



A USER'S GUIDE TO DIRECT VISUAL ACTION

DENISE HAWRYSIO

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I had this idea to put marks

which art attempts to



A USER'S GUIDE TO DIRECT VISUAL ACTION:

Gary Michael Dault

ON CERTAIN RECENT PRINTS BY DENISE HAWRYCIO

Given the tepidity, the conventionality, with which printmaking tends (unfairly or not) to be identified, Denise Hawrycio's art practice – much of it devoted to or springing from the idea of printmaking – has always provided a forceful corrective to the technique-driven, craft-saturated tropes that have so richly accumulated around that medium over the past few centuries of art history.

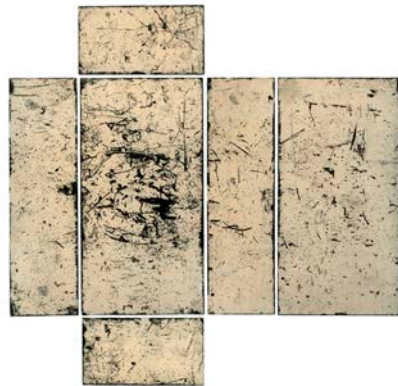
Printmaking, which, for the most part, has usually been seen as a technically intense means to an expressive end, is vigorously transformed, along Hawrycio's methodological trajectory, into a highly reflexive kind of aesthetic production, one in which it becomes more than usually assertive, even to the point of settling in close to the condition of utterance.

Arguably companionable works to Joseph Beuys' *Words Which Can Speak*, the suite of calendar drawings he undertook in 1975, Hawrycio's increasingly voluble, infra-explanatory *Printworks Which Can Speak* take their place as a convincing adjunct to Beuys's *Social Sculpture*. With objects such as those making up

across the wall, that remind the

her *Situational Prints (An Etching Plate Feels No Pain, 2009)*, and more recently *Protest Ready to Go*, Hawrysisio is essentially generating a species of Social Printmaking.

Beuys stands tall in Hawrysisio's aesthetic background but, further back, so does Marcel Duchamp (*With Hidden Noise, 1916, 50 cc of Paris Air, 1919*) and the denizens of the venerable century-long conceptual tradition he spawned. What a dutiful Duchamp-child is Robert Morris with his *Box With the Sound of its Own Making, 1961*! And how wittily has Hawrysisio alluded to Morris's articulate *Box* – and folded herself into the long idea-art tradition – with her ambitious print construction from 2009, *Brick with the Marks of its own Making and Unmaking!*



In the history of conceptualism (crystallized in John Baldessari's maddeningly acute after-school-detention lithograph from 1971, *I Will Not Make any More Boring Art*), art moves inexorably from passivity to assertion. It proclaims. It partakes, on occasion, of the confessional mode (how it got to be what it is). It offers an archive of traces, of the sounds of its own making – and the sight of it. Hawrysisio's art takes a vigorous place in that tradition as an art that is part of all that it has met – and has survived to tell the tale. It is an art that has 'become what it beheld' (the phrase, slightly modified here, is from anthropologist Edmund Carpenter). Her printed objects are not nouns, but verbs.

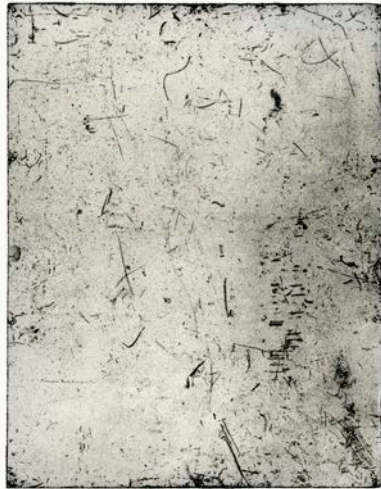
Artist-critic Ian Wallace has referred to Hawrysisio's printworks as 'event structures': in an essay he wrote to accompany an exhibition of her *Situational Prints* at the Simon Fraser University Gallery in 2005 (*Denise Hawrysisio and the Imprint of Engagement and Indifference*), Wallace noted that because 'her content seems to be largely about the removal of her personality from the work itself,' her prints – which she sends out into the world to be acted upon according to a methodological program she has devised for them – 'are more *event structures* than pictures since the image is generated more from a social situation filled with irony and alienation than as a pictorial concept per se.'

