How to do things with pictures in the museum

Photography, montage and political space

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Publication date
2020

Document Version
Other version

License
Other

Citation for published version (APA):
Hans Haacke, *Voici Alcan*, 1983
CHAPTER THREE

The Contemplative: Framing and Being Framed in Haacke’s Voici Alcan

The discussion so far has considered how specific twentieth-century montage images could be considered as performative when working from Austin’s concept of the speech act, and in conjunction with more recent writing around the “politicity of art”. I have proposed the combative in relation to Heartfield’s photomontage practice, and the integrative to describe the performative strategies of Hannah Höch and Martha Rosler. I turn now to propose another mode of visual speech act, the contemplative, and introduce the significance of the museum as the site of display, a space designed for contemplation.

German-born, New York-based artist Hans Haacke is one of the most notable practitioners of the transgressive within and about museum social space. Haacke was heralded as a leading figure of Institutional Critique, a form of conceptual art begun in the 1970s with the intent of revealing and critiquing wider social structures and systems, through which the operations of art systems were embedded. Typically, Haacke’s works were (and continue to be) site-specific and reveal like x-rays the invisible interconnectedness of economic, political and cultural systems. In his consideration of the operations of the museum, Haacke has explored the authority of museums through connoisseurship practices of artistic commodities to the wider corporate and political interests that fuel them. Notable early examples are Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971 (1971), a structural analysis displaying the generally unseen connections between money, power and the operations of culture; and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees (1974), a critique of the business practices of the individual museum patrons. These


2 Haacke executed two major new works for his proposed solo show at the Guggenheim in New York. As Luke Skrebowski has recounted, the planned display of Shapolsky et al was cancelled by the Guggenheim Museum; a second exposé from the same year Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971, was also not exhibited. See Luke Skrebowski, “All Systems Go: Recovering Hans Haacke’s Systems Art,” Grey Room 30 (Winter 2008):54-83; and Rosalyn Deutsche, “Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate and the Museum,” in Evictions, Art and Spatial Politics (London and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 159-192.
brazen effronteries serve to transgress the normative codes of the museum *qua* sanctuary untainted by external, extra-aesthetic concerns. While Haacke’s critical strategy has been unswerving, the resultant physical forms and visual styles of the works themselves are rarely similar. I am particularly interested in how the site and practices of the museum, and our role as audience habituated to a specifically aesthetic mode of viewing, play a role in the activation of Haacke’s work.

I have selected Haacke’s *Voici Alcan* (1983) as a work that exemplifies this approach as the focal point to explore the possibilities and limitations of another kind of visual performance: the contemplative. This is one of least discussed works in Haacke’s oeuvre, perhaps because it addresses very specific late-capitalist Canadian industrial and cultural operations, and behind these, the historical ties between Canada and South Africa as former colonies and current members of the British Commonwealth. *Voici Alcan* is at once pictorial and sculptural, taking the form of a suspended triptych of aluminum window frames that also function as picture frames. In these frames, direct and indirect corporate operations of Alcan (a company name formed by the contraction of the word “aluminum” and “Canada”) are presented: resource extraction, patronage of the arts, and tools to enable political oppression. *Voici Alcan* depends on the juxtaposition of photographic fragments to reveal a covert narrative that binds a very particular collision of Canadian and South African foreign policy, commercial globalization, national, institutional and racial identities, cultural patronage, and the forced dislocation of citizenship. The work was acquired by the National Gallery of Canada (the same venue in the earlier discussion of Nadia Myre’s work) and, soon after, featured in the 1988 inaugural exhibition in its monumental new building designed by Moshe Safdie, one of Canada’s leading architects. This prominent renewal of the nation’s prestigious showcase of historical and contemporary art, can be seen, from the perspective of Carol Duncan’s analysis of the functions of the museum, as the coming of age of Canada as a serious curatorial “player”, and by extension, Canada as a sophisticated modern nation.3 So, there are many threads to contemplate.

