

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO.
U.A. WALKER,
NEW YORK, 1978.
PHOTO N. ET B.,
50,8 X 61 CM;
PHOTO:
(HIROSHI SUGI-
MOTO) SONNABEND
GALLERY.
NEW YORK.

L'exposition du CIAC propose une division des œuvres en sept séries, selon les sujets spécifiques traités par l'artiste. Cependant, telle que montrée ici, la production de Sugimoto semble s'articuler autour de deux sensibilités distinctes. Qui plus est, cette bipartition s'impose d'emblée, dès le premier coup d'œil. D'une part, il y a les compositions à caractère abstrait et géométrique – un brin mystiques – qui, à l'instar des premières expériences phénoménologiques de la photo documentaire, notamment celles de Muybridge, documentent le temps en mouvement, et de l'autre, il y a les images figuratives – humaines et animalières –, témoins de la fascination trouble qu'exerce sur nous (Occidentaux) la notion du temps, qui documentent son arrêt et son historicité et, par extension, la logique de l'artifice de laquelle ils participent.

D'un côté, donc, le photographe fait l'expérience de la durée réelle d'un film pour en traduire, par surexposition, la blancheur et le néant, de même qu'il fait l'expérience atmosphérique de la nuit ou du jour pour y capter dans le détail les transformations temporelles, également à travers une longue période d'exposition. Ce procédé empirique crée un ensemble de photographies qui portent en elles la sensibilité de leur expérience, du temps de leur patiente réalisation.

Elle est tantôt vive et intense (les écrans cinématographiques) et tantôt profondément méditative (les horizons marins).

Et dans un esprit tout autre, Sugimoto documente et rapporte des faits observés. Avec les chaises cirées de Valentino, de Mae West ou d'un meurtrier condamné à mort représenté dans les instants précédant son électrocution, avec aussi les décors didactiques et « naïvement » réalistes de scènes préhistoriques, il n'est plus question de rendre invisible le visible ou son contraire, mais plutôt de réitérer la factice visibilité de ce qui n'est déjà plus. Il s'agit ici davantage d'un commentaire socioculturel ironique à souhait, qui, par la consacrée objectivité du dispositif photographique exacerbe le glissement délibéré du faux vers le vrai. Ajoutons que dans ce cas-ci, le choix d'une pellicule noir et blanc contribue à insuffler l'impression d'un document véridique. Il suffit d'imaginer à quoi pourrait ressembler les couleurs du visage fardé d'une Elizabeth Taylor en cire pour s'en convaincre...

Qu'il s'agisse des images du temps continu ou de celles du temps à jamais suspendu, ces photographies sont d'une remarquable qualité plastique, allant de l'impression, à la présentation (presque précieuse), avec les titres relevés en bosse sous chacune des œuvres, en passant par

la saturation des noirs et des blancs, la finesse des gris, et l'habileté avec laquelle l'artiste rend la sensation d'espace et de profondeur dans la série sur les salles de cinéma, sans parler, bien sûr, de sa judicieuse utilisation de la lumière. Soit, ces photos sont belles. Mais combien plus riches sont celles qui relatent l'expérience réelle du temps, celle du photographe lui-même. Elles happent notre regard par l'assurance et la netteté de leur composition minimaliste et elles retiennent notre attention par la sensibilité de leur esprit tout en nuances, où mille détails informent des images en apparence simples.

Devant les représentations des vedettes de cinéma et des assassins à peine moins célèbres du musée de cire de Madame Tussaud à Londres, on ne s'extasie point. Pas plus que devant les deux dioramas du Carnegie Museum of Natural History de Pittsburgh. Le propos est usé. Jeff Koons et ses semblables (bien malgré eux ai-je tendance à

croire) nous ont déjà inoculés d'un puissant vaccin contre notre capacité d'éprouver de l'étonnement ou de la désillusion face à l'insidieuse omniprésence du kitsch dans notre culture contemporaine. Pis encore, ils nous ont gavés du discours écho d'une soi-disant critique de l'absurdité de la culture de masse qui, pour « mieux » illustrer l'enjeu, faisait tout autant dans le kitsch que son sujet. Il fallait connaître le terme « distanciation critique » pour faire la différence entre le kitsch savant d'un bibelot grand format de Jeff Koons et le kitsch premier degré du bibelot-souvenir qui l'inspirait...

