

INFRA-ORDINARY



Infra-Ordinary presents the work of Christine D’Onofrio (Vancouver, BC), Toni Hafkenschied (Toronto, ON), Dave Kemp (Toronto, ON) with Kevin Robbie (Kinston, ON), Preston Schiedel (Kingston, ON), and Collin Zipp (Winnipeg, MB).

The title of the exhibition is taken from a text by Georges Perec, in which the writer proposes a close examination of the everyday to the extent that it is rendered unfamiliar. The works in this exhibition enact this close examination, not only in terms of their subject matter, but also in terms of the very media themselves.

Through close-up photos of panty-hose, D’Onofrio scrutinizes the construction of gender and sexuality; the shallow depth of field in Hafkenschied’s photos transform tourist snapshots into scale models; Kemp (with physicist Robbie and an electron microscope) emphasizes the sculptural quality of photos with extreme views of their edges; Schiedel photographs scenes that are empty of people but reveal a psychogeography; and Zipp’s work explores the effect of technology on the perception of the environment by subtly manipulating his videos of landscapes at the level of their digital code.

On Saturday August 2nd, from 12 noon to 5pm, at Springer Market Square, Dave Kemp will present *Taken*, a camera obscura within a van. The rear portion of a van is completely blacked-out with the only light allowed to enter coming through a 1/4" pinhole on the rear window. By making a camera obscura within a van it is possible to have a moving enclosure and thus a moving image of the environment outside. The result is a rather disorienting perceptual experience. Meet with the artist and arrange for a ride at the Modern Fuel booth that will be located in the Courtyard of the Springer Market Square in downtown Kingston. Then come to the reception in the evening at Modern Fuel.

Essay by Riva Symko

Nothing is Ordinary. Everything is Ordinary.

“What they recount doesn’t concern me, doesn’t ask me questions and doesn’t answer the questions I ask or would like to ask...How? Where? When? Why?” – Georges Perec, “L’Infra-ordinaire”, 1989

What is this 'ordinary'? Is it easier to ask what is extraordinary? Is the extraordinary "the big event, the untoward, the front-page splash, the banner headlines...a scandal, a fissure, a danger...the spectacular...the abnormal...historical upheavals, social unrest...the historic, significant, and revelatory...the truly intolerable, the truly inadmissible"? (Georges Perec, "L'Infra-ordinaire (1989)", 209) Are these the only things, to Georges Perec's annoyance, that speak to us? What has happened, he asks, to the daily? "What's really going on, what we're experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it?" (209-210) Shouldn't we be questioning "the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?" (210) Is this ordinary the daily? The everyday?

Is the everyday ordinary? What is the everyday? Is the everyday that which is commonly thought to be those actions and objects that involve a habitual presence in our lives? Is everyday life, as British cultural theorist Ben Highmore writes, "not simply the name that is given to a reality readily available for scrutiny", but that which also accounts for aspects of life that lie hidden (Ben Highmore, ed. *The Everyday Life Reader*, 2002, 21)? Do things become everyday by becoming invisible or unnoticed (21)? Is the everyday familiar? Does familiarity breed a kind of numbness? Does the numbness and familiarity of everyday life, as American cultural theorist Fredric Jameson suggests, "estrangle us from the everyday?" (Fredric Jameson *Brecht and Method*, 1998, 84). How is it that the familiar has become estranged? Is it because familiarity has encouraged neglect? (Highmore, 21) Do we neglect the familiar in favor of the extraordinary? Has this neglect caused our alienation from the ordinary everyday life? What is the consequence of this?

Was the Situationist International right after all? Is everyday life the "measure of all things" (Guy Debord, "Perspectives for Alterations in Everyday Life (1961)", *The Everyday Life Reader*, 239)? And has that measurement become defined by materialism so that "all that was once directly lived has become mere representation" (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1957, 12)? Are we locked into a cycle of reification whose result is the spectacularization of the ordinary? Does consumption depreciate everyday life? Is "what is gained at the level of appearances lost on the level of being and becoming" so that everyday lived reality begins to seem so inconsequential that "appearances become the centre of our attention, until roles completely obscure the importance of our own lives"? (Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, 1967, 125) Are impersonal human relationships, such as those found in public spaces or even more private situations like offices or apartment complexes, a kind of sterilized zone offering a "truce in the endless battle against isolation, a brief transit which leads to the illusion of communication"? (Vaneigem, 42) Are we passive receivers of information and regulations? Are we consumers of manufactured pseudo-needs? (Debord, 1957, 33) Has our passivity made the everyday inconspicuous? Was the Situationist's search for a non-commodified 'authentic existence' – the synthesis of art and life – futile in the face of consumer capitalism? Isn't consumption an inherent aspect of the everyday?