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In *How to do Things with Words*[^4], Austin explores how humans use language to interact with one another (relationships between people) and emphasizes that the uttering or performance of the speech itself is or is part of the doing of an action, its addressivity.[^5] Austin then works out a tentative classification of *kinds* of uttering representing social interactions around a preliminary list of verb types. In considering the ways in which image acts perform, the mode of Haacke’s addressivity could be termed the contemplative. Haacke’s largely conceptual and installation-based practice invites scrutiny about the operations of the museum itself, and beyond that, the social and economic forces that shape the consumption of culture. In this chapter, I will also relate the valency of contemplating Haacke’s *Voici Alcan*—as a work that makes visible the unseen interconnected commercial and political interests and their violent consequences—to contemporary work by Allan Sekula and Fred Wilson (North America), and Paul Stopforth and Sam Nhlengethwa (South Africa). Working with various artistic media and genres, and sometimes with the direct participation of the audience, Haacke refutes the concept of the independent artist creating autonomous personal expression: the work of art is a cultural symptom of capitalist operations, and imbricated as a commodity in museum acquisition and blockbuster exhibitions underwritten by corporate sponsorship.

I will investigate how the contemplative can work as a visual speech act mode in two ways:

1) internally, by *framing* the narrative operations of *Voici Alcan* within the borders of its physical frames. Within this discussion, I will address three concepts present in the work: here/not-here; us/not us and the torture aesthetic; and

2) externally, by *being framed as Voici Alcan* as an encounter in museums spaces. In this discussion, I will discuss the nature of the museum as a performative stage,


[^5]: While I do not wish to digress into the vast territory of the philosophy of language, I am very tempted here to link Austin’s distinctions to M.M. Bakhtin, who points to expressive intonation as key in the delivery of speech as well as diverse kinds of speech genres such as everyday expressions, formal expressions, praise, approval, rapture, reproof or abuse. See M.M. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, translated by Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 60-102.
classical and contemporary concepts of the contemplative, and the implications of displaying the work three decades later in a particular historical context in South Africa.

This dynamic tension between two concurrent vectors, framing (as centripetal) and being framed (as centrifugal), presents an opportunity here to re-imagine the contemplative as a dynamic zone to perceive hidden networks.

1. Framing

The situation has become so complicated because the simple ‘reproduction of reality’ says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or AEG yields almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional. The reification of human relationships in the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations. So there is indeed ‘something to construct’, something ‘artificial’, ‘invented’.

Bertolt Brecht

As Brecht observed, the act of mimesis—in this instance, as afforded by the camera—does not in itself constitute a political speech act. The naturalizing processes of realism and reification slip into the functional, that is, slip into strictly indexical statements: the camera (operator) saw this. In order to contest such apparitions, as Heartfield discovered, it is necessary to construct a decidedly un-natural or artificial proposition to disrupt the smooth(ing) operations of myth. So, bizarrely, the function of the poetic as a fiction (a play, a book, a work of art) enhances the rhetorical operations of truth telling.

Haacke’s title Voici Alcan refers to the Quebec-based Canadian resource extraction and manufacturer. The National Gallery of Canada installation of this work as a feature acquisition [fig. 3-1]—which is the basis of my analysis of the processes of framing and being framed—literally consists of three frames hanging suspended several inches in front of the gallery wall. These frames are not decorative frames typically used to frame works of art: they are actual Alcan-produced aluminum window frames, each crowned by the iconic pyramidal logo of the Alcan corporation.

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The arrangement of the three silvery frames initially appears sleek and minimalist. At closer look, the compositions are elaborate recombinations of disparate word and image elements: logo, short texts, photos of people (real/fictional, dead/alive) contained within the frames, visual counterparts to the *vita activa* of Alcan’s dynamic and manifold corporate activities. Knotted together are three specific facets of the multi-national corporation: Alcan as a major Quebecois resource extraction company; its goodwill sponsorship of elite performing arts in Montreal; and its material support to apartheid by the export of its goods to the South African government. The central image features a reproduction of a post-mortem colour photograph of Black South African civil rights leader Stephen Biko, who died as a result of beatings while in police custody for

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7 In his supporting text for the work, Haacke notes that Alcan is one of largest producers of aluminum ingot in the world, operating some 35 countries with 60,000 employees. In 1983, it was largest manufacturing employer in the province. See *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (New York/Cambridge: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986), 250.
nonviolent protest against the government policy of apartheid. The image is flanked on either side by sepia-tinted black-and-white photographs derived from Opéra de Montréal's publicity posters for its productions _Norma_ and _Lucia di Lammermoor_, both sponsored by Alcan. The three arrested “moments” initially seem unrelated, two pictures representing pivotal moments in staged fictional and historical operatic tragedies, images that border or “contain” an actual contemporary political tragedy.