En revanche, on n'hésite pas à se réjouir devant les quelque trente photographies des cinémas intérieurs et extérieurs et des paysages qui font se toucher ciel et mer. Elles sont assurément singulières. Les images d'écrans portent en leur centre un rectangle lumineux – un espace vierge, un lieu de réflexion hors-temps – se découpant sur des fonds informés par leur environnement construit ou par la spécificité temporelle de leur architecture qui, en fait, n'en a pas, puisqu'il s'agit d'exemples des styles « néo » tous azimut (les salles art déco font exception) qui firent la marque des cinémas américains des années 1920 et 1930. Tandis que les vues de mers exhibent un esprit, si ce n'est une facture, pictural – les images basculent entre les paysages embrumés de Turner et les abstractions texturées de Rothko, et, dans le cas des plus sombres, elles rappellent même les bichromes de Molinari. Mais c'est toujours une photo qu'on regarde, avec son support en papier, son grain, ses noirs, ses blancs et ses gris, et avec la transparence de son objectif qui enregistre et documente ce qui sans cesse passe.

— JENNIFER COUËLLE

ROBERT SAUCIER

Galerie Optica, Montréal, March 23 – April 22

Tuned to the channel of their choice, viewers enter the gallery to check out a new show. Slotted for prime-time viewing, Robert Sau-

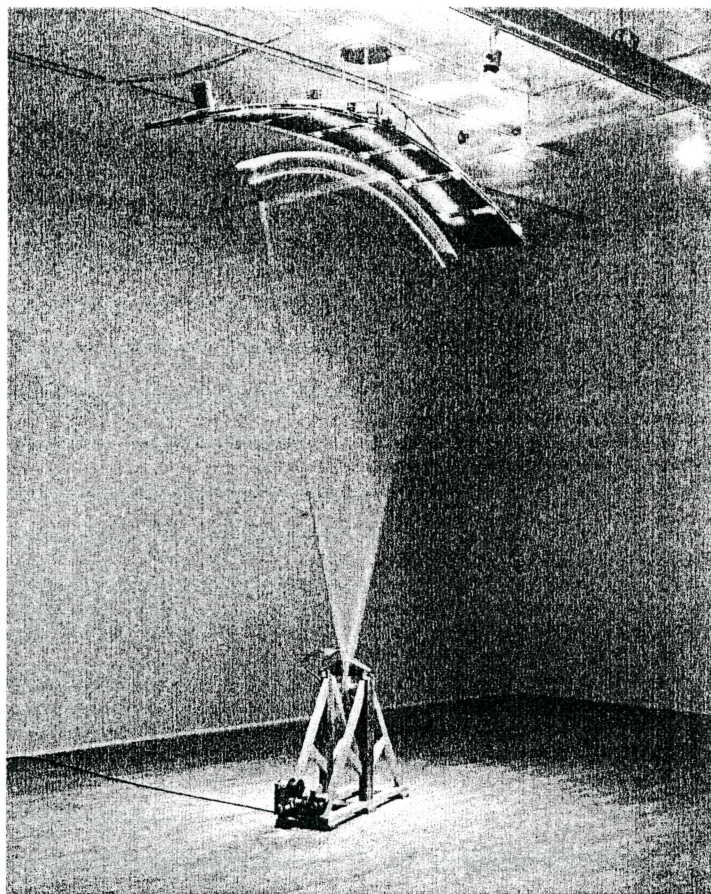
cier's erratic scanners expose the speed and coherency feature produced by mediated technology. Entering the space activates a mo-