There is an exceedingly pure example of this deliberate consigning of a work's fate to the machinations of The Other in an early etching called *Odessa* (1980). Here, Hawrysisio wandered around this small Eastern Ontario town with an etching plate under her arm, asking people she came across to draw or write something on the plate. Some of them did. But of course it was the asking, the quest for content, the *will to content*, that constituted the work.

Since that time, Hawrysisio's printworks have become increasingly demonstrative of notions touching the shapes and enactments of social consciousness. Having come to see etching plates – or other mark-receiving surfaces – as metaphorically vital matrices for the impress of events and their innate payloads of information and revelation, Hawrysisio's prints have become something akin to texts and beyond that, anthropologically, to presences (I cannot rid my mind of the haunting title of Edward Dahlberg's *Can These Bones Live* (1941) and its semantic relevance to Hawrysisio's work).

Writing about her *Situational Prints* at Toronto's Open Studio in 2009, Dean Kenning remarks – discussing Hawrysisio's

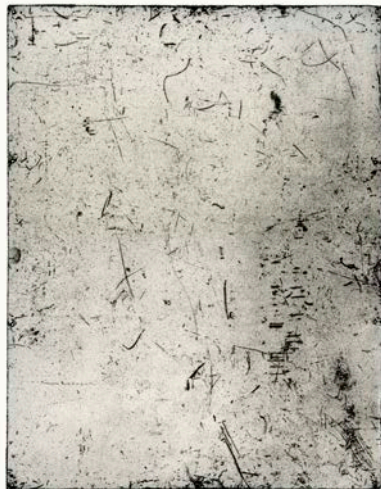
viewer of the physicality of



Etching plate used as shield as I walk through Peckham, London, 2009 (photograph)



Etching plate used as shield as I walk through Peckham, London, 2009 (photograph)



Etching plate used as shield in case I have to interview in a confrontation, London, 2008 (etching)



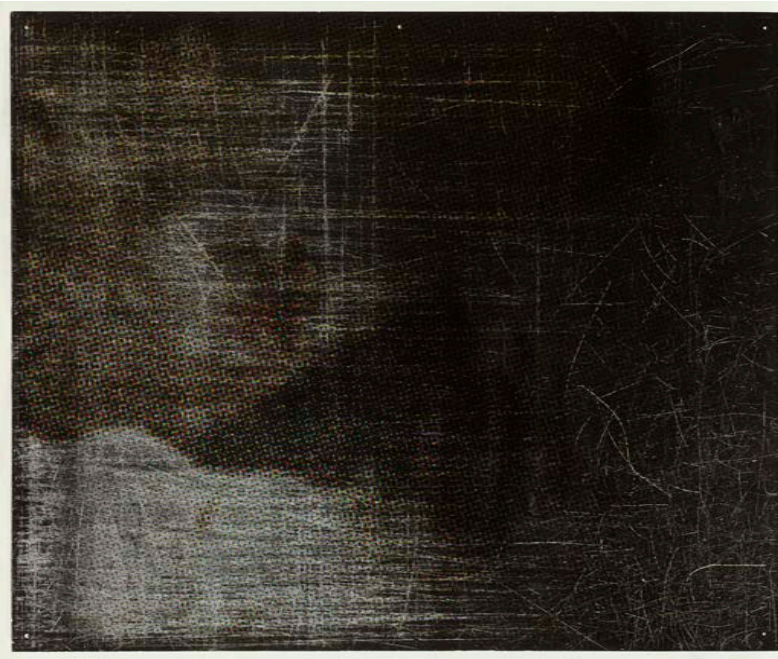
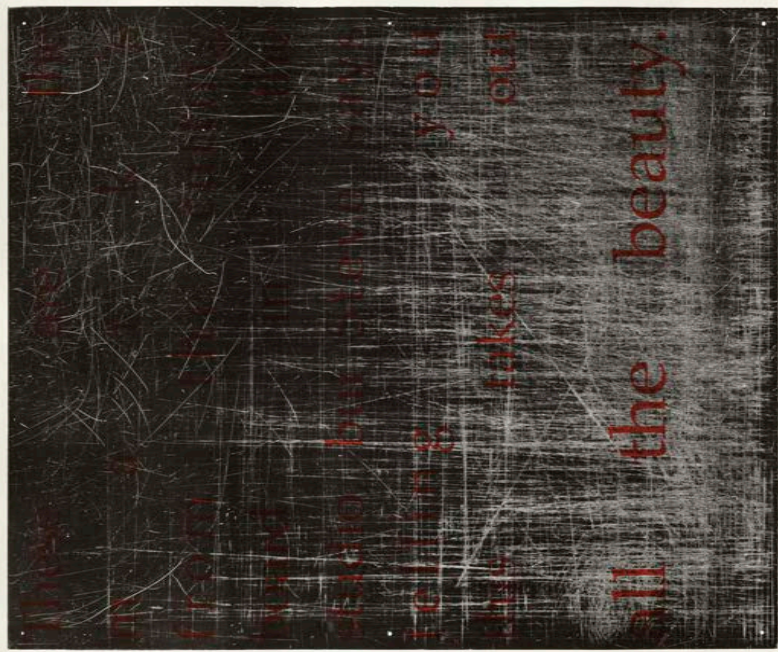
Etching plate used as shield in case I have to interview in a confrontation, London, 2008 (etching)

