

A Set of Suspicions

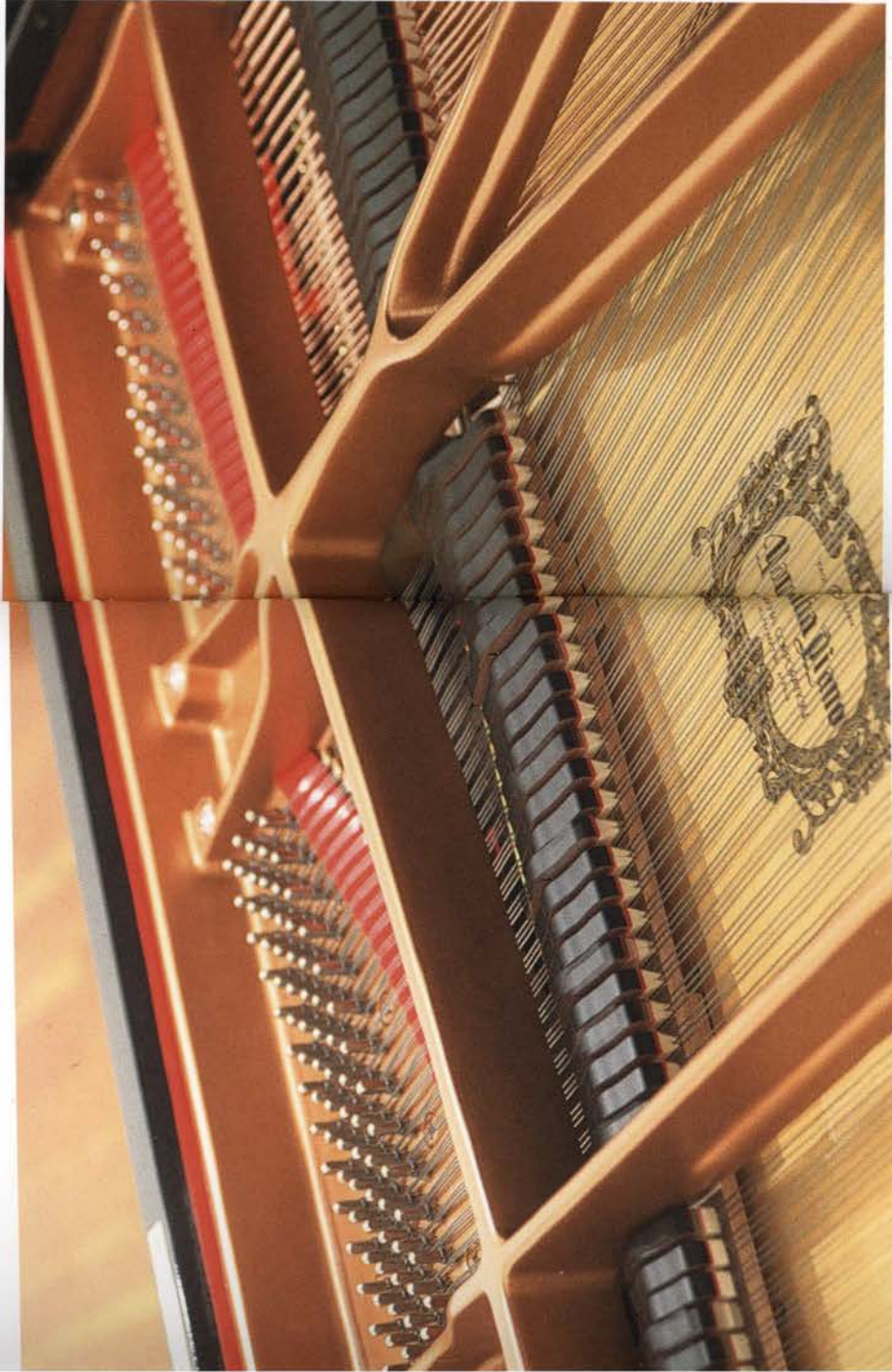


La Salle des Noeuds (pedestrian movements)
Jocelyn Robert and Daniel Jolliffe

9 September to 14 October 2000







La Salle des Moeurs (pedestrian movements)
Jocelyn Robert and Daniel Jolliffe

helping hand of the state, offering up your meagre bank statements and case files as evidence of your deserving status. Panhandling laws require that one may sit or one may beg but never at the same time. Keep moving. Your status as threatening or threatened correlates to what Randy Cutler in her accompanying article calls *susceptibility*. Be vigilant. Interpret according to the codes and criteria of blockwatch.