tion sensor which in turn initiates the slow progress of the two pieces, as they work up to an optimum velocity of movement before becoming dormant again. Alluding to a change in the perception of time, both pieces reference dynamics of chronological registration. *Piézo* is a ten-foot metronome with a bulb attached. Overhead, an arc of seven solar panels rotates at a dilatory pace which means that when the pendulum swings, the bulb feeds the solar panel and produces a transient burst of noise. The solar panels are connected to cheap, pocket-size transistor radios, so as the arch of silicon slices reflects the swing of the light, the panels activate the radios. This meeting of function and form, however, only lasts for a short time. The panels are always moving, rupturing the sound as the mechanisms of movement work incongruously.

Surfing is the other piece of the show. Here the bulb is attached to a cord, which again slowly works up to a flowing circular motion, energizing the cells which stand twelve inches apart. The light loops through several solar eclipses before quickly deactivating its optimum circulation. Even at its peak, when the radios are activated sequentially to Radio-Canada, the narrative conducted by the twenty-four piece ensemble is fractured by the disruption of silence, which is caused by the gaps between the cells.

This fracture of narrative is a relatively new direction for Saucier. He has used solar panels in two previous pieces, which marked a shift in his object production. Whereas a concern with the narratives of technology persists, Saucier has altered the formula he utilized to critique the military's justification machine. The mechanized boats and trains which previously propelled overtly political notions of technology – i.e., Western ideology, as it is embodied in the notion of “developing nations,” which places its agenda ahead of the wishes of those it seeks to upgrade while defining a rational self-identity – have been replaced by conspicuously low-tech objects.

Appreciating the fact that by pursuing specific ideological orientations, this work may reflect



ROBERT SAUCIER, *PIÉZO*, 1994-95. INSTALLATION VIEW, PHOTOVOLTAIC CELLS, TRANSISTOR RADIOS, MOTORS, SPOTLIGHT, WOOD, METAL. PHOTO: RICHARD MAX TREMBLAY, COURTESY GALERIE OPTICA.

culture's sacrifice of contingency's possibilities, both pieces in the exhibition play upon the idea of the circuit. Their lack of direction is intended to derail technology's idea of progress. In a conversation with Saucier, he cited the Internet and the drive to access information as a cultural condition influencing his latest work. By connecting relatively low-tech transistors and their components with the movements of viewers' bodies, the stuttering motion of these pieces dissolves the coherent message of technology as a ubiquitous developer and presents the language of electronics as a deification of particular info-rhetorics.

His refusal to use the latest Internet browser in the software/hardware dualism replies a speculative “No” to the urging c'mon of the fully rammed joystick advertisement. For it is in and around these advertisements that technology calls us. Introducing advertisements of silence, these pieces work to divert our conditioned reception of the info (as) commercial. Saucier's technology of inter-

ruptions illuminates the gallery along the lines of Critical Art Ensemble's insight that “there can be no place for gaps that mark discrete units in the society of speed.” Thus the light which falls between the discrete spaces of the solar units illuminates rupture as an economic process, one which subsequently drives the cultural condition. It is no coincidence that the discourse of postmodernism is bound around the tenets of fragmentation, diversity, non-linearity and the unchaining of narrative. The uncoupling of binaries reflects a culture mediated by deflective interruption. Interruption is a strategy which allows just enough time to read the credit card numbers before the next shape of the future is handed out and plunges us into a demographically projected void. It is this cyclical motion of product foreplay that holds the mass public in a stuttering loop state of info-interruption.

