Some Walks will have up to twenty different scripts before they are finished. It is like writing on a word processor, where the field of improvisation expands infinitely as we play with words, concepts and the reordering of paragraphs. Yet, for all the openness and improvisation that the Walks may go through, it is only due to very precise editing that this art can "work," since participants must be able to walk in comfortable synch with the audio or video tour.[14]

The **scripts** shift from one linguistic register to another. These include instructions; contextual descriptions of what "Janet" (and you) see (or imagine seeing) around you during the walk; descriptions of her feelings; the narration of memories triggered by some observation; dialogues with other characters, principally her young, male lover; and dialogues with you, the walker. There is a blending of descriptions of the interior landscape and of the perceptual field outside, as in reverie. There is a dreamlike fluidity to the scripts, heightened in the recording by the tone of voice and rhythm of walking and pausing. "Janet's" voice is quiet, reflective, conversational, and soothing. Her flat tone suggests sleepwalking, a ghost-like voice that recalls both absence and presence, or a voice from inside the brain. Her whispering suggests intimacy and secrecy. As John Weber has described it, "She generally speaks in a distinctively private but neutral tone - far removed from the voices used in public. At other times, an intimate, almost confessional, erotic, or conspiratorial tone fosters the impression that Cardiff has mistaken the listener for someone else and is revealing things that he or she may not be intended to hear, lending a voyeuristic quality to certain passages."[15]

The Walks create hallucinatory spaces where fiction and reality overlap. "Do you know those moments when the past overlaps with the present, for just an instant?" asks "Janet" in *Wanås Walk.* **Dreams** and the phantasmagoric run throughout all the works. As Kitty Scott has remarked, "When seen as a flow of mental pictures augmented by sound, the audio walks and installations resemble

---

[13] "Televisions, newspapers, cell phones, ghetto-blasters, car alarms, billboards, radios and other electromagnetic impulses are absorbed into our bodies. Our means of perception and meaning formation are relentlessly reshaped by the co-existence of different and constantly evolving orders of experience as we negotiate the terrain between the actual and the virtual. We experience a distancing from what is real - from both self and the world - and unconsciously anaesthetize ourselves against the cacophony." Marnie Fleming, *A Large Slow River,* Oakville Galleries, Oakville, Ontario, 2001, p. 16 (catalogue).

[14] Editing is usually done with the help of Bures Miller, although the Walks are not authored by both artists. First, they used a cassette deck and elaborate drawings to edit the recordings, until they began using computerized editing, where each voice or sound is on a different track, so as to bring them in and out of the work digitally with great precision.

[15] John Weber, "Janet Cardiff," in *Present Tense: Nine Artists from the Nineties,* San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 1997, p. 16.

dreams. They are sometimes irrational, frightening, difficult to remember; scenes shift quickly; temporal conventions and solutions disappear. In effect, the experience of taking the audio walk is like dreaming another's dreams."[16]

In *Drogan's Nightmare,* "Janet" is in the museum in São Paolo. During the walk, her mind interacts with that of Drogan (Bures Miller's voice), a young man from another spatio-temporal dimension, apparently strapped to a bed and abducted by a machine that can read his thoughts. The machine insinuates itself through him into "Janet's" mind and memories as well. Drogan attempts escape from this *Matrix-like* world where humans belong to machines ("I see rows of beds, filled with naked bodies attached to wires and tubes"), and Cardiff's audience identifies with ("becomes") Drogan, as she attempts to walk him/us out of the building/confining institution. Ultimately, we are left unsure as to whether the story is "real" or not: "He's not really there on the bed. He's just dreaming it."

It is repeatedly stated in critical commentaries that Cardiff's works present ambiguous fragments of narratives. It is not that there is no story at all in these works, however. A **general plot** does usually emerge by the end of the editing process, and some elements are repeated in other works. Each new Walk could even be read as another episode in a wacky, mad serial. The basic "story" often revolves around the unnamed persona, "Janet," looking for someone who has left or who has been abducted ("This is a trip to find something I've lost. There's always an inability to make a sound, a voice," Janet says in an early work.) That someone - often "George" - is a scientist, dreamer and lover who, as in sci-fi, has disappeared during his experiments. Your walk overlaps her walk/quest for her lover. In *Walk Munster,* an old man is searching for his daughter while "Janet" is searching for a lover. As a *mise en abîme,* "Janet" sometimes listens to the doubly removed recorded voice of her lover and tries to find him in the same way that you listen to her recorded voice and try to follow her. In *A Large Slow River,* she listens to a cassette she has found ("This is where I found his tape recorder, wrapped in a plastic bag, I always think I'll find him here waiting for me when I come here"); in *Drogan's Nightmare,* she listens to his dreamy voice, which enters directly into her mind through some sort of telepathy.

Within this frame-tale of searching for someone missing, fragments of other narratives are integrated. They suggest different worlds - things that have happened in that same location but previously. For example, sounds of fighting, gunshots, soldiers and bombs recur, laden with memories of war movies and past events. Things happening at the same time but in other places (you hear the waves of the sea while looking at a lake, etc.), and suggestions of time travel or sexual encounters are also typical. Time travel, like dreaming, is a metaphor for escape: It is an established fact that consensus on temporality is requisite for the maintenance of social order in modern urban life, while disjunctures between lived time and the standardized time of clocks and calendars tend to accompany various forms of psychopathology.

Creating a similar sense of disorientation, in *A Large Slow River,* "Janet" says, "I'm in the churchyard, my best dress crisp as I walk." You hear the rustling of clothes. But when she says she is "walking through the field at home on the farm," the same layered-in sound no longer evokes a starchy dress, but brings to mind walking through tall, dry grass. "Which of these memories is real?" she asks, suggesting how fictitious, constructed and artificial the world of audio vision really is. It also refers to the fallible nature of perceptions and memory themselves, in our prosthetic and post psychoanalytical culture where projection and false memory syndromes are common.

There is a strong relationship between walking and remembering in these works: the rhythm of

---

[16] Kitty Scott, "I want you to walk with me," in *Janet Cardiff. The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*, Artangel, London, England, 1999, p. 16.

walking encourages reverie, and specific scenes and sounds trigger recollections. There are usually a couple of pauses where the walker sits and rests ("Here's a bench. Let's sit here for a minute"), as in a musical composition. These are moments of reflection where memories can surface, or they are delays in the experience of pleasure. Time in Cardiff's work is expressed through the interplay of memory and expectation or anticipation of events. Duration, and the fluctuation in the density of experience (what feels like minutes for one person may feel like hours for another) are subjects of her work. In The Museum of Modern Art, during *MoMA Walk* (1999), you're told to pause and sit on benches in the Matisse room. It is here that an Italian singer's voice emerges as if from memory - *Lui s'avanza lentamente, con incedere elegante ...* ("He comes forward slowly, with elegant gait...") Experiencing a Walk is a bit like love-making, where pauses and delays become integral to the rhythm, which slowly reaches a climax that is both a loss of the self and a loss of the "other." At the end of *Villa Medici Walk,* for example, just as you reach the deepest recesses of the Villa's underground Roman tunnels and have given up all control, all agency over direction, to "Janet's" guiding voice, she is overcome by what sounds like the "real" voice of her newly found lover, and she abandons you - the walker - to a solitary and symbolic death ("Sometimes you have to lose yourself... ")

A memory of almost dying is a recurring *topos* in the works, evoking both the erotic and the sublime. This recalls how the contemporary Self revels in false memory syndromes, as much as in multiple personality disorders. In *Whispering Room,* you hear: "R: I have this image of us swimming in the river. Do you remember? J: You tried to drown me. R: There was a lot of mud in the river. I wanted you to carry me. J: But I couldn't carry you. The water was in my mouth. I couldn't breathe." In *An Inability to Make a Sound,* the same episode is recalled: "You climbed on my back in the water," and a feigned drowning is described. In *The Dark Pool,* a young woman called Torah has disappeared in the thick, black pool ("She seemed to float to the water's edge and not even pausing for a moment walked straight into the black pool. Her white dress didn't even float up around her. It was as if she opened up a seam in my vision and walked through it ... When she was twenty-six she realized that she had been drowned as a witch in a previous life so she took swimming lessons and learned to float.") The theme of cold running water comes back again in *Villa Medici Walk.* The list could continue.

