

Afterword

Being on Time was an interactive exhibition that set out to explore a set of relationships and boundaries: the high school and the city, art and education, age and adolescence, high and low technology. Varying in format from photocopy to performance to blackboard to screensaver, the works shared in a joint inquiry into the operation of time in school, charting in its course the high school experience of future time or no time or as McLuhan put it, 'doing time.' Being on Time harkens back to the pedagogical experiments of the sixties where the curriculum and architecture were reconfigured to represent a more open and connected space promoting communication, discovery, being. This was the space encouraged by McLuhan's work to Understand Media in the context of the new perceptual needs of the citizen born through the electric galaxy, the 'TV child'.

Public Access's exhibitions have in the past explored commercial spaces whose grammar is institutionalized, in order to protest and subvert but further to reimagine these sites in modes which celebrate public culture. Central to the conception of this project was a preoccupation with the rapid commercialization of core social practices—the effects of which are acutely evidenced in the case of public education. Education has, as McLuhan predicted, become increasingly consumer-oriented and instrumentalized. And, as Henry Giroux has noted “[c]onsiderations of ‘cost’ and ‘productivity’ have never pressed more closely upon academics than now, when such considerations are escorted by the philosophy that business is itself all about knowledge.”

Given the visible encroachment of these calculations in the practice of the Ontario curriculum, a large part of our task was to ‘make time’ for this project within the school. To allow the exhibition to live in the space necessitated the mediation of school hours, permits and rules. Further, it required the commitment of artists (on their own tight schedules) to meet with students in many cases doubly burdened with both the obligations of part-time employment and their curricular responsibilities. Making time for art in the school meant traversing fixed schedules and transforming the routine of school and everyday life.

All of the artists involved in the Being on Time exhibition re-deployed found spaces in the school and reconfigured these to set up situations in which the materiality of the pedagogical environment becomes an experience of structured time. James Carl worked with a group of students to document interstitial spaces found within the façades of houses in the school's vicinity, carefully revealing the sedimented history of place and the transformations of class and ethnicity that can be read across these

axes. Ho Tam's installation of black boards in the school's hallway in a manner reversed this exercise by inviting students to inscribe their own traces on the walls. Existing inscriptions of homophobic graffiti proved to be the starting point for John Greyson's installation which also collected footage of a life-drawing class taking place within the school. Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak recorded the dreams, fears and nightmares of students and housed these audio recordings in a row of anonymous lockers. Kelly Mark performed the same set of gestures outside the school on a precise daily schedule of imperceptible rituals, positioning her body as a fixed time marker in order to trace movement around her. Michael Snow designed a waiting room which asks visitors to wait for their number to appear, setting up a systematic structure of duration that, depending on the number drawn, could either whisk the visitor away or involve him or her in a test of endurance. Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan set up fantastical mirrors which distort the very moment of apprehension and self image. Finally, Mike MacDonald's butterfly quilt made up of specimens collected from around North America speaks to a sense of fragility and temporality, the relation between being and the specificity of place. Fundamentally each of the pieces, performances, installations, photographs, audio recordings, blackboards, involved setting up relationships of dialogue and experiment around the temporal, cultural and political economy of the high school as place in history, a psychic formation, a material ontology, an experience of duration or waiting, a place that is written, performed, imagined and drawn.

Central Technical School's Art Centre, one of the first institutions of its kind in Canada, was designed in 1967 to celebrate art and education at a time in Canada's history (the Canadian centenary) when the liberal agenda sought to foreground culture and art as central features of a new social charter. Situated in the heart of Toronto, the school has increasingly fallen into disarray due to financial difficulties brought on by conservative governments bent on privatizing education and making 'art' into financially viable spectacles. What was once the social and aesthetic architecture for future engineers, designers and artists in the city has been steadily crumbling in the face of Toronto's bid for status in the global economy. It is our hope that the exhibition both drew attention to the school's plight in the face of a new conservative curriculum and also succeeded in dislodging time from its schedules and deadlines, opening up questions around the embedded, subjective and creative nature of time as aesthetic and cognitive experience.

—Janine Marchessault and Sarah Robayo Sheridan