233 Carrall Street - The Location Shoot

Now, let's place this paranoiac maneuver into the context of the ubiquitous presence of location crews for feature film and television. This morning when I arrived at work, all the street signs for shops, restaurants and offices were written in French, the license plates were black on white, and wider. Everyone looked better dressed and like they had attached importance to what they had eaten last night for dinner. Three shadily sophisticated characters idled in a black Mercedes, practicing menacing looks, while an actual police officer detoured the regular traffic away from their escape route. We all checked one another out. I searched for clues to the date of this fiction, to the specific city or town under construction, to the genre, big screen, small screen. Blood Alley, with tanded cobblestones and wrought iron atmosphere, has been New Orleans and London; Cordova Street parking arcades have been Brooklyn with mountains, the un-named alleys in between have been the mean streets of Manhattan and LA with tax incentives and seventy-five cents on the dollar. I have personally witnessed Jean-Claude Van Damme run repeatedly across Carrall Street and fling himself face first into an airbag, again and again, an entire afternoon. One may interrupt gritty crime narratives, real and virtual, in the course of a short walk to the mailbox. We passersby watch either

kind. These envelopes of fantasy are attenuated by the lights, the cameras, the action and all the watching going on. The codes of gesture, utterance, dress and deportment are loose and always contingent. Is that a person in distress or in rehearsal? It is easy to imagine oneself an accidental extra to the performances of the imported talent and to those with recurring, less lucrative roles. Pedestrians are a threat to continuity. I imagine watching myself later from the couch, or cinema seat, an intrepid incidental in a Hollywood version of a French crime scene. Or contained as blurry local colour in a tourist High-8, bracketing the real action.

A Set of *Suspicious* is set here - a backlot/frontroom/storefront. The artists' projects have used a range of processes and techniques: direct engagement with the acute anxieties of this neighbourhood, deft inferences to the devices that manage threat in other specific locations, evocations of the fantasy of a perfect crime, entrapment. The three exhibitions engage in considerations of performance - and how the public performance of identity is heightened by the levels of scrutiny under which urban subjects are placed. Threat is produced through images; surveillance markets the capture of images; captured images produce a more intense sense of threat.

A SET OF SUSPICIONS 01

233 Carrall Street - The Coordinates

Latitude N 49° 16.971' Longitude W 123° 06.242' EPE : 20 M,
a stationary position expressed in conventional geographic notation.

In *La Salle des Noeuds (pedestrian movements)*, a collaboration between Vancouver artist Daniel Jolliffe and Quebec composer and artist Jocelyn Robert, the gallery space houses two technological artifacts - a Global Positioning Satellite receiver marketed for civilian purposes and a

stationary grand piano. The GPS receiver, used by travellers and hikers as a high tech compass, and the piano, with its attendant associations of virtuosity, are linked together with hardware and software. The data flowing to the receiver from the surveillance network of satellites in constant orbit around the earth is captured and translated as an unpredictable music composition, specific to the coordinates of 233 Carrall. An inversion and subversion of a system meant to track civilian and military locations, the work articulates the activities of the satellites as volumes and quantities of sound, as a five week 'live' performance. This 'room of knots or nodes' also subverts the privilege of vision as key to the apprehension and control of observed subjects; the quantities and proximity of the satellites are heard and felt rather than visually tracked.

"*La Salle des Noeuds* takes as a starting supposition that music is about the way in which it is produced, rather than the quality of composition, playing or notation."¹, deflecting the authoritative status of composer and performer that gleams from the weighty instrument. The historical and physical autonomy of the monumental object is breached, patched into the network of electronic knots and nodes that vein the technologized world. Its weight becomes a visceral index of the scale, mass and volume of the satellites themselves.

A SET OF SUSPICIONS 02

233 Carrall Street - Specifications of Property: Lot 4 Plan LMS 738

Suspects (*Performance for the Police*) stems from an interest in the long-standing proposal by the Vancouver Police Department to improve policing of the Downtown Eastside by installing surveillance cameras in key locations. This controversial initiative has the support of some businesses and neighbours and is opposed by others on the basis

of privacy issues, as a breach of civil liberties that would be unacceptable in less impoverished neighbourhoods. The police cameras would join the already established use of video surveillance on private property such as office towers, shopping malls and business enterprises where they are used primarily to discourage property crime. Under the plan, the video documents would be monitored by civilian volunteers.

Video surveillance, unlike other forms of data-gathering, is the accumulation of purely visual information, removed from its context by the limits of the frame. Placed above its field of operations, the surveillance camera produces an image with some familiar characteristics - a particular angle, a grainy resolution - that skews the interpretation of the activity it records. Imagine Van Damme's compulsive repetitions without the sanctioning presence of the production company. What behavior is above suspicion, when watched through this lens?

In *Suspects*, four artists were invited to consider what might constitute 'suspicious behavior' in the context of this neighbourhood and to develop work in response to the proposal.

Susan Stewart's work, *scene unseen*, is a three channel video installation which uses still photographs and text, taped interviews and surveillance images taken from cars or upper storey windows. It is presented on three TVs facing Carrall Street and three placed within the gallery. Over the course of its 40 minute running length, *scene unseen* splices the conventions of documentary film to those of a hidden camera, to the graphic impact of still photos and captions. The intimacy and implied consent of the hand held, close range camera used in interviews is interrupted with the aggressive zoom shots from another camera across the street, breaking the comfortable consumption of the image, forcing a reconsideration of that implied consent. Throughout the work, the people interviewed refocus the debate toward

¹ From the artists' statement at: www.artspeak.bc.ca