One of the most striking features of the work is its composition as a montage through the close adjacency of the large-scale images; it is also a triptych composed of three window/frames. Like the panels of a Renaissance altarpiece (and I return to examine the formal and semantic connections to this historical precedents below), the adjacency of the three panels of ostensibly self-contained imagery combines to create a sacralized meta-narrative in which all three parts are semantically welded together to join both the visible and the invisible dimensions of Alcan’s corporate operations. The nuance of the French title _Voici Alcan_ is not merely as a welcoming announcement to the performative public sphere stage (_Here is Alcan_), but a dramatic pulling back of the curtain to expose the coruscating raw material beneath a smooth veneer (_This is Alcan_).

The three images join together significant moments in the story of Alcan as a global corporate agent, signifying two aspects of its operations, namely its public face as a sponsor of cultural performances, and its hidden (but now revealed) dimension as a supplier of the raw materials used in state military operations against South African dissidents. In this way, these significant moments, or _fabulae_ as Bal explains in her foundational text _Narratology_11, are fragments of a complete story, arranged in a

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9 The photographic copies are derived from the original photographs taken by André LeCoz.

10 This variability of inflection and effect is also inherent in the title of Haacke’s _Norbert: All Systems Go_, 1971. See Skrebowski, 57.

particular sequence to “tell” the greater story they combine to reveal. In this semantic sense, the assembly of distinct and seemingly unrelated components forms a narratival photomontage, bounded formally by the literal products of the corporate to which they point—Alcan aluminum frames which at once frame and trisect the total picture. In this way, the addition of these manufactured physical frames is linked to the semantic framing of the narrative. The frames also prevent the images from being read “merely” as photographs (what has been seen) but as a single discursive montage produced by the artist (what is being said).12

As a static object (seeing) the work visualizes the “true” map of the journey of the raw resources from Canada and also the flow of the profits yielded by these transactions. As a speech act (saying), Haacke is unfolding a web of human relationships and their many forms of communication, presenting this discourse on a public stage (the museum) and sutureing the viewer as a subject morally affected by and implicated in these relations, much as Azoulay argues for responsibility of the viewer to confront and connect with the dispossessed non-citizens who address the privileged citizen viewer via the medium/mediation of the photograph.

12 Haacke had earlier confronted the systemic economic underpinnings supporting South African apartheid in two separate projects:


In 1978–1979 Haacke created But I Think You Question My Motives, a work that documents the connections between the Dutch corporation Philips and the apartheid politics of South Africa. In 2008, it was displayed as part of a survey exhibition, Forms of Resistance: Artists and the Desire for Social Change from 1871 to the Present, at the van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven; this is especially poignant as it is a Philips company town. See Hal Foster, “[review of] Forms of Resistance: Artists and the Desire for Social Change from 1871 to the Present, exhibition organized by van Abbemuseum” ArtForum 46/5 (January 2008):272-273.

Metromobilitian (1983), like Voici Alcan of the same year, exposed the American-owned Mobil’s Corporation’s dual interest in supporting South African militarism while simultaneously garnering attention as a visible patron of public broadcast programming and exhibitions in North America.
Further consideration of *Voici Alcan* exposes the systemic links and tensions between the official and unofficial texts, and between the visual and written sources of the texts. Beyond the juxtaposition of the photographic components of the work is the polysemic layering of texts. Haacke’s combination of textual elements—based on an actual Alcan promotional brochure—serves to disrupt and splice the smooth rhetoric of Alcan’s own public apparatus. In this work, Haacke applies identifying captions in the upper border of each image suggesting, but not confirming, the relationship between the three events:

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR, produit par l’Opéra de Montréal avec des fonds d’ALCAN.

STEPHEN BIKO. Leader noir. A succombé à des blessures à la tête reçues lors de sa détention par la police sud-africaine.

NORMA, produit par l’Opéra de Montréal avec des fonds d’ALCAN.