Another evocation of danger is often achieved in the Walks through the presence of a "bad guy," who is frequently a doctor, a scientist, or someone from a pulp fiction detective novel. In *Whispering Room,* it is a woman researcher or psychologist ("My stomach feels funny. Relax. I can't. I want to cry. Fuck. Why am I going to meet her anyways? She'll probably just be cruel and ask me stupid questions. Exit 24. I turn left.") In *Drogan's Nightmare,* it is a machine that can enter into people's brains and read their thoughts ("Machine: I can feel his lips on your neck. The wet saliva on your skin. Janet: Leave my memories alone. Machine: Tell us what you see ... Do you really think you can leave?"). In *In Real Time,* it is a middle-aged man with glasses dressed in black; in *The Paradise Institute,* it is on older, heavier man speaking with a foreign accent at a phone booth.

IV. Fictions

It is difficult to locate Cardiff's art specifically within established art historical narratives and lineages. Rather than simply building on other artists' achievements, her Walks shoot outwards from the visual arts into other dimensions. However, a number of art-historical precedents can be identified. Walking according to chance patterns in the urban environment was a strategy adopted

by the Situationists in their psycho-geographic *dérives* during the late 1950s and 1960s. More recently, in the 1990s, Francis Alÿs has also developed urban walks, representing on attitude towards the poetry of daily experience. And walking in nature has been at the basis of the practices of Richard Long and Hamish Fulton since the late 1960s. Like Cardiff, Andrea Fraser has explored the dimension of the audio tour and has spun her work off the traditional museum acoustiguide, though the conceptual and critical outlook of Fraser's work is very different from Cardiff's vertiginous cinematic walks. Most of these examples, however, foreground the artists' own experience of walking, while Cardiff takes her audience on an acoustic journey. A more pertinent analogy with Cardiff's work is therefore Max Neuhaus' tours (1966-1976), which took his audience on various itineraries in New York to "listen" to the environment.

From the perspective of exploring seduction and intimacy, one can draw parallels with artist Marina Abramovic, who has staged seduction in performances where she engages bodily with her audience, or with others, such as Vito Acconci, who has focused on the relationship with interior, psychic dimensions, sometimes addressing the viewer personally. Also relevant here are Sophie Calle's fictional works of the 1980s building on the tradition of narrative art in France (Christian Boltanski, among others) that incorporate her "persona" in complex stories.

It is far more pertinent, however, to look at Cardiff's art in relation to literature and, even more crucially, film. Film genres, cinematic montage, and specific experimental films are the prime materials for her "sculptural" practice, providing her with a reservoir of source material. To find sound effects for her Walks, for instance, Cardiff rents old B movies and records snippets from them. Her art is definitely a post-VCR one, expressing an age in which it is normal to own entire archives of films on cassette and DVD, and to rent movies on a regular basis.[17]

Sometimes, references to film are direct, and Cardiff has often “sampled" parts of movies. At the end of *Walk Münster,* for example, she used a snippet from Bernardo Bertolucci's The *Conformist* (1970), when a woman whispers "Alright, go on," encouraging a man to kill someone in order to prove his loyalty to Fascist Italy. In the same Walk, Cardiff uses the laughter of a woman from François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 457* (1966). The film tells the story of a fireman, living in a futuristic surveillance society, who follows instructions to burn all books until he realizes that he is against the destruction of knowledge and joins a group of resistant rebels, whose strategy is to memorize the contents of books. Cardiff was inspired by the story of the religious sect, the Anabaptists, who burned books in Münster's Cathedral in the 1500s. In her postmodern mind, this resounded with and was conflated by Truffaut's film, while also recalling the stories of Nazi book-burning that were so often part of American war movies.[18]

Avant-garde films such as Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) and Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) have also influenced Cardiff. The flat narrator's voice that accompanies the series of still images in *La Jetée* recalls the flatness of Cardiff's own voice in her Walks. The conceptual time loop of *La Jetée* is a constant for Cardiff, as is the theme of experimenting with memory and time travel. *La Jetée* was made during the Cold War and describes a post-nuclear world where people live in underground tunnels beneath Paris. The winners perform experiments on the losers, attempting to send them through time in order to save humanity by finding new resources from the past or the future. The main character of this haunting tale of still frames remembers a scene from

---

[17] Other artists today, from Cardiff's contemporaries Douglas Gordon, Pierre Huyghe, or Tracey Moffat to younger artists like Christoph Girardet and Omer Fast, are similarly using the cinematic as a sculptural material in their works. Such practice pushes copyright issues into the forefront, and begs for a redefinition of legal boundaries in order to accommodate these new creative practices.

[18] Noted by Kitty Scott, *The Missing Voice (Case Study B),* Artangel, London, England, 1999, pp. 12-13.

his childhood at Orly airport, when he saw a man killed after approaching a woman. He travels into the past and falls in love with a woman, then goes into the future and discovers that humanity has survived. Having brought from the future to the present the energy source necessary to facilitate this survival, he travels back to the past to be with the woman he loves. However, other men from the present also travel into the past to kill him: the scene he had seen as a child was his own death as an adult. Cardiff's *Wanås Walk* also refers to a post-atomic world where people live underground, in this case in imagined tunnels under the Swedish forest through which you walk.

Unlike in the movies, however, Cardiff explores our relationship with technology and how it impacts on consciousness not only as a theme, and not only as a structuring element, but also as an experience. When you sit in the model theater space of *The Paradise Institute,* for example, your own experience of the theater becomes a part of the story, while the binaural recording creates a *trompe l'oreille* fiction of events happening in *your* space, not just in the "movie" that you are supposedly watching. Cardiff and Bures Miller thus create works that play out the relationship between the *dispositif* - the machine of story-telling in film and literature - and the audience. Film - no matter how experimental - has up to now constituted a more traditional form of communication than can be found in Cardiff's work: you experience it sitting down in a darkened room, which encourages you to project psychologically onto the story. Cardiff's work involves instead each individual spectator as an active participant and "maker" of the piece. It slips film into the real space of the viewer. It is "about the intrusion of plot into life."[19] *The Muriel Lake Incident* or *The Paradise Institute* could even be a pre-figuration of what cinema might become in the future, once advanced digital technology becomes more accessible, and it is possible to carry the filmic and fictitious out of the screen and into the space where the audience is sitting (or acting).