Alvin Toffler recognized this twenty-five years ago when he cited that when “events occur at rates too fast for us to follow, we are re-

duced to sampling experience at best.” Toffler accurately predicted techno-culture's music and art production, while recognizing the induction of a schizophrenic network as the prime associative function in an era of “information overload.” Saucier's works disarrange Toffler's definition of schizophrenia as “ideas and words that ought to be linked in the subject's mind, which are not and vice-versa,” and indicate a dynamic shift in the perceptual and relational manner in which people think. Thus what “ought to be linked” is no longer a process whereby narratives make sense through the reception of ideas and information from official storytellers, e.g., the church. Rather, there is a cutting of links and the subsequent feeling of disorientation which creates a desire to appear to be moving in a forward direction. It is this ethos of progress that produces the hard sell and drive to own a main-frame that processes a maximum of information into a streamlined pattern. Understanding is less qualified by the time of reflection than it is by the speed of reception. The plugging of (non-)reflexive time is an essential tactic in the formatting of technology's material and informational addiction.

Realizing that serial motion would dimly reflect this electronic process, *Piézo* and *Surfing* play with the notions of technological consistency and the singular equation of efficiency through speed. In reference to Robert Rauschenberg's use of radios in the 1960s, Saucier's work is a volte-face. Whereas Rauschenberg's *Oracle* (1965) required covert technology, Saucier announces a revealing low-tech maxim which does not reflect the alienation of high-tech's framed surfaces. Both pieces were activated by bodily movement but the slowness of their motions made it ambiguous as to whether or not the audience's actions influenced the kinetics of the work.

Saucier's attitude towards technology can be seen in his contradictory attitude towards electricity. The solar panel's function to harness natural energy, yet here electricity is presented as an overflow. The artist views his position to be one that displeases both advocates and critics of modern

technology. His unwillingness to support either side runs concurrent with his use of technology as a means to question the mechanisms that privilege the circuited narratives of informational speed and coherency. Recalling Thomas Pynchon's cut-up style of writing, in which incongruous pieces of text relate multi-layered tales, Saucier proposes a relational quality in questioning the processes of understanding, where the emphasis is on how we move between and

make sense of technology. This suggests a sutural mode of storytelling, where the links of narrative are defined by the silence between the words. For Saucier, it is in these spaces where the editing and channeling of perception take place, and where he chooses to electrify the schizophrenic thread of random connection and weave patterns in the fabric of information.

— DX RAIDEN

KEVIN KELLY

Galerie Oboro, Montréal, March 25 – April 23

Here in the West, the tree has implanted itself in our bodies, rigidifying and stratifying even the sexes.

— Deleuze and Guattari,
A Thousand Plateaus (1980)

mythologies of knowledge. These mythologies can be traced in part to the educational project of natural history museums which simplify and “elucidate” scientific con-

surrounding popular knowledge. The drawings of early European anatomists Andreas Vesalius and Regnier De Graaf provide “raw material” for an exploration of the relationship our culture mythically maintains between “sex” and “nature.” In this familiar schema, the body and nature are seen as participating in a fundamental materiality which is both inert and obscure, a dark realm opened by the light of a scientific gaze.

“Dissecting One’s Nature, *une exposition d’histoire naturelle*” consists of three installations grouped together in the gallery, the parts existing as moments in the same project. Together, they present a complex, sometimes ironic array of naturo-historical views of the body, sexuality, and nature. Outside the door, a drawing by Vesalius transferred onto the wall displays a table laden with the tools of the anatomist, a grisly display of knives, saws and probes. This image suggests a brutality of methodology but the installations within frame their material aesthetically in a darkened space which feels genteel and theatrical.

Entering Kelly’s installation, the first element the viewer encounters is a triptych of paintings suspended in a circular configuration, entitled *Swamp Species. When Human Beings Turned into Plants*. In each of three curved images, an anatomical fragment (specifically, of human genitalia) grows or, more aptly, floats in a slimy minimal landscape. The conflation of the botanical and the anatomical here suggests a proliferation of (albeit already anthropomorphized) means of reproduction. There is a baroque, even kitsch aspect to this misplacement. Natural history exhibitors, bent on creating a “context” for artifacts in order to heighten their educational effect were (are!) great producers of inadvertently grotesque and absurd scenes. Kelly’s dioramas constitute a deliberate perversion. His “primordial landscape” acts as a site of original wholeness, marking a return to integrity, but also as a space of multiplicity and productive chaos, non-hierarchical, unformed, and self-organizing.

