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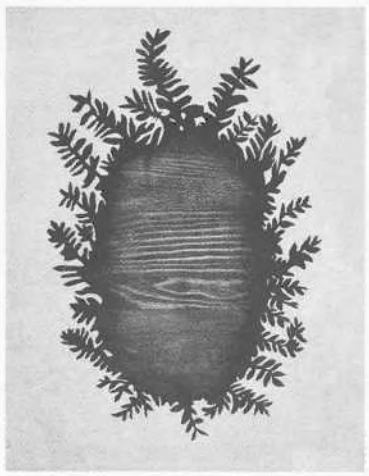


COUVERTURE/COVER
Sylvie Bouchard,
Les Bras de Daphnée (détail), 1991,
huile et cire sur bois,
78 x 56 cm;
photo : Louis Lussier.

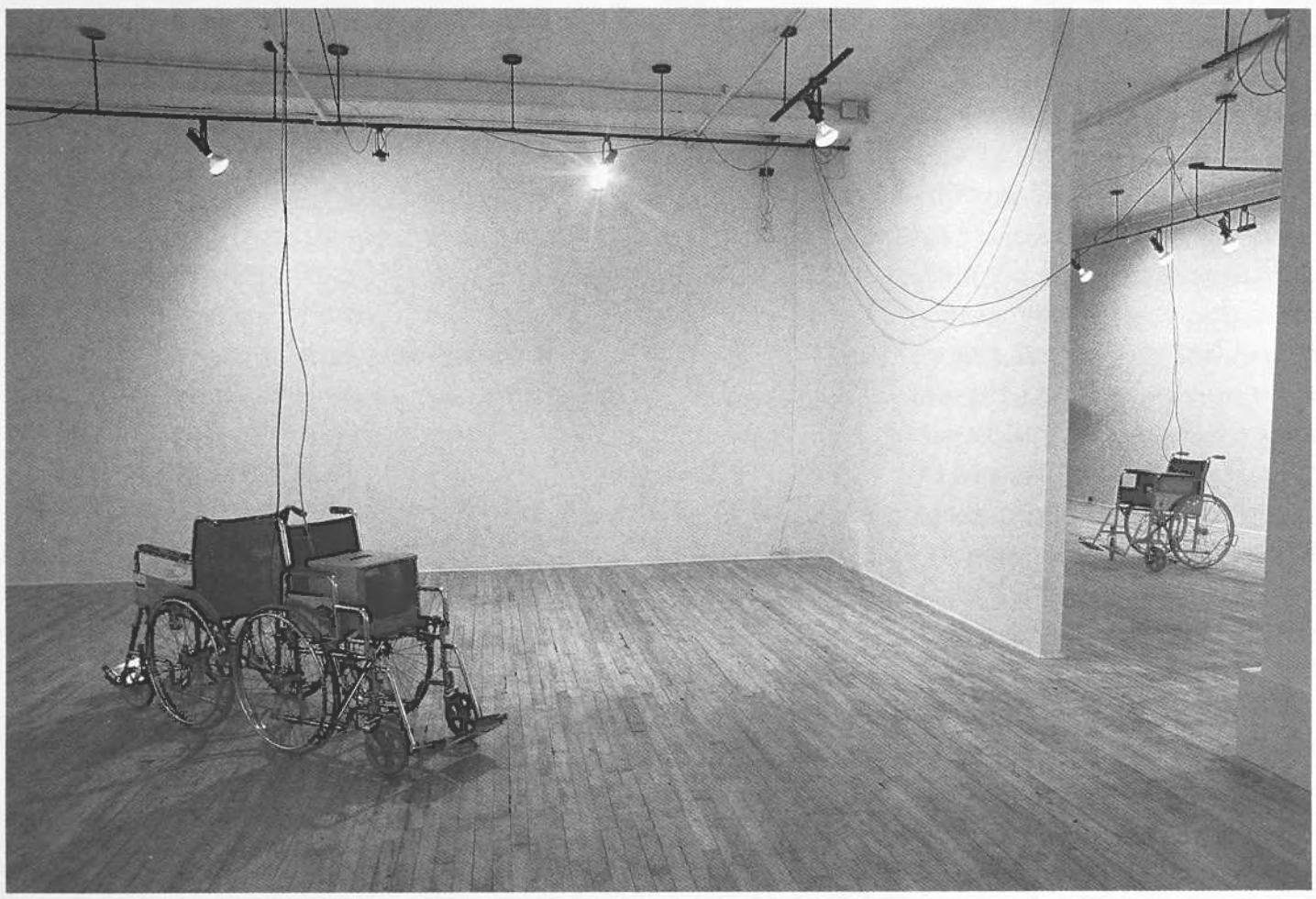
conscious act of engagement defying the viewer to participate through subjective interpolation. What if that synthetic kneecap, that artificial ovary, or the substitute valve resided within us? Can we remain detached from knowledge once aware that the object of speculation is a functional part of ourselves?