Science fiction is the realm of film and literature into which Cardiff taps the most. Her fragmented cyberfiction narratives and cyberpunk aesthetics recall movies like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* (1990), as well as more recent films like *Gattaca* (Andrew Niccol, 1997) and *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999). Cyberpunk, in the work of writers such as William Gibson, who coined the term "cyberspace" in his novel *Neuromancer* (1984), Neal Stephenson and Philip K. Dick, developed out of the fusion of "cybernetics" - a 1960s term defining the study of communication systems - and 1970s punk rock music. These post-human worlds of the 1980s and 1990s are worlds under surveillance, urban wastelands, realms controlled by oppressive technological systems of the Information Age, imaginary developments of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949). The character "Janet" in the video Walk *In Real Time* certainly recalls this post-human theme. Her brain is "wired" and, as she attempts escape, she is "rebooted" at the end of the Walk. In post-humanist cyberspace, we live in a prosthetic culture where flesh is transcended by constructs of all kinds - artificial limbs and intelligences, computer implants, genetic manipulations, and more. Digital information reigns and people become in part machines - cyborgs.[20] Cardiff's characters, the scientist lovers of *The Dark Pool,* the lovers in *Villa Medici Walk,* etc., are both scientific researchers and Romantic hacker heroes. Cardiff's landscape is not usually the barren urban post-nuclear wasteland of many recent cyberpunk novels and films, however. Nature, history, the persistence of the natural world, as of our past, even within the contemporary world, are essential to her work. She enjoys setting her narratives in parks, woods, old villas, near churches, inside museums, playing off the contradictions between these different worlds.

---

[19] Marnie Fleming, "A Large Slow River," in *A Large Slow River. Janet Cardiff,* Oakville Galleries, Oakville, Ontario, 2000, p. 40.

[20] "Cyborg" was defined by Donna Haraway in 1985.

Desire is at the root of this fascination with science and technology. As Robert Pepperel and Michael Punt recently put it, "In spite of (or perhaps, because of) our considerable technical success, there are many human desires and aspirations that still resist realization: the desire to live indefinitely, to travel through time, to have cost-free energy sources, to make contact with alien life forms, to read other people's minds, to create artificial beings, and so on. The fact that we have not yet devised the technical means of realizing these goals does not stop us from imagining that we might in the future. Indeed, this list of phantasmagorical human dreams may be driving some of the most prestigious and highly funded scientific programs in history - The Human Genome Project, High End Particle Acceleration, Cold Fusion, SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), Brain Imaging and Intelligent Robotics, all of which feed on an imaginary, pre-Oedipal future in which desires are fulfilled."[21]

Cardiff is particularly concerned with fiction and narratives. Her work calls to mind the poetic rhythms of Virginia Woolf's prose, the stream-of-consciousness of James Joyce's novels, the psychological universes of Henry James' heroines, the flow of time in Alain Robbe-Grillet's novels, the poetry of Margaret Atwood, and the labyrinthine mental worlds of Jorge Luis Borges. There are also affinities with recent Canadian fiction. Michael Ondaatje's experimental novel *Coming through Slaughter* (1976), for example, is based on the quest of a missing person. This quest is also a quest for narrative. The writer, like the reader, is an archeologist searching for ways of telling stories. The narrating voice sometimes addresses the reader directly, in a conversational tone ("You see what I'm getting at don't you?"). There is no beginning, middle, nor end. Plot is torn apart. Stories are constantly started over and over again, to the point where trying to tell the story becomes the story. In *Coming through Slaughter,* Buddy Bolden is a jazz musician in New Orleans. When he disappears, an old friend, Webb, searches for him; he is brought back but goes mad and dies in an asylum. But Bolden is never really missing, nor ever really found. The two characters blend together, as the narrating voice shifts from character to character in a dreamy world of words.

Christopher Nash, in *The Unravelling of the Postmodern Mind* (2001), sees the obsession with narrative fiction as a defining characteristic of postmodern culture. In this culture, "Characters experience anomalies ... They encounter the ambiguity of their own acts. They watch events occurring where they shouldn't happen. Time moves backwards, sideways, or stops; space is reduced, enlarged, displaced or evacuated; dimensionality is distorted or comes to seem illusory ... Postmodern fiction likes to leave us in the grip of the 'uncanny;' in a condition of irresoluble hesitation or aporia... In such a world, character itself is bound to undergo radical alteration. The 'self' multiplies; metamorphosis and transpeciation take effect. 'Persons' impersonate other 'persons,' become invisible ... Fiction may escape reality, create reality and destroy it."[22]

V. Intimacies

Intimacy is a key notion in understanding Cardiff's work. In 1992, following an impulse towards establishing strong relational bonds with her audience, Cardiff created *Intimacies* - a three-day event organized with three other artists. The group placed an advertisement in Calgary newspapers for individuals to come and talk with them about such questions as "When is close too close?"

---

[21] Robert Pepperel, Michael Punt, *The Postdigital Membrane: Imagination, Technology and Desire*, Intellect Books, Bristol and Portland, 2000, pp. 8-9.

[22] Christopher Nash, *The Unravelling of the Postmodern Mind,* Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2001, pp. 15-18.

inviting them to "explore the nature of the desire for and boundaries of intimacy." In a rented office building, at a set time every day, Cardiff met privately and face-to-face with people who had answered the ad. Meeting with strangers to talk about sex and intimacy had a potential erotic quality, but Cardiff felt that her presence was inhibiting and awkward. This fostered the idea of creating a fictional "Janet," a surrogate persona, whose voice could gently lure her audience deep into her artworks, without literally needing to be there. Cardiff's Walks seduce the listener-walker by connecting with her fictional persona. "When I'm so close, I can smell the warmth of your neck," she says in *An Inability to Make a Sound.* Listening becomes an erotic encounter. *Drogan's Nightmare* starts by setting up just such a connection near a window in the museum: "I'm standing with you facing the window. Place your fingers on the glass, it seems cool to me. I want you to walk with me, try to walk with the sound of my footsteps so we can stay together."

Traditionally, art is enjoyed publicly rather than privately. Some Post feminist strategies of the 1970s and 1980s involved the attempt to bring intimacy into the public realm. Mary Kelly, for instance, developed a time based process and concept oeuvre on the relationship with her baby in *Post-partum Document* (1973-1979). Cardiff takes this process a step further. Not only does she bring intimacy into the public realm, she also explores how it might be possible to achieve the experience of private enjoyment in the public field. She preserves the one-to-one relationship characteristic of intimacy even in public. Addressing the audience as a single person and evacuating the public realm altogether, she substitutes it with a cluster of intertwined and interconnected private spaces of being.

In order to achieve this, a participant in Cardiff's work must surrender all intentionality and agency. Her art is therefore not only about empowering the viewer/listener in an active experience. It is just as much about disempowering the walker, who becomes a passive and "controlled" subject. This duality points to the underlying ambiguity of our technological society. On the one hand, we live in a universe where agency is increased. Homes will be ever more customized to fit each dwellers' tastes and desires as computer networks enter into daily architecture; genetic research carries us ever more towards the threshold of human cloning, controlling what and who we want to be or become, and "interactivity" has become a catch-word for a simulacral freedom to buy products and access services on the Web. But agency is also decreased through many means, such as manipulative marketing instruments, instant polling, and surveillance systems.

Whether the work is manipulatory of the audience and undermines the participatory potential of "new media," or whether instead it reveals deeper forms of freedom in a society that is over anxious about self-control, is open for discussion. Cardiff allows us the freedom to let go for the duration of the game, to be passive in an overly proactive society, and to trust another person. Certainly, Cardiff is aware of the erotic potential behind her authoritarian directives, and how these become essential to the seduction of her audience. The eroticism of giving yourself up to another's authority is intertwined with and predicated on the tension, panic and fear of going astray, of not being able to follow her directions.

Pleasure and pain are often joined. "The man is walking towards me," she says in *Drogan's Nightmare.* "I see his brown neck against a white shirt. Light hair on his arms. He's looking at me; now he looks away. I think about his skin against mine." In *The Missing Voice (Case Study B),* she describes how a character "grabs me from behind, his hand over my mouth. I bite his fingers and hit him in the ribs with my elbow."