In this triad, two of the texts are nearly identical, emphasizing the production by the Opéra de Montreal with funding by Alcan. The organization of these texts over each image is suggestive of newspaper headlines; the all-capitals type used for the titles of the operas and the name of the black martyr also suggest a bizarre continuum between the three objects on display. This linkage is reinforced by the repeating motif of the Alcan window frames. The formal conflation that Haacke makes between the single most potent trope of Western art, namely *looking through* (the image as illusionistic window and frame) and *looking at* (a literal window and frame), creates a powerful internal tension between the layered sources of the work. In this way, the icons of corporate promotion, journalistic practice and aesthetic practices are conjoined and set off new moves which are interplayed as the viewer considers the work in greater detail.

The lower portion of the framed windows contains lengthier texts excerpted by Haacke that “testify” against the boosterism of the upper texts. Information is cited such as the various respiratory diseases and other illnesses contracted by Alcan’s Canadian smelter workers; Alcan’s sales of semi-finished products to the South African government for police and military operations; and the lack of union recognition of Black workers by Alcan’s South African affiliate. In another critical series such as *Der*
Praleinmeister (1981), Haacke deploys an extensive critique of business tycoon Peter Ludwig and his apparently separate lives as exploiter of workers in candy factories across numerous global manufacturing locations (including Quebec), and as influential art collector and museum patron in Cologne, Germany. These projects are intensively text-heavy, with each visual panel incorporating or adjacent to several hundred words of text.

The texts of Voici Alcan are not rendered as “artist’s statements” but as content detached from their origination in corporate annual reports, a purportedly “neutral” documentary style narrative mode. Haacke positions the three previously disparate images into a single narrative; in a literal sense, the texts are cited out of context, yet their insertion by the artist into the “fiction” of the image/frame modalities constitutes a speech act that inscribes a context in a fuller sense, that of truth-telling. It is also significant that the texts are given in French: although Canada declares itself to be a bilingual nation with two official languages, the use of French-only in the work is itself indexical. First, it points to the fact of Alcan’s headquarters in Montreal, and thus the province of Quebec’s unilingual language policy under séparatiste governance to encourage Francophone nationhood and to diminish minority Anglophone power and presence. Related to this goal is the encouragement of immigration to the province of Quebec from the monde francophone, including Black immigrants from French-speaking nations such as Haiti. In the National Gallery of Canada installation, a wall placard with English translation of the text that appears on the work assists in making the text accessible to both official languages. [fig. 3-2]

13 The vector for the replacement of one narrative for another also goes in the other direction. As Sophie Berrebi notes the document reconfigured within a dialectical artwork opens the range of oppositions between neutrality and subjectivity, transparency and opacity, art and non-art […] it is always a thing in itself and, at the same time, refers to something else. See “Documentary and the Dialectical Document in Contemporary Art,” in Right About Now. Art and Theory since the 1990s (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007):113.

Translations:
Left panel: LUCIA DI LAMMERMORR, produced by the Montreal Opera Company with funding from Alcan. Alcan's South African affiliate is the most important producer of aluminum and the only fabricator of aluminum sheet in South Africa. From a nonwhite work force of 2300, the company has trained eight skilled workers.
Center panel: STEPHEN BIKO, black leader, died from head wounds received during his detention by the South African police. Alcan's South African affiliate sells to the South African government semifinished products which can be used in police and military equipment. The company does not recognize the trade union of its black workers.
Right panel: NORMA, produced by the Montreal Opera Company with funding from Alcan. Alcan's South African affiliate has been designated a "key point industry" by the South African government. The company's black workers went on strike in 1981.

Alcan Aluminum Ltd., through its subsidiaries and affiliates, is one of the largest producers of aluminum ingot in the world and operates large aluminum fabrication facilities in some thirty-five countries. Throughout the world it has approximately 66,000 employees. It is the largest manufacturing employer in Quebec. The head office of the totally integrated multinational company is in Montreal. On December 31, 1981, 48% of the common shares were held by residents of Canada, 45% by residents of the U.S. The Chairman of the Board, Nathaniel V. Davis, a U.S. citizen, is reputed to control a considerable block of shares. While the largest single shareholder is the Caisse de Dépot et de Placement, which administers the pension funds of the province of Quebec, it is not represented on the Board of Directors.