Descartes' position is so extreme that it allows him only certainty of himself while he is thinking and negates the knowledge of anyone else's existence. There is no concept of past or future in Descartes' ontology: he has no certainty that anything has existed or will exist in the future. Simms' ambivalent relationships of figure/ground, technology/nature, mind/body similarly leave us with the present as an open question. Her artist's statement tells us that her intent is to "propose a cohabitation of opposites." Is this an apocalyptic vision of a world in crisis or an endlessly replicating image of a technological future without borders?

– SUSAN DOUGLAS

DENISE HAWRYSIO

Galerie Articule, Montréal, February 15 – March 15



DENISE HAWRYSIO, MUSICAL CHAIRS (INSTALLATION VIEW), 1992; PHOTO: CENTRE DE DOCUMENTATION YVAN BOULERICE.

Denise Hawrysio's video installation, *Musical Chairs*, subtly investigates the surveillance mechanisms that pervade North America. With a few simple elements – wheelchairs, video monitors, and surveillance cameras – the artist renders the gallery a panoptic space. Territories in any panoptic system must be demarcated. The careful positioning of cameras reconfigures the interior of the gallery; entering bodies are monitored so that discrete analyses can be made of their movements. The video technology does not just constatively record the movements of spectators, but performatively influences where they *will* move.

Paradoxically, in order to be effective and totalizing, Hawrysio fragments the gallery into controllable units open to measurement and observation. Because of Articule's division into two rooms, it is a perfect vehicle to explore visibility, invisibility, and the paranoia of what might be behind the next corner. While both rooms are visible from the doorway, their separation ensures that you are not always in full view of the entire space from all positions.

In the first room, two wheelchairs are situated back to back in the middle of the floor. A video monitor sits on the first chair, while the second is empty. Immediately, the monitor draws the viewer into its line of vision, transmitting the information relayed by four cameras placed in select corners of the gallery. The screen orders the images into a temporal narrative sequence: you see yourself watching the monitor; you see the wheelchair and monitor in the next room; you see the empty wheelchair in the room you occupy; and again you see the wheelchair and monitor in the adjacent room from another angle.

In the second room, the video terminal simultaneously displays these same images in a quadrant, bringing our attention to the rationalized demarcation of space rather than time. This spatial mapping underscores the mediation of technology in our visual perception, for the gestures of those captured in the image-space have been made slower by a fraction of a second. It reminds us that the eye of the camera has an effect on what we see: for instance, its fish-eye lens sacrifices clarity in order to cover a wider field of territory.

Whether you are looking at the monitor, or are unable to see it, you are conscious that you are always on camera: it contains you. However, the cameras and monitors invite you to reposition yourself and therefore contemplate how you are positioned as a spectator in the gallery. Because one of the cameras is placed behind you, you see yourself watching yourself in a monitor that contains an image of yourself watching, and so on, virtually dissolving the spectator in a moment of infinite regression. In the first room the emptiness of the chairs tempts you into entering a different relationship to panoptic power: if you sit in the available chair, you are unable to see the monitor, although you remain part of the spectacle. In the second room, the change of speed entices one to perform in front of the camera.

While the connection of cameras and video terminals to security systems seems obvious, the wheelchair is a more perplexing text that unravels in several directions. According to the artist, in retrospect the wheelchairs reminded her of Andy Warhol's electric chair silkscreens. While the chair occupies this intertextual artistic lineage, it also generates multiple significations to contemporary social life. Together, the terminals and the chairs are a sign of the presence and absence of the human subject in cyborg worlds: the monitor can be interpreted as a head carried along by the wheelchair-body. The wheelchairs link the installation to medical procedures which may amputate the body's limbs. The terminals and cameras are akin to scientific visual technologies which probe and penetrate the body. In this respect, we recall that these "benign" applications are spin-offs from the radar systems used by the military. While the monitors suggest radar screens, the wheelchairs refer to the human casualties resulting from this function. Finally, the wheelchairs unite the seeming contradiction of containment and mobility.

Hawrysio's creation of a panoptic system extends Foucault's description of the panopticon in *Surveiller et punir*, misleadingly translated into English as *Discipline and*

Punish. In Foucault's account of the nineteenth century prison, power was organized centrally. The guard sat in a central tower observing the prisoners along a wall. The guard remained unseen and protected, while those incarcerated were visible and therefore vulnerable. This theory of power turns on a simple and essentially stable dialectic of visibility and invisibility.

In the essay, "The Eye of the Power," Foucault suggested that modern power may have some of the features of the panopticon, but warned that we should not take panopticism as an absolute, ahistorical model or assume that a transcendent position is available to us. In the majority of contemporary systems of panoptic surveillance, the seer and the seen occupy rotating positions along its circuits. This does not mean that we occupy equal spots relative to power – it does imply that we must learn to map our shifting positions both spatially and temporally.