VI. Identities

Particular to Cardiff's work, and to her collaborations with Bures Miller, is the way in which she blurs the boundaries between self and other, the I and the You of speech and communication. This blurring and morphing of identities occurs in the Walks, where Cardiff's voice sometimes addresses the participant as a separate person: "There's something I want to show you… Get up, go to the left," while at other moments, it is as if Cardiff and the participant have fused. At these times, characters talk into our ears and we find ourselves literally walking in "Janet's" shoes.

The constant merging and separating of self, losing one's individuality and finding it again, is at the root not only of the thematic interests and the techniques used by Cardiff, but reaches far more deeply to question and toy with the identity of the author as a fixed and identifiable entity. These artworks problematize authorship: while the audio and audio-video walks are "signed" by Cardiff alone, Bures Miller participates in the editing and articulation of these works. Other works are co-authored with Bures Miller, as often occurs with the indoor installations. Furthermore, Cardiff and Bures Miller also lend their own voices to the pieces, and those voices slip from being narrators to being interpretations of the fictional characters "Janet" and "George" - movie stars in their own works. Narcissistic disorders become creative wealth in Cardiff's work.

Questioning the boundaries of selfhood speaks of a general concern with the breakdown of modernist and Western structures of thought and metaphysics over the past three or four decades.[23] This attitude is typical of the ideas around selfhood in postmodern society. It is interesting to look at this question from the perspective of feminist film theory as well. While an early articulation of feminist production was marked by the effort to change the content of cinematic representation in order to focus on the representation of the real life of women, thus raising consciousness and partaking in political activism, a second period was instead marked by analyzing and disengaging the ideological codes embedded in cinematic representation as it had evolved throughout the century. This was achieved through avant-garde and formalist practice.[24] Cardiff's work evolves from this second period. Much of her early photocollage practice has a distinctly "avant-garde" look, and all her work is grounded on disengaging the codes of cinematic representation. Cardiff's position differs, however, from that of feminist filmmakers of the 1970s and 1980s when it comes to the question of "illusionism." It was argued in those decades that narrative illusionism was embedded in the aesthetic of realism, and that that, in turn, was compromised by Hollywood cinema and bourgeois ideology. Therefore, foregrounding formalist experimentation and avoiding narrative and visual pleasure, as well as avoiding emotion, was essential to practitioners such as Laura Mulvey. Cardiff, quite to the contrary, indulges in narrative illusionism, pleasure and the strategies of emotional response.

Cardiff's work is like a vaccination process: she injects a small quantity of the disease to cause the body to produce antibodies. Rather than reject the view of women as "hysterics," for instance, she indulges in stereotypical hysterical behaviour in the work. Rather than avoiding images of the socio-sexual victimization of women, she indulges in those fantasies. Typical of psychotic behaviour, "Janet"/you hear voices throughout the Walks without being able to discern the "real" ones from those echoing only in the mind. With the headset on, you are isolated in your own autistic world, in the insularity of thought typical of the Walkman generation.

The "subject" of Cardiff's work is the fictitious voice of the character "Janet," and at the same time,

---

[23] Exemplified by Jacques Derrida's radicalization of critiques of traditional philosophy by Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, whereby he saw Western metaphysics as based on the totalitarian principle of "logocentrism" - the repressive dominance of reason that structures a sense of centrality and a unitary voice.

[24] See Silvia Bovenschen, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?," *Aesthetik und Komunikation,* 25 September 1976; and Laura Mulvey, "Feminism, Film and the Avant-Garde," *Framework,* no. 10, Spring 1979.

the listener also becomes the "subject." By reversing the power structure dominating the woman's voice that is embedded in traditional authorship, as well as in the audience's gaze, Cardiff subverts that discourse. We are not listening to an opera singer in lament in *Playhouse,* we are not looking upon a desirable female object - she, with all her sensuality, is looking at us as we move, breathe and walk. She is listening to us, as we become one with her.[25]

Several authors,[26] especially in the early 1990s, have discussed the relationship between Cardiff's work and feminist thought and practice. Her refusal of narrative foreclosure is read as an act of resistance to authoritarian, traditionally male, discourse. Appropriating the "hysteric's"[27] behavior, traditionally associated with female folly, becomes an enriching and subversive form of thought. The "bad girl" aspect of the work - openly naming and voicing her sometimes violent desires - is part of this process. In *Drogan's Nightmare,* for example, "Janet" says, "I'm afraid of these images that go through my mind, destroying things. A car runs you over. A knife to my throat, falling down stairs, bite into your flesh, fist to your face, pushed against the wall, choke you with my tongue, drowning in puke ... "

VII. Addio

The primary characteristic of Cardiff's work is the way in which she merges film and reality, memory and perception, artificial and natural, virtual and bodily, self and other, into a continuum where these elements never act as opposites, neither thematically nor structurally. Her specific reasons for doing so are worth thinking about. In today's globalized and information based world, we live in a continuous disjuncture from the actual location and the events that surround us: while we are sitting on the grass in the mountains in summer, we read about a bomb exploding in a city; while we are drinking coffee in the city, we see images of floods in distant lands. We are constantly being made aware of events in which we are not participating. We worry about those that occur elsewhere, and we live them in a surrogate manner through the media. Newspapers, television and the Internet carry us off to "other" locations. Our bodies can be in one place while our minds are somewhere else. This makes us feel impotent, diminished in agency, unsatisfied, and at times, guilty. We are always in the wrong place. We disregard ourselves and are unappreciative of our surrounding reality.

At first glance, it would seem that Cardiff's layering of fiction onto perceptions might encourage a similar separation of self from place. Quite to the contrary, however, she uses her media to encourage experiences that counterbalance the dislocation fostered by our media. She does this by pursuing the audience's identification in her works through a double strategy. First of all, she grounds us in the location by heightening our sense of being in that *specific* place through adding sounds that could presumably be there. Secondly, she evokes "personaI" memories and narratives

---

[25] See Kim Sawchuk, "The Sensation of Sounds," in *Auricle Interchange, Installations by Janet Cardiff and Ken Gregory,* Muttart Art Gallery, Calgary, Alberta, 1997; and Catherine Clément, *Opera. The Undoing of Women,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988 (1st edition in French, 1979).

[26] Barbara Lounder, in "Janet Cardiff: la Chambre blanche," *Parachute,* Montreal, no. 71, July/August/September 1993, pp. 40-41, remarks that "It is worth remembering that what Freud disliked about the histories told by hysterics was that they were halting, riddled with gaps, obscure and imprecise; they defied his desire for narrative closure." Laurel Woodcock, "Speaking of Touch," in *Janet Cardiff: To Touch,* The Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta, 1994, pp. 5-19.

[27] The word "hysteria" is derived from the Greek word meaning “uterus."

that are vague or sketchy enough to be anyone's. The audience can partly create their own stories and project their own personal history onto the experience. Before the technology is even there, Cardiff imagines what to do with it. But rather than playing with new toys, rather than uncritically accepting that interactive software and technologies are liberating, Cardiff asks us to question the psychological and aesthetic meaning and implications of immersive environments and new media just as she celebrates the new possibilities for creative practice that these tools engender. Cardiff's art is ultimately ambivalent about new media and wary of the new, emerging "technosophy" of cyberspace. In the wake of an ideology of transcendence of the bodily into the virtual, and of memory into the digital archive, she reaffirms the body, nature, and the fallacy of memory.