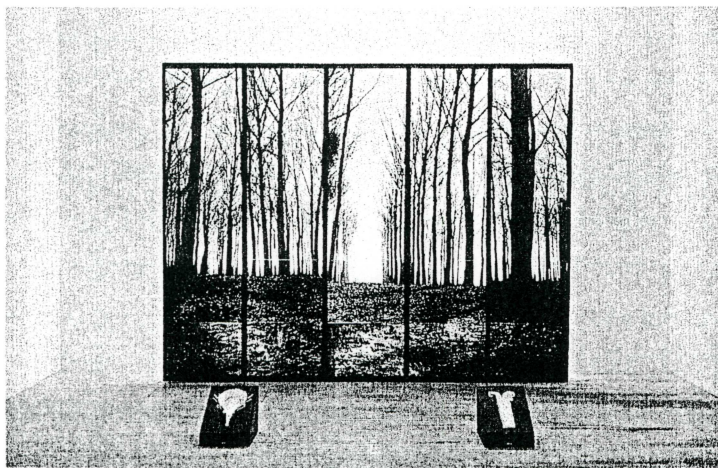
Proceeding from there, the viewer encounters *Terræ Orificium*, an anthropomorphized mound

of inert soil, the summit of which displays a succession of magnified human orifices on a buried video screen. This oracle, which stands about waist-high, emits a soundtrack of growling, organic rumbles. Reminiscent of materials-centered works of earlier decades, this piece seems to poke fun at the symbolism of “earth,” and of the expectation that “she” will speak to “us.” The orifices represented are those of the artist’s own body, a fact intended to subtly challenge our assumptions. Kelly’s attitude is ambiguous, though, and the irony of the earth-human relationship in this piece remains unresolved.

In another corner stands the third element, a large, framed and back-lit kodalith image of converging rows of trees, before which sit two two-sided light-boxes with tinted anatomical reproductions from De Graaf, again of genitalia. The shiny surface of the large image reflects ghostly afterimages from the rear screens of the light-boxes. These reflections glow like coals in the brooding, romantic black and white landscape. Also entitled *Dissecting One’s Nature*, this piece presents the differentiation of the sexes as a horticultural problem akin to that of cultivating uniform and orderly forests, reflecting the (northern) European origins of the dilemmas and mythologies around which the work revolves.

While Kelly’s works foreground nature, the term enjoys a troubled status throughout. By repeatedly placing nature in relation to physiology, he insists on its human importance. But the elements of “Dissecting One’s Nature, *une exposition d’histoire naturelle*” fall within a traditions of landscape painting, landscape photography and the use of the “earth” as a metaphor for the body. These aesthetic means signal the inevitability of a human viewpoint in representations of nature, a kind of human-tinted filter through which all images must pass.

Layered upon, or perhaps entangled within this humanist bias, is the code of gender. Reworked by Kelly, Vesalius’ diagrams deprive the penis of its phallic status by pluralizing genital configurations, neutralizing their dichotomous formulation as presence and absence. The gender of the genitals becomes in-



KEVIN KELLY, DISSECTING ONE'S NATURE, 1995, INSTALLATION VIEW;
PHOTO: DENIS FARLEY, COURTESY GALERIE OBORO.

In the current era we are witnessing the advent of museums without objects, as robotics and image technology enable a seamless nexus of information and style. While viewers adapt readily to these new contexts, the information transferred there bears traces of other frameworks. Stated differently, the aspiration that technological linking will supercede our dependence on dichotomies is utopian in light of the viewer/user, who continues to participate in pervasive popular

cepts for a lay audience. More than a century after its heyday as an instrument of European colonialism, the museum itself may be becoming only an artifact, the symbol of an obsolete regime of knowledge which privileged the study and classification of the material world.

In his re-fabrications which blend the objects and methodology of anatomical science and of natural history museums, Kevin Kelly foregrounds the archaic and persistent quality of the frameworks