

pock-marked with old nail holes). The window is of opaque glass. We become intrigued by the fact that things are not what they seem: what looks like a series of elegant, finished works turns out to be something more like traces of process and encounter, as they qualify the material world, binding us to it and to our own death. Most of the materials are left-overs extracted from the system of production by the artist. Fong-Jean's work consists in nurturing their specificity. He does this in a variety of ways: while the wall units are hung at uniform height, the intervals between them are unequal; at unannounced moments during the month of the show, he intervenes to change the sequence in which they are hung; the way in which he plays with the notion of the frame — in the three plexi-glass pieces substituting sheets of prefabricated coloured material for the subjective expression of the artist in coloured pigment and in the fourth piece drawing our attention to the material nature of the various frames themselves while giving us in the window, not an image, not even the reflection of our own form, but the ghostly shimmer of our *movement* — has nothing to do with the making or taking of images and everything to do with the fragile reality of the life of all things, ourselves included.

Christopher Ira McKay's *Replicas* are structurally identical wood reproductions of airplane wing sections, their canvas surfaces curving outward from the walls on which they hang. We see these surfaces first, painted in bright acrylic, vertically bisecting panels, orange/grey and blue/grey. In each case, a narrow strip separates the two panels more or less decisively. This strip emphasizes the bulging curve of the surface in each case and the variations in it seem to correspond to different moments of our awareness of these "paintings" as three-dimensional objects in space — as indeed replicas of painted wing surfaces. Wing surfaces generally are

absolute status of subjectivity. McKay's painted surfaces neither symbolize nor proclaim: they simply draw us into an involvement with their underlying structure. The delicate and complex design of the wooden section has aesthetic qualities which are a by-product of function.

Antonia Lancaster's installation sculpture, *Hook and Eyes*, occupies two connecting rooms. We enter a furnished two-room apartment — but the "furniture" is mostly cast iron, cut, twisted and combined into sharp, uncomfortable forms. Not designed for our comfort, these objects aggressively surround and fascinate us. In the first small room is a table, its top roughly assembled out of uneven plates of metal; we are aware of four sharp metal rods projecting from it. On the wall suspended on hooks are "pillows" of cement ready to drop on our heads. A disused radiator, its cover removed, gapes like an industrial oven. Generally, in the way she treats her materials, leaving them rough, unfinished, brutally cut, Lancaster emphasizes their unfriendly dereliction. In the next room, the black metal

shape of a large easel, a "window" equipped with moveable wire shutters cut into it, seems to mock the pretensions of painting. A stool with a hole in the middle reminds one more of the rigours of toilet training than of rest and comfort. The title is an important part of the work: neatly painted in large black lettering, it stands out against the white wall; it functions as an assertion of the human "order and good government" against which the sculptural objects "revolt." Power structures are at stake here: the artist has unleashed the anger in the metal.

March 1991 Mars is the first show to be curated by Philip Fry in five years. In the catalogue essays he states his belief that the work proposed is vital, stimulating us to form "not ideas, but singular sentiments, a strong sense of what it is to exist as a whole being in direct working contact with things." The different processes of work visible here all have an effect that amounts to restoring us to our true selves, as beings immersed in time, acting on and acted upon by our environment.

— ELIZABETH RITCHIE

PAULETTE PHILLIPS

The Lorne Building, Toronto (presented by YYZ Artists' Outlet) February 7–9

During his recent concert tour, Neil Young offered a comment on the Gulf war as the opening gesture of his performance. While Young played a Hendrix version of the *Star Spangled Banner* from the wings, a stagehand dressed up as a sort of hick everyman placed an oversized forties microphone on centre stage and fixed to it a long yellow ribbon. Subtle, and probably not making the intended connections for some of the audience.

In *Under the Influence*, her recent performance work for a cast of three, Paulette Phillips claims a parallel topicality in her closing monologue. She approaches a microphone close to the audience

just spent an hour in an interpersonal battle zone staged by Phillips. In this instance, we, a sophisticated art audience, know that we know the connections. But they're so disturbing to speak aloud — do we have to be reminded?

Phillips' own minimal but sustaining presence on the set anchors the work in the domain of performance, or rather a hybrid of performance and theatre. In her author's voice, she delivers opening and closing monologues, bracketing the theatrical core of the work. She performs a drunken walk sequence with repeated falls near the beginning, and inter-

most of the duration of the performance. Seated in an arm beside a lamp and a potted she is far enough away from the centre of the action to not be visible in the mirrors that line the walls of the performing space. Meanwhile, two actors, a woman and a man, engage in a dialogue around and on to a centrally-placed object, a floor that at first appears to be a stage with curtained sides. It is solid though; it drops dramatically to the real floor where the woman sits on its edge.