Our Internet culture is an ethereal world of disembodied voices and decontextualized points of view. Cardiff's art grounds these voices and pursues experiences of "individuation." Like the Internet, however, her art is ambivalent. It is based on intimate communication, but the intimacy you experience in her Walks is a virtual one, just as being "face to face" is impossible in cyberspace. And, as on the Net, she expresses an impulse towards separation as much as towards "connectedness." As David Porter, in *Internet Culture,* puts it, "what continues most powerfully to draw people to the Internet is its power and novelty as a medium of person-to-person communication." And in this world of disembodied voices conversing with each other, the powers of imagination and the pull of fiction increase. "As participants adjust to the prevailing conditions of anonymity and to the potentially disconcerting experience of being reduced to a detached voice floating in an amorphous electronic void, they become adept as well at reconstituting the faceless words around them into bodies, histories, lives: an imaginative engagement by which they become fully vested co-producers of the virtual worlds that they inhabit."[28] The desire for virtual "embodiment" was common in the many MUDs (Multi-User Dimensions) that have developed from Dungeons-and-Dragon style gaming, and in current multi-user web-based games, where role-playing and the creation and morphing of fictional characters and surrogate personas is frequent. It is interesting to look at Cardiff's work from this perspective, in the light of this free identity-play (at times a form of self-therapy) on the Net: "The persona that appears in cyberspace is potentially more fluid than those we assume in other aspects of our lives, in part because we can consciously shape it. And that consciousness may allow us to engage with ourselves in what appear to be novel ways."[29]

Highly self-conscious role play and a mastery of text - typical of Cardiff's seductive and erotic scripts - is also typical of virtual sex, where it is necessary to maintain a precision of language at the moment when coherent verbal expression is customarily abandoned, in the sensual gap between utterance and experience.

The notion of a unique, free, self-determining and responsible individual, centered thanks to memory in his or her own personal biography and contained in one body, a notion dating from the Renaissance and consolidated during the Enlightenment, has long ago given way to a shifting, precarious, contingent sense of self. Celia Lury has studied this "self" in *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory, Identity* (1998), claiming that the emerging subject of Euro-American societies is characterized by "seeing photographically" and by an experimental attitude towards "editing" the self, or experimentally dis-and re-assembling it. "Euro-American societies are now contending with the possibilities that memories may exist independently of the individual and that the individual may be defined or authorized by more than one set of memories... memories substituted for one another, organs transplanted from one body to work alongside those of

---

[28] David Porter, *Internet Culture,* Routledge, New York and London, 1997, p. XII.

[29] Shawn P. Wilbur, "An Archeology of Cyberspaces. Virtuality, Community, Identity," ibid., p. 12.

another's... This is no longer a culture of synthesis, but one of prosthesis."[30] Cardiff's art can be read as an exercise in learning the resources needed to deal with this new condition of consciousness, as an exercise able to retine our abilities to disembody and re-embody at will, to experiment with individualism.

[30] Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory, Identity,* Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p. 16.

Conversations

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (CCB) - What can you tell me about *The Paradise Institute* that you and George exhibited at the Venice Biennale in summer 2001?

Janet Cardiff (JC) - George and I were both interested in making a theater larger than we did with *The Muriel Lake Incident.* Something that would envelop the viewer more. When you enter into the box-like structure of *The Paradise Institute,* you sit in what seems to be the balcony of a large old-fashioned cinema. The balcony seats are the normal size, but the space below is a hyper perspectival situation complete with a small screen, balconies, and miniature seats that get smaller as they recede from your viewpoint. We've always enjoyed the idea that when you are in a theater, you get a sense of being removed from reality. It takes you to a fantasyland where you don't have to worry about things. We originally thought of calling it "Fun House," and having a ride, like a "fun house" ride, only it's a cinema simulator instead of a flight simulator. I like the way George expressed the idea: we are building a model of a theater, and we are also building a model of a film.

CCB - So the viewer is able to feel that he or she is in a movie theatre environment. What is your process?

JC - The way George and I work for the filmic element is that we tend to start by writing scripts, and once we are happy with most of the scripts, then we start shooting. Once we start shooting, however, it is really an intuitive process. If a location or an actor's movements gives us ideas, we go with that. Even after we have finished shooting and started editing, it's still sketching. We say, "Oh, that scene is much more interesting put here...and that shot's not good." I think that we both work in a way that only once we see something can we respond to it.

CCB - I see. So the process is improvisational.

JC - Yes.

CCB - In this case, what was the original script about?

JC - One of the ideas we had was how we both enjoyed coming into a movie when it is halfway through. Late at night when you turn on the TV and there's a bad movie playing, you try to figure it out. It's sometimes much more interesting, especially with a lot of "made-for-TV" movies. We wanted to make a narrative that recalled many films that we'd seen but that doesn't tell you everything. We were also very interested, like *The Muriel Lake Incident,* with what's going on in the theater balcony, too.

CCB - What do you mean?

JC - People wear binaural headphones. You hear sounds of an audience around you in the theater, people who are walking in, eating popcorn.

CCB - I've read somewhere that your work is about "making it real by making it filmic." Could you comment on that? I think that you were saying that the artificial nature of the fictitious construction

you create is really done in order to create a situation of “real experience." Sort of the reverse of post modernist photography which was about how nothing could be authentic, how there could be no real experiences, and you could only copy things that are the models of models of models. In a way, you are using that artificial nature of our culture to find a way of producing something that can offer a sense of an authentic self.

JC - The way we use audio makes you much more aware of your own body, and makes you much more aware of your place within the world, of your body as a "real" construction. What is reality and authenticity if not that? If you give someone hyper-reality, then they have more of a perspective on what's really real. You are hearing the sound behind you, and you know it's not real, but you want to turn around to look for it. It relates to our primordial defense mechanisms, like how hearing a scratch of a claw on a rock behind us triggers our action. We can play with these programmed responses in such a more complex way now because we have this extra layer of pop culture and virtuality that our ancestors didn't have. We know what movies are, we know that we are not a part of them, but we also know we want to be part of them. And that's OK. We know we can play, and go in and out of them all the time. And that's just a part of our primary language. But I think that this type of work is also escapism. You know that you are playing - it's almost like a virtual reality. You know that you are giving yourself in.

CCB - In a way, your work is the reverse of virtual reality. It's fiction coming into reality, not reality going into the fiction. It goes back and forth. I was talking to my husband the other day about emotion. And I said something about why so much art has not dealt directly with suggesting emotion throughout this century. And I said, "Oh, that's because of modernism, because of structuralism." And he said, "No, it's because of psychoanalysis." In a post psychoanalytic world, you become self conscious, and you think you can experience emotion only if there are lapses. The subconscious slipping through somehow. You think that you cannot intentionally cause that anymore because we are living in this psychoanalytical world. It's as if you, Janet, were trying to push through some sort of membrane of self-consciousness, to achieve emotions.

JC - I think I agree that we need lapses to forget about ourselves or our little voice that constantly is with us. I don't know if this is just a modern phenomenon ... you analyze your moves, you analyze what people are saying… That's why playing is so good, or swimming. It really triggers lapses where we forget about ourselves. I think that often, the work I've made allows you to forget yourself, but still feel alive. The walks make you think as if you were part of another person. And the world becomes filmic and you become part of a dreamlike situation. You don't have your own voice going "blah, blah, blah," or maybe you do. Some people say that they worry about getting lost. The lapses is what George and I are trying to do. I love how when you go into a theater, you forget about where you are, you just go with it. You forget about yourself, and your analysis. Some films just take you and let you go for 90 minutes. You escape from yourself and from your analysis.