The security guard, the perfectly replaceable late capitalist employee, is emblematic of these shifting positions. While working for those who obviously have the resources and the property that need securing, it is a job that requires little skill. Twentieth century guards do not sit in central towers separate from the space of observation. They sit alone, in front of a monitor, pinned behind a desk. The guard is immanent to the system. The impenetrability of these spaces is a fragile illusion, for the guard remains vulnerable to any activity outside of the eye of the camera. While the wide-angle lens augments the field of vision, in most surveillance systems visibility depends upon a fixed camera. Intruders must enter into its space; it does not follow them, they must encounter it. For this reason, companies locate their cameras along several strategic axes, such as stairwells and elevators, which one must pass through in order to move through the system. Moreover, many security systems monitor not just intruders from the outside, but employees themselves.

The function of these systems and our relationship to them is often ambiguous: do they protect, monitor, provide safety, or spy on us? It depends on the context. While those who are already in a position of power can afford this monitoring most easily, in another instance, the presence of a video camera may offer protection from an unwarranted attack in a darkened corridor. The initially puzzling name of Hawrysio's installation, *Musical Chairs*, signals this historical transformation of mechanisms of social containment and their contextually situated nature.

While the installation's reading of surveillance is sophisticated, it does suggest further explorations – for example, the cameras could record the exchanges and transactions of movements within the gallery. In *Musical Chairs*, the camera functions as a deterrent. The act of observation has no permanence; viewers are surveyed only in the present. Deterrence works more effectively if subjects believe they are being filmed and that this documentation can be used as legal evidence. Likewise, the process of collecting data to forecast what probable movements will be made by individuals or demographic groups indicates that power is not simply repressive but productive. Documentation helps to amass the information base used to build even more sophisticated systems and to guide future investments for those with the interest and the capital.

Thankfully, Hawrysio doesn't overload the gallery with visual clichés to represent the seamlessness of technological domination. In an understated manner, the piece traces the architecture of security to expose its solidity and its fissures. Yet, her avoidance of excess does have limitations. While I am impressed with the artist's sensitive reflection upon the circuitry of surveillance, I'm not sure whether æsthetically it compels the viewer to remain in the gallery long enough to decipher its complexity. On the one hand, the cameras and monitors are so familiar a feature of the contemporary landscape that one's first temptation is to avoid them or to leave the room; on the other hand, their placement implies a condition of cold seduction that invites the viewer to interact with the technology. Perhaps this conflict could be intensified. The work also makes visible the role surveillance mechanisms play in structuring the spectatorial conditions within galleries and museums, but the installation, again, provides too few clues to develop this connection. The elements feel strangely distant from the space, as if they've simply been deposited here, and here could be anywhere.

Perhaps this *is* the point: here is anywhere because these technologies, like the chairs, are extremely portable and easy to install. Despite its scope, *Musical Chairs* remains a fascinating depiction of our unstable, multiple positions in a network of surveillance, and a chilling reminder of the ubiquitous but banal familiarity of twentieth century power.

– KIM SAWCHUK

COLETTE WHITEN

The Power Plant, Toronto, January 17 – March 1

Colette Whiten's *New Needleworks* exhibition reformulates the traditional practice of women making needlework in the home into one in which women begin to make private acts that speak to public issues affecting the conditions of their lives. With this installation, Whiten frames her new subject – women surviving through acts of resistance. Curator Rick Rhodes astutely notes in his catalogue text how, for Whiten, needlework has been a personal activity for redressing patriarchy. He states that the needlework pieces of her earlier two exhibitions were sites of a detailed praxis which "engaged male power in political terms." Here the formal intricacy of the work operated as a countering force to patriarchically inscribed dominance signified by Whiten's appropriation of the faces of prominent men – world leaders taken from newspaper images. She turned her newsmaker "subjects" into types and specimens through the needlework process of re-presenting these images on a two-dimensional ground. She posited the fact of woman's *différence* with each gridded pixel of thread, thereby making the gap between news image and the proximate reality of the needlepoint image a site for questioning media representation as a strategy for perpetuating patriarchy.

Whiten's first needlework exhibition (1987) addressed viewers' attention to news media representation as a process of constructing signs set out to evoke prescribed receptions; her second showing (1989) probed the illusory dynamic between "figure" and "ground" which affected readings of each patriarchal sign. Rhodes observes that the steady steel ground which fixed these images "asserted the fickleness of power," creating an atmosphere of "ambivalent malevolence." By simply setting her needlework square against the hard steel, Whiten constructed a concrete paradigm for analysing the shifting grounds of power headed by those lone patriarchal figures who, in turn, become targets through public perception of their vulnerability.

Whiten's needleworks are agents for change and transformation. Not only do they inscribe her personal history, and women's history of handicraft, into a public art process, they provide her with a material means for challenging institutions of patriarchal dominance (even the "art world"). The material image of each needlework fixes a sign of patriarchal power for viewers to scrutinize. Simultaneously, Whiten deconstructs the medium of its political agency – the news media as a rhetoric of political discourse – with each reconstruction of the image into an abstract two-dimensional schema where no illusion of three-dimensional reality operates to mediate reception. By fixing each figure, and displacing the attendant temporal/spatial conditions for establishing viewing immediacy, these images are depleted of their urgency. Their power continuum is absent. With each of the earlier exhibits, she asked viewers to pay attention to their own activity of reception. Her deliberate