Etching Plate as Shield suite (2009) – ‘the etching plate appears to have become identified with the human individual and his/her vulnerability to the slings and arrows of everyday life.’ He goes on to identify the ‘metaphorical violence’ that tinctures her prints ‘through an analogy with the processes of etching, one that involves exposure and abrasion.’

Not all ‘exposure and abrasion’ is, of course, painful and ruminative. Sometimes it is exuberant, expansive and empowering. In the elaborate, socially galvanizing *Protest Ready to Go*, for example, Hawrycio – as she explained it in an email to me – asked the operator of a land excavator ‘to make marks on an etching plate with the bucket of his machine.’ The operator dutifully ‘drew’ on the plate, exclaiming ‘Hey, everyone’s an artist!’, a statement Hawrycio says she slightly altered back in her studio to the more manifesto-like ‘Everyone is an Artist’, a text then ‘printed digitally in combination with the *analog* intaglio plate.’ She then took the print and ‘scanned it, reduced it, digitally printed it and made it into placards.’ This work lies a very great distance indeed from the tact and delicacy inherent in the hothouse printmaking tradition. Here, by contrast, the print has become an adjunct to public action and to social difference.

Where is the locus of beauty in Hawrycio’s work? Despite her procedural rigour and her ad hoc bravery during the transformative moment when outer experience impinges on the forming artifact, she is still sometimes content to let mystery and wonder float freely, like perfume, through what she makes. As with her recent, exquisite, paired prints, *Taking Out and Putting In*. Here, an explanatory text in one print presumably ‘takes the beauty out’ of it by ‘revealing the source/process/signifier’, while the second print ‘puts the beauty in’ by leaving the work’s imagery free of annotation. What is more beautiful? To be schooled, to be privy to the work’s agenda? Or to be condemned – or released – to freedom?

looking, which art attempts to



AN ETCHING PLATE FEELS NO PAIN

Dean Kenning

Last April the British newspapers were lapping up a publicity photograph of Harriet Harman, deputy leader of the Labour Party, touring her socially deprived South London constituency of Peckham wearing a stab-proof jacket. Amidst a spate of teenage knifings in London, Harman's photo op alongside neighbourhood officers in their 'stab-vests', seemed both an unconscious admission of policy failure, and a misguided gimmick which placed the politician beyond the lives of the people she represented, who, after all, went about Peckham in broad daylight without the benefit of body armour. I was reminded of Harman's PR gaff when I saw Denise Hawrysis's series of works *Etching Plate Used as Shield*, respectively followed by the clause as I walk through Peckham; as I accidentally step into rival territory; and in case I have to intervene in a confrontation. Each title is printed once below an etching, and a second time below a juxtaposed, identically sized photograph of the artist in a mundane public setting: walking down a high street, or queuing at a newsagents counter; in each shot a dark rectangular plate partially covers her torso. The incongruity of Hawrysis's protective attire pulls together, and comically deflates, the fear-mongering media hysteria about crime, and the heroic, or socially conscious artist's imperative to be 'in the thick of it', located where the real action is. This 'reality' is vouched for through the medium of photography □ yes, Hawrysis was really there. But in the bare abstract marks of the juxtaposed etchings, we have a yet more viscerally direct relation to the real.