CCB - Does this have anything to do with your biography? I read all these early articles about you coming from a very rural environment, and not a big city. Your whole experience was through TV; and projection, fascinations, information...

JC - I forgot about those articles.
(Laughs)

CCB - Do you think that there is something true to that? Coming to the big city. "Not like I imagined it. Not as great. So I just want to make it like that." Making it more interesting, exciting, sensual, desirable, pleasurable, and emotional.

JC - I really don't know. I do think that there is a very strong connection with the idea of projecting yourself into an imagined place. I think that it has to do with the idea of feeling like an outsider. In our culture, the teenage experience of feeling outside the group, an outsider to the social group, of feeling like a recluse, is important. I don't know how other people grew up, but I grew up feeling like an outsider, a farm kid, which was somehow much lower in status than being a town kid. All pop culture was basically far away. And it's telling you stories about the city, never stories about your real life. I grew up being an avid reader and reading gives you the ability to project yourself into all these different worlds. And then, when I first visited the big city, it was a sensual overload. I remember when I first went to university in a larger city, I had a hard time crossing the road, because there were just too many sounds, too many people. I think that sound consciousness is how I try to make you aware of the presence of all this space around you. When you are walking down the street, you don't normally hear all that's going on around you. But when you record it, you can accentuate one sound or another, like a car driving by, for example. You really feel it, you really hear it and you feel more alive because your senses are heightened. Perhaps it's more of an idea of trying to regain some sense of the loss of your youth, because when you are younger, you have this sense that everything around you is new, everything is alive, everything is intense. The world around you is a mystery; it's like you're seeing something for the first time. But now when I travel, and I travel so often to different cities, you just adjust right away - now I'm in New York, and now I'm in London, now I'm in wherever. It is hard to get that intensity of feeling that you do as a young person when you go to a new place.

CCB - That answers the question about making it real by making it filmic, doesn't it? What were some of the books you remember reading when you were little?

JC - *The Sword and the Stone.* It is kind of a King Arthur story. Books about little girls on the prairie. Historical fiction. Jewish novelists like Chaim Potock. Native writers, stories about Native Canadians, Native Americans. Like *Wounded Knee,* and things like that. When I was really young, it was fables and fairy tales.

CCB - What is your relationship with story telling? If you are so interested in stories and story telling, why did you move into visual arts and not into writing, creative writing or something?

JC - I think it's what impulses you have as a child. I liked to draw. I was very good at it. So I got validation through that.

CCB - And you are not a good storyteller?

JC - No, I am a terrible storyteller. One of the worst. I don't know about pacing. I don't have any talent in storytelling. I don't know how to tell a joke. My mind skips around too much. I don't know how to tell it in a logical, linear way that builds.

CCB - When did you decide that you were going to go off and study art, or be an artist?

JC - When she was young, my mother had done some paintings, and that meant that art was an acceptable thing for me to do. She was always very encouraging, so I just assumed the role of the artist in the family. Since I was eight years old, I never doubted that I would be an artist. And I was reading all these stories about artists living in Paris and things like that. It seemed like an exotic lifestyle.

CCB - So it was an exciting, sort of sexy thing to do?

JC - Sexy and interesting. And not normal, not farming. Not boring.

CCB - What do you remember about the farm?

JC - It's funny thinking about it now; I can just feel it. What a silent environment. Especially in the wintertime. You walk into the barn and it was just straw, and you hear the cows eating. It was an incredible soundscape. I know it's romantic, but I do think it has an influence.

CCB - The solitary aspect you describe is interesting. Your work always makes me think of the insularity of one's emotional sphere, like when you put on a Walkman on the subway. Why do you think you are interested in creating such a one-to-one, intimate relationship with the individual members of the audience?

JC - I think it partially stems from a certain shyness or fear of intimacy.

CCB - What?

JC - A fear of intimacy.

CCB - You have a fear of intimacy?

JC - Yeah. To a certain degree. Not extreme but there is something that draws me to wanting to have a safe intimacy with the viewer. Safe in that the audio creates a go between, like a surrogate relationship with the listener. Perhaps I've inherited this fear from my Scottish Presbyterian background. This question relates to a performance I did with a couple of other people in a residency, in 1991. We made a performance that for me was influenced by one of Linda Montano's projects at the New Museum where she talked to people in an interview situation. We made appointments and people came in and we talked about intimate subjects. People could talk to me about anything… sex, or insecurities. Then we replicated this project with a gallery in Calgary.
We advertised in the newspaper, and set up the office spaces downtown. We did interviews, about half an hour each. People could talk about whatever they wanted. It was actually a very scary incredible experience. A lot of men signed up to talk with me who told me that they had no one they could talk intimately with. It really gave me insight into the alienation that goes on in our culture.

CCB - One person at a time.

JC - Yeah. And it was a very weird experiment with intimacy. This was before, or at the same time as I did my first walk. I didn't have the skills for the conversations; it became too much like therapy. It was too much like counseling, something in which I have no training. I had men come and say

during the conversation that they had never talked intimately like that with anyone before… and they had only talked to me for twenty minutes! And that kind of scared me, because people have this total need for intimacy. With the walks, I didn't deliberately think "OK, well, I'm going to use a Walkman because it's more intimate." It was more of a by-product that resulted from these pieces. When I made my first walking piece, I could talk to someone very closely, yet I was still protected.

CCB - You don't want to be implicated directly, but rather as a kind of surrogate Janet Cardiff.

JC - Yes. The Walkman became a surrogate for the relationship.

CCB - But you wouldn't get anything out of this relationship, would you? It's the other person that...

JC - I do, in ways, just knowing they're following my voice and trusting me. It's like when you're meeting someone, you get over the first hurdle. Then you get to this level where you talk a little bit more intimately. You trust each other. It's something about trust. If I'm directing someone, and I say "Watch out for this car" or whatever, people start trusting me. They start trusting the voice. I think that's sort of, subconsciously, what I want to set up.

CCB - You mentioned sex in your discussions during the performance. Let's talk about the eroticism of your work. Where does that come from?

JC - I think it's part of the experience of intimacy and it may also be a reaction to art history and to our culture's obsession with male desire. Think of analyzing Jackson Pollock - ideas of virility, and genius related to virility. In my pieces, it's the woman's voice that bosses you around, the voice of authority. You can be directed left or right. But also, there's an edge to it, a sense of insecurity and seduction, an enticement. I am quite interested in sexuality that has this edge of danger. I think a lot of people are.

CCB - Changing the subject a little. One of the recurring elements in your work is the reference to the technology of recording, the reference to recording instruments and surveillance. The "dark side" of recording is a very common theme, like in *In Real Time* at The Carnegie Library, where you are rebooted at the end by a male character. Or in the *Villa Medici Walk,* where the female narrator is searching for a man, reaching into another dimension, and has only a tape recorder and batteries to guide her towards him.

JC - I think it's mainly conceptual. If you're listening to a tape recording and you hear a different tape recorder playing inside "your" recording, it puts you as the listener into a unique space. You can tell that it's more in the past than the main voice is, but then where does that position you as a listener? The first voice is more real somehow, closer in time and space to your reality. It changes your position to the piece, it places you more in the position of the character that you're caught in between. It has something to do with our culture's relationship to technology right now.
There are all these layers of reality that have been filtered through surveillance and recordings. We can have satellites out there in space that pick up everything. I remember when I was working on *The Missing Voice* in London and George was in Canada, and he said to me on the phone, "Oh, I can see the clouds over London right now," because he was watching a computer program that showed the satellite pictures above Europe. Mental transportation. In the next logical program he

will be able to zoom down into whatever surveillance camera he wants to access on the streets on London to actually see me. Our culture is fascinated by time and space, and how we are connected to these places, whether we want to be or not. Or maybe we want to delete space. The next step will be like in Star Trek, "Beam me up, Scotty!" It's a hyper-textual connection or relationship with the world. But it's also metaphorical, how technology brings us together, but removes us at the same time. The medium itself says so much - just like you said, the Walkman, the medium of the Walkman - it's intimate, but it's also a medium that removes you from your environment. It creates a sort of cyborg relationship with the person, so that they're in different worlds at once.