Is the everyday "choked with opportunities which we are unable to seize"? (Alberto Melucci as quoted in Michael E. Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life*, 2000, 157) How do we "strip the everyday of its inconspicuousness?" (Highmore, 21) Will this allow us to move closer to ordinary reality? Instead of seeking the more grandiose revolutionary schemes of the Situationist's, should we look, instead, to Michel de Certeau's understanding that 'culture is ordinary' and human agency is a natural mechanism of everyday life? (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1988, 1) Is there a creative nature to ordinary culture that only emerges out of the direct experience of a particular moment? (de Certeau, xix) Does resistance happen in the common here and now? Is power ordinary – "where there is power, there is"...ordinary? (Michel Foucault as quoted in de Certeau, xiv) "How are we to speak of these 'common things', how to track them down rather, flush them out...give them meaning...let them speak of what is?" (Perec, 210)

Can we track down the empty places in our city? If we photograph all the corners of Kingston and, over time, observe the changes, the details, the relationships between the natural and built environment will the innocuous suddenly stand out and confront us like the deserted baseball diamond in Preston Schiedel's *Marlbank Baseball Diamond*? Will the Midway Mini-Mart suddenly seem like a noteworthy reflection of our history? Does this kind of history bleed from the edges of the aesthetic materialism right back into reality again, like a bird or a sailboat moving through one of Collin Zipp's (untitleds)? Do these kinds of documentation tell us just as much about the terms of our technology as

they do about their subject? Are the pixelations, scratches, and ordinary 'flaws' in the technologies of representation part of the unseen system of our perception?

Are there microscopic narratives lying dormant in the fibers of the everyday? Is it possible, for instance, to uncover the imperfections in the quest for feminine perfection by examining the rips, tears, bumps, and threads in the weave of Christine D'Onofrio's *Nude (Grid 1)*? Do these Nudes have a life, a history, of their own after they've been removed from the body that wears them? Or is everyday life in a constant state of violent disintegration like a pair of nylon pantyhose? Like the bent and torn edges of a photograph or postcard that has been handed around and handed down through generations of owners? Can Dave Kemp and Kevin Robbie's scanning electron microscope look deep enough to find Che's aura in Alberto Korda's postcard of Che Guevara at the funeral of the victims of the La Coubre, 1961.? Is the ordinary inherently lacking in aura?

Is aura as artificial a concept as one of Toni Hafkenschaid's monumental model landscapes? Does the MGM Lion constitute the limits of reality or unlimited fiction? Isn't Mt. Rushmore spectacular? Does the infra-ordinary magnify the common banalities and make them extraordinary? Is this the way we "question what seems so much a matter of course that we've forgotten its origins"? (Perec, 210) How much of it is really ordinary?

Works Cited

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Bios:

Christine D'Onofrio lives and works in Vancouver, British Columbia. She works with photography to investigate the problematics of identity, femininity and the body. By utilizing the tropes of commercial/product photography, she appropriates and comments on the power the advertising and fashion industries exert upon the body.

Toni Hafkenschaid is a Toronto based fine art and commercial photographer. He has been active in the arts community in Toronto and has received several Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council awards. He has exhibited in solo and groupshows throughout Canada, the U.S., and Europe.

Dave Kemp is a visual artist and recent graduate from the Master of Visual Studies program at the University of Toronto as well as in the Knowledge Media Design Collaborative Program. He earned his BScE in Mechanical Engineering at Queen's University. His art practice looks at the intersections and interactions between art, science and technology - particularly at how these fields shape our perception and understanding of the world. **Kevin Robbie** is a physicist specializing in nanostructured materials.

Preston Schiedel teaches photography in Kingston, Ontario. For the past nine years his artistic focus has been on the changing landscape in and around Kingston. Devoid of sound, devoid of people, and devoid of colour, these places question the relationship to the ground the photographer stands on. **Schiedel will be presenting a photography workshop at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre on September 4, 2008 as part of the Exposures project.**

Collin Zipp is a multidisciplinary video/digital artist who obtained his BFA from the University of Manitoba's School of Art. His video work uses various experimental techniques to explore human perception and memory. Raw video footage is manipulated, and imperfections in the data caused by the technology are utilized to make the medium more self-evident; and create a lo-fi aesthetic.

Riva Symko is currently a doctoral candidate in Art History at Queen's University. Her research is focused on contemporary art and Marxist cultural theory.

Image: Dave Kemp and Kevin Robbie. "Photographer unknown. My Grandfather's (Albert R. Bowles) military identity photograph. Circa 1939. Gelatin-silver print." Archival inkjet print, 2006.