go beyond, but then I thought

In 'Notes on the Index', Rosalind Krauss described how photography had in fact 'increasingly become the operative model for abstraction' in the early 70s. In the terminology of Roland Barthes, photography is a 'message without a code', an image that has not undergone transformation according to a cultural convention, in the manner of traditional art or everyday signs. It is a nice surprise to find in the quaintly old-fashioned medium of etching, which we associate with the pictorial, a recognition of the 'mute presence of an uncoded event'. The etching has, of course, always been the index of whatever pressures — intentional or otherwise — have scratched away at the passively submitting plate's protective coating, allowing the acid to subsequently penetrate and corrode its surface. It accounts for the 'aesthetic' white noise ambience of accidental marks and 'underbiting' familiar from conventional figurative etchings. This registrative character is distilled to the point of tautology in Brick with the Marks of its Own Making and Unmaking, Hawrysis's witty homage to Robert Morris: a copper plate coated with an acid-resistant substance is cut and soldered together to form a brick-like object, before being dismantled, put into an acid bath, and then printed, thus revealing the scratches and abrasions suffered by the 'brick' — in fact all surface — which necessarily accompanied its construction and deconstruction.

While this piece is itself a literal recording of a blankly objective process, it is significant that the titles and descriptions of Hawrysis's work have begun to negate the literalism of earlier work, and take on a more metaphorical, indeed anthropomorphic quality. The etching plate appears to have become identified with the human individual, and his/her vulnerability to the slings and arrows of everyday life. Thus, in Plate as Shield, the incongruity between the inflationary rhetoric leading to an expectation of traumatic, interpersonal encounter, and the forensics of the etching itself which reveals nothing but evidence of the rough handling of the plate. The Pencil Stories also have moved from

descriptions of actually registered processes (Speed Bump, Mount Rundle), to ones which, at most, bear a quixotic relation to the resulting etching. In Bully, Hawrysis recounts how she took a plate to a local school and, paradoxically, 'asked a kid to bully it' (apparently he kicked it around the yard for an hour — water off a duck's back for an etching plate). The jerky marks of Taser may be evidence of some sort of frenzied activity, but they were not the result of an electrical current delivered by an RCMP officer. In Fingernail marks from the guy whose job I stole, and Latch marks from the door slamming in my face, this tendency to human identification reaches its apex.

A metaphorical violence runs throughout Hawrysis's prints through an analogy with the process of etching, one that involves exposure and abrasion. It was the mental after-effects of trauma that lead Freud to speculate, in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' about the origins of organic life and their instructive value for thinking about a defensive psychological anatomy: a 'vesicle' (all surface), a 'little fragment of living substance suspended in the middle of an external world charged with the most powerful energies — would be killed by stimulation if it were not provided with a protective shield against stimuli.' As anyone who lives in London knows, it's not a good idea to leave home without at least putting on your psychological body armour.

better of it.

Denise Hawrysiw was born in Toronto and lives in London, England since 1985. She received her BFA from Queen's University, Canada, and her MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute. She works in a variety of mediums and media including site-specific installation and has exhibited her work in Europe, the United States and Canada. She recently received fellowships for residencies at the Banff Centre for the Arts, the prestigious MacDowell Colony in the United States, the University of British Columbia and University of Alberta.

Gary Michael Dault is a writer, artist and critic. His work has been published widely in Canadian and international catalogues, magazines and newspapers, including The Globe & Mail, where his weekend art review column ran for over a decade. He lives in Napanee, Ontario.

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Denise Hawrysiw est née à Toronto et vit à Londres, au Royaume-Uni depuis 1985. Elle a complété un baccalauréat en beaux-arts à l'Université Queen en Ontario et une maîtrise au San Francisco Art Institute. Elle travaille avec différents médias et médiums, incluant les installations in situ, et a exposé son travail en Europe, aux États-Unis et au Canada. Elle a récemment reçu des bourses pour des résidences au Banff Centre for the Arts, au prestigieux MacDowell Colony, à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique et à l'Université de l'Alberta.

Gary Micheal Dault est écrivain, artiste et critique. Ses textes ont été publiés dans plusieurs catalogues, revues et journaux canadiens et internationaux, dont The Globe & Mail, où ses critiques d'arts hebdomadaires paraissent depuis plus d'une décennie. Il vit à Napanee en Ontario.

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