This surface mounted on springs becomes a powerful metaphor. It's the *Raft Medusa* with its survivors clinging to the edges; a site for negotiation with sex, like an overwaterbed; an earthquake where usually reliable ground is not solid, not to be trusted; use of this unsteady stage, the actors tussling on it, hugging each other, standing on it to stabilize it, and eating at it like a visually constructed narrow balance between continuity and surprise, between the familiar and the unknown. It's the shifting ground of being stoned on some of being "under the influence."

The mirrors have an interesting effect as well. The actors see themselves, as well as frequent playing to the audience through the mirrors when they are away. The checking out of reality as an image is looking and assessing oneself through another person. This is a key for Phillips: measuring differences and similarities between people as well as "between what you feel and what you see." The performance built around these interrelationships, propelled forward by visual strategies of destabilization and mirroring, and a densely woven text played out by author and her two characters.

The characters here are searching for an author, Pirandello's great theatrical invention. Phillips' characters find their author, and acknowledge that they author themselves; author is a metaphor for the

them out of it precisely because she has constructed two of them, each compelled by a complex set of *idées fixes*.

The characterization is fraught with dualities that are caught up in language, several of which are philosophical mindbenders. The most obvious and ultimately fluid of these is gender difference. Among the more complex and entrenched is a discussion in the opening address to the audience in which free will is posited against

vein, like Wittgenstein's dictum that if a lion could speak we wouldn't hear it. Yet this inadequate language is all we have, and so it is presented here as the primary tool available to us for affecting the world and ourselves in it.

The performance subtly shifts linguistic contexts as the dialogue unfolds. In the discussions on will and its relation to destiny, choice, and the subconscious, we drift in the high, pure atmosphere of modernist philosophy, where will

tivity. On this issue, Phillips' bottom line is optimism. For all their miscommunication, her characters are always addressing each other, and she us.

When the language issues of *Under the Influence* ask us to exercise our post-structuralist mental muscles, to consider an attempt to reconcile meanings with words in their Derridean evasiveness of is and is-not, there and not-there, we see a clear drawing of gender lines. Not that both characters

don't have trouble with each voicing suspicion and a found helplessness. He is decisive and rather cavalier about shifting semiotic ground: "... I don't know what that word means. I'm an animal, you're animal, we are all animals." She, on the other hand, is plexed and possibly sad: "E time I open my mouth to say something I feel like I'm grasping the right word, the word that pin down... Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

There is no blame attached to this measure of difference, there is a comment on the real implications for both women men of feminist investigation into language. They map a different and therefore unfair relationship between thinking and acting. There's a lot at stake. The feminist project of language stems from the dysfunctionality for women of inherited colonized modes of language. It doesn't follow that a decolonial alternative is self-evident or recognizable. When Phillips "... what I feel is contained within the distance between us," is commenting on the human condition, to speak to another sometimes be heard.

— NELL TENI



PAULETTE PHILLIPS,
UNDER THE
INFLUENCE, 1991,
PERFORMANCE.

determinism in the form of an "influencing machine" that sometimes, as part of a passing crazy state, seems to control life. Later, the two characters spar around the issue of limits vs. possibilities in relation to mythologies about love, sex, and identity. They arrive at a kind of standoff, not so much an understanding as a manifestation of battle fatigue.

The dense and intense language of the lovers' dialogue, most of it conflictual, coupled with these convincingly ontological dualities, results in an almost tragic declaration on the inadequacy of language. Words seem to slide past each other, not connecting with the other's receptors, something like a malfunctioning

means freedom, the driving force of progress, and is quintessentially male (no matter how much post-modern theory tries to feminize Nietzsche). Here the characters' standoff, an acute alterity or mutual "othering," is located within a play of cross-gendering through historically rooted categories. It signals a crisis of language, a crisis of will. In fact, the woman claims will more than the man as a site of possibility, saying it is "like a muscle, you must flex it, and keep it in use and it gets stronger," while he prefers to speak of desire, the need to be loved, and the supremacy of pleasure. Ultimately, their standoff results from the difficulty of trying to transform the modernist legacy of solipsistic

Privileging the viewer as a site of reception, completion, or interpretation of the work of art has great currency in contemporary art criticism. The artwork is theorized as a collection of social codes to be activated and circulated by the viewer, who tends to remain, however, the disengaged cerebral eye of traditional discourse. *The Embodied Viewer* includes works by eleven artists from across Canada. Curated by Vera Lemecha, this exhibition assembles works that address viewers' identification with their own

Lemecha relates concerns of embodiment to anxieties induced by social contexts, and today are increasingly technical in their manifestation. Curatorial activity takes the form of an investigation rather than prescription; as such, the works vary in media, formalism, and theoretical base despite their heterogeneity, and their logic surfaces, which require the patient viewer.

Not surprisingly, reproduction and nurturing emerge as universal issues for several artists. Eliz

THE EMBODIED VIEWER

The Glenbow Museum, Calgary, February 9–May 26