CCB - You keep referencing the equipment of recording. Sometimes there is a strange loop, which is typical of science fiction films, where there's a short circuit and the role of recorder and recorded shifts.

JC - A friend of mine in San Francisco found a picture of herself on the sidewalk that someone had taken and probably deliberately left for her to find. She never figured out why it was there. When people tell me these stories, little fragments, they become important icons for me. This idea of her seeing that and how I imagine the situation, seeing the picture and all of sudden thinking, "Oh, it's me," is very interesting. This shows me that a lot of the conceptual tricks I use are about placing the person out of themselves so that you establish a reality, and then all of a sudden pull the rug out from under it and be somewhere else. It's like in *In Real Time,* where you watch the scene on the video screen getting rewound but you know that you have no control over that aspect of reality. But for an instant, it makes you think that you are recording, that the image you see on the screen is live.

CCB - It’s the subject of the gaze becoming the object of the gaze...

JC - You can never see yourself. It's like what happened to me in a restaurant. This is the perfect example. I was in a café-style restaurant, where you take your tray, and you walk along. And at the end of the counter, they have this huge full-length mirror, and I stood looking at this woman who was staring right at me. I screamed and dropped my tray because it took me one second to realize that she was *me*, that it was a reflection. And for some reason, that scared me. But we never get to see that moment; we never get to see ourselves in film and video. Actually, that's a whole other conversation... I had a dialogue with Ralph Rugoff who wrote an article in the *Financial Times.* His whole idea was that my walks were a schizophrenic experience.

CCB - That's true to a certain extent. In the Carnegie piece, I certainly had that sensation of schizophrenia and multiple personality disorders. Like when you appear in the pre-recorded video, and you walk up and talk to the walker/audience. One of the effects that piece had on me was to provoke paranoia, and other forms of anxiety, because I never knew how much you had modified the real space around me, and how much was just there in the soundscape. That is something that is in all your walks. Here, though, with the new level of video coming into the walk, it seemed to cause even more anxiety and sense of disjuncture.

JC - A lot of people said that it made them feel schizophrenic. I am not sure if it was as much my intention as it is a product of what happens, sort of a serendipity. But I did start noticing that as soon as people started doing some test walks of the piece. I added something that said "Don't worry, you're in the right place," because I found that people were just getting so concerned and really upset.

CCB - Let's stay with the Carnegie piece for a moment. Why did you choose the library out of the whole building?

JC - I knew I wanted to do a video walk and the museum building itself did not interest me and I love libraries because of the layers of time and meaning they contain. I like how you can escape into other worlds in a library, how when you open a book, you're somewhere else.

CCB - You're somewhere else and yet still there...What about the relationship with film, science fiction films, like *The Matrix* and others? How do you feel about that association?

JC - I think it is quite deliberate. There are other films I was also thinking of, like Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire.*

CCB - How would you describe what is going on in the piece?

JC - I started to write it with the idea that you were kind of a cyborg. It becomes a science fiction experience because you are carrying around a camera and wearing a headset; it is almost like you are participating in a virtual reality game. I then realized that, with video showing images, you can be a little more abstract with sounds. So I thought that I'd be really playful with this piece. You don't have to rely only on memory of voices. The images will stick in peoples' minds, too. There is maybe an analogy with Sarah Sze's work, that same kind of playfulness, and you take one element and you move on to another element and to another element, and it joins up, but it is quite playful. That was my approach. It wasn't until I experienced the first walkthrough that I realized that the guy on the screen asking the questions wasn't really suggesting that much of a "Matrix," but more that he was a doctor, a psychologist. There are so many hospitals in Pittsburgh, and you can interpret the white lab coats that you see in the piece in ways that have something to do with a hospital. I had more images from the sci-fi realm, but I decided I didn't want that. What I really wanted to do in the piece was to have some sense of reality of me as a person, some truth, but then have these other stories, as if I'm pretending I'm in these stories. I'm pretending I'm in this role. When you go down the street, you visualize stories in your head all the time, you take on roles. So I'm taking on this role where I am somehow important to these experiments that are going on.

CCB - You explore ways of dealing with the complexity of subjectivity. Your work is about negotiating a self, learning to be able to be someone. Experimenting and not becoming schizophrenic, even though you are experiencing schizophrenic situations constantly... I am interested, however, in your process. I think it's very similar to William Kentridge's. He never knows what one of the animated films is about before it's finished, before he's far into the editing process. It's an empirical process, back and forth, back and forth.

JC - That makes me feel better. I never liked talking about what I am working on. I don't know why that is. My brain is so muddled.

CCB - Let's go back to the issue of recording. I noticed that everything you do is "recording" based - whether it be video, audio, photography, or prints. What do you think that means, all this “indexical” practice?

JC - Conceptually, I was doing the same thing in the eighties that I am now. Mixing, layering ideas, making narrative juxtapositions. Only I was doing it visually, Visually, though, you didn't really get it directly, somehow. There is something about audio that goes right into you directly. You can't stop it. Your brain doesn't cut it off. Your brain has more of a filtering process for visual formation, I think, than with the audio. I don't know why it is, but somehow sound just comes into your subconscious much faster and easier. As on the soundtracks, there is something interesting that happens when I relate my memories, something about time slippage. When I'm talking about my memories, they become immediate for the listener. For me, they'll always be past, but for the listener, they are part of the present. I'm interested in working with time in this way, flip-flopping between past and present, using memory and bringing it into the present.

CCB - Why did you start with prints? Why the printing department?

JC - Because the painting department was really boring. They were into Matisse. And the sculpture department was totally modernist. The only interesting place where you could have ideas was printmaking. And the way the professor taught was through taking things apart, separating things. If we were making a piece, we would take apart the gesture. I was reproducing gesture. You can use gesture as object by re-photographing it and replaying it. It interests me that through photography and printmaking, you can manipulate things in that kind of way and change the time, the time of your gesture, and that relates to the time of the photograph and all these different elements. I guess that back then, I was just as interested in time manipulation as I am now.

CCB - How did digital editing change your work?

JC - In terms of technology, if I didn't have audio editing computer software, I wouldn't be doing my walking pieces. It allows me to look at the audio track, to move things around in fractions of an inch, in a visual way. It's all visual information on the computer. You can take a chunk of this, you can take a chunk of that, and then you can shift them around, you can see right in front of you on the computer how much they are moving back and forth. On a tape, it is recorded on the physical part of that tape, and if you lay that track and you get it a second late, then you have to relay it. It's all frustratingly invisible. Whereas now, you can program it so that it's louder at this point, or softer at this point. You don't have to plan everything ahead of time.

CCB - That's kind of like DJ-ing.

JC - Similar. You can actually write visually. You can look at sound waves on the computer screen.

CCB - You are more interested in the diachronic than in the synchronic. That's typical of sound, music, and narrative. What does it mean to bring in memories?

JC - I think that it's about creating visual images. When I first started working with audio, one of the things that attracted me was that it works so well at representing how we think, how our minds function. Our minds are constantly flipping back and forth, in and out of reality. There is a great short story by Virginia Woolf called "A. Sketch from the Past," where this woman is walking along, but she actually isn't there. She's thinking about children on the beach, or something like that. *[“The strength of the impressions (memories) make me digress. These moments - in the nursery, on the road to the beach - can still be more real than the present moment. This I have just tested. For I got*

up and crossed the garden. Percy was digging the asparagus bed; Louie was shaking a mat in front of the bedroom door. But I was seeing them through the sight I saw here - the nursery and the road to the beach."] Audio can do that - it can have that layering effect of bringing you elsewhere. In *The Missing Voice (Case Study B),* the sound of a bomb exploding could be from a war, it could be the Brick Lane bombing or an IRA reference. We are always inventing different scenarios as we walk along. You hear something and it triggers something else. That's really what I'm trying to represent. It's an escapism that brings you closer to the physical but at the same time puts you in two different worlds.

CCB - I think it makes you present, also, to yourself. What about the relationship to film - your work is also about the memory of film, and filmic genres. What does it mean to be referring to a situation that film arouses in the audience? Why do you think it's fun, or interesting, or engaging, to be cinematic?

JC - Perhaps it has something to do with the process of playing, role-playing and game playing. When you are a kid, you play this game where you have your eyes covered and you are led around by someone else, who says "turn right here" and "turn left here." I think when viewers experience a walk, that's what it's like. And role-playing leads you to film.

CCB - Did your relationship with George influence your coming out of prints and into installations?

JC - I met George in 1981. When we moved to Toronto in the mid-1980', he went to an art school where he was in a program called "Photo-Electric Art." They did a lot of audio and computer work. That was the first time I had access to audio equipment, and that's when I started adding audio to my print installations. It was because the technology was available. I see technology and it opens up new ideas for me. I credit a friend of mine, Bruce Evans, with my move into binaural audio. He would sit on the bus and record binaural audio with a hidden tape order and fake headphones. I recognized the technology and I did audio walks with it. I'm just taking a technology that is there, and it gives me ideas. Sometimes, though, I'll say to George, "How do you make this move? It would be great, you know, if this could move," and he'd figure out the technology for me. We collaborate in that way too. Also, he did a piece called "Conversation/Interrogation" that when I look back at now is really a precursor to the walks in many ways. I'm not interested in media for media's sake. I'm not interested in experimental electronic music or abstract sound art. I'm interested in taking the technology, seeing what it can do: using it and manipulating it for conceptual reasons.

CCB - Technology is also about modifying consciousness. It changes our ways of thinking. What role do you see technology playing in our daily lives? Are we going to have chips embedded into our palms, so we're on e-mail all day long?

JC - First, we're going to have glasses and other devices that we wear and that are "smart" and will connect us to the web and still allow us to be in the real world. Definitely. Personal digital communication devices are getting so adaptable and extensive. A great book to read is *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson. It is based on the idea of the Tower of Babel, but it also refers to Jorge Luis Borges' Library of Babel. It compares that to the Internet. It's about a virus that could be passed on visually, by just looking at something. Then there are all these cyborg people, constantly wired to

the Internet, so you have all this wiring and you're connected to satellite systems, and you're watching yourself move through space. Similar to the systems they have for cars now, so you can find out where you are, but he was adapting these systems to people.

CCB - Much of your source material is in science fiction novels. What do you read? What are your sources?

JC - I am much more stimulated by literature that I am by art. I like art, but it doesn't intellectually stimulate me.

CCB - It doesn't get you thinking, trigger your imagination.

JC - No.

CCB - By literature, do you mean fiction or essays or philosophy?

JC - Mostly fiction. Sometimes I read theory. I would get my students to read cyber-punk novelists or Borges. I love his way of thinking about time and space and this labyrinth of stories.

CCB - What about Henri Bergson, texts on memory, and things like that?

JC - One of my favorite books on memory is Mary Warnock's *The Art of Memory* and Gaston Bachelard 's *The Poetics of Space.* That's about intimacy, also, and seeing space as laden with memory and desire. I think a lot of the walks are in some ways about space impregnated with memory and desire, expectation.

CCB - What was George reading? What was he interested in?

JC - He would read technical or scientific texts. He can't stand theory, although he has much more of a mind for it than I do. He was reading lots of different stuff like Chandler, Hammett, Phillip K Dick. He's much more pragmatic and I'm more interested in the conceptual side of things.

CCB - How does the collaboration work when you don't co-sign a work? It seems that the more sculptural pieces are collaborations. *La Tour, The Empty Room* and *Dark Pool* are co-signed, whereas most of the walks are not.

JC - *Dark Pool* is the perfect kind of collaboration. It mixes his sense of that strange library aesthetic with technology - kind of cyberpunk but engaged with old technology - with my interest in bringing the labyrinth of stories into it. The two aesthetics merge into one, big story. The walks are also really collaborations, although they come under my name. I write the scripts, and he's the first person who reads them. He gives feedback and I rewrite them. He's my editor. When I'm recording, sometimes I'll do a rough edit, and he'll take over for the final edit. He'll suggest to me where I need something or where some element doesn't fit. I couldn't make a walk without him. His role is the producer's position; he doesn't invent the work, but he has the ability to look at it and turn it around and see things that I don't. For the video walks, he does most of the shooting.

CCB - I really don't understand how the scripts work. When you said that things only come

together in the end...

JC - No. There has to be an original script to get started. It's the same with the walks; it's a sequence of scenes - and it has the conversation and everything. But then when we're recording it and filming it, we'll vary the script quite a bit. These scenes do have a theme - I just don't want to tell anybody about it too early on, because it might change. It usually changes so much. I find that when you start, things will give you ideas all the time that will lead on to another story. It's a very organic process.

CCB - Take the *Villa Medici Walk.* You had an original script that had the story of a woman who finds a recording of her husband, or her lover, and she tries to follow him into another dimension of time by doing various exercises.

JC - But I didn't know that was what it was about when I was starting.

CCB - Oh, you didn't know that?

JC - I came up with the idea because of a tape that I actually found in my suitcase. Then the narrative really changed a lot. There is a main text, and then there is a secondary text that layers and expands, to add to the flavor of the main text. Usually I know the main text, or the main scene. Then the secondary ones, that add flavor to it, change constantly, and they might change right up to pressing the CDs. You wouldn't believe how many scripts there were for the *Villa Medici Walk.*

CCB - An association between sexuality and violence recurs in your work. Let's talk about the way in which your work reverses power relations. That was something you mentioned.

JC - Yes, power relations with the medium of the Walkman also interest me. Some people refuse to do the walks because they don't like to listen to instructions. There is something about letting yourself go: it can be a pleasurable experience to give your control up to someone else. We always have control over everything, we're always making the decisions in our life. I think that's part of why people watch television. You let go of control. With the walks, I take people's decisions, I lead them around. I think it's connected to the same kind of impulse that exists in S&M - sexuality that is about sadomasochism - not necessarily that extreme, but with the same impulse of wanting to have someone else in control.

CCB - The main concept here is this slippage between the recording and recorded, the past and the present and the confusion of what is memory and what is our present.

JC - I think that that is fundamental to the way I think about the world. Sometimes, I just don't feel like I'm in reality. I feel like I'm remembering. I think everyone has a sense of that. You just can't scrape away the layers to get to the real thing. It is the Matrix idea, we keep thinking that there is something else there, that there is something we're missing…

1999-2001
(interview edited by Bethany Pappalardo)