Alcan has marketed aluminum in South Africa since 1930. In 1949 it started production at its plant in Pietermaritzburg near Durban. Major new investments occurred between 1969 and 1972. When Alcan sold a block of its shares in 1973 to the South African Huletts Corporation it stressed that this was not a political move. Duncan Campbell, a vice-president of Alcan, explained, "The decision was made purely for commercial and financial reasons. It doesn't mean we're pulling out of South Africa." The increase in South African ownership in Alcan's South African affiliate allows the company to borrow locally and thereby to circumvent restrictions imposed by the South African government. The chairman of Huletts Aluminum was represented on the Defense Advisory Board of the prime minister of South Africa. In the early '70s Alcan was accused by church groups of having paid its black workers wages below the poverty datum line. In 1982 representatives of the United Church of Canada, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Redemptorist Fathers, and the Anglican Church of Canada filed a proxy resolution at Alcan's annual meeting requesting the board of directors to establish a South African review committee to "examine the company's activities in South Africa, including the sale of its products to the South African military, the status of Huletts' chairman on the Defense Advisory Board, and the storage of weapons on company premises, as well as the training of militia units of Huletts employees."

Speaking for the board, Nathaniel Davis, its chairman, opposed the resolution. He explained that all security regulations of South Africa are binding on Alcan's affiliate. "While it is entirely normal and indeed inevitable," he said, that Alcan products are used by the South African military, Alcan was not permitted, under South African law, to disclose the nature of sales for military use.

Stephen Biko was the cofounder and central figure in the Black People's Convention, the South African black consciousness movement. He was arrested without charges by the Special Branch of the South African Police on August 18, 1977, and detained in Port Elizabeth. The police admitted having forced Biko to spend nineteen days naked in a cell before he was interrogated around the clock for fifty hours while shackled with handcuffs and leg irons. During his detention he suffered severe head injuries. In a semicomic state he was taken naked in a Land Rover to a hospital in Pretoria, about fourteen hours away from Port Elizabeth. He died from his injuries on September 12.

Alcan has been sponsoring cultural programs, ranging from the Théâtre Alcan and the production of the popular TV series Les Plofs to architectural conferences and an art collection in the company's headquarters. Cosponsorship of two productions of the Opéa de Montréal with Hydro-Quebec linked Alcan in a highly visible way with the provincially owned utility company. Cheap hydro-electric power is the main asset of Alcan's aluminum production in Quebec. In the recent past Alcan has been threatened with nationalization of the electric power generating plants it owns in the province.

"Voici Alcan" is the title of a glossy brochure which was published by Alcan in 1979.

[fig. 3-2] translation of Voici Alcan's text
This question of the placement of copious texts (albeit accessible in the language of the presumed adult visitor) runs counter to the majority of curatorial practices in fine art museums, which often provide a title label only or one with a very short contextual reference to the artist, or in history/science museums, where visitors (readers and non-readers) are invited to explore a topic interactively in three dimensions, not read a protracted essay while standing. Haacke’s method, deeply connected to his interest in emergent social science framework of L. Bertlanffy, Howard S. Becker and Jack Burnham, is predicated on recontextualizing fragmented information, both promotional and revelatory, to show the interconnectedness between systems—in the case of Haacke, civil society, commerce, the art world. Kasper König, who worked with Haacke in his capacity as director of the NSCAD Press, explained the juxtaposition of texts in this way:

[Haacke’s] works often constitute voluminous and detailed reading material which is not easily taken, digested, and retained while standing up and reading off a gallery. It is in a gallery or museum, though, where they attain a social-economic and politic impregnation which then becomes an essential part of the works. Once they have been exposed to this fertilization, as all works reproduced here [in the exhibition catalogue] have they retained the specific contextual quality, even if they are no longer seen in the environment for which they were originally made.

This observation suggests the work exerts not only a dense force field saturating one’s attention with the dissemination of knowledge/evidence, but also literally pulls the body of the spectator into close physical proximity to the actual components themselves in order to read the texts. As Irit Rogoff notes, Haacke’s work is frequently predicated on this juxtaposition of subjective decorative modes (the staging of props, the use of frames)

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15 Kasper König, Hans Haacke: Framing and Being Framed, 7 works, 1970/75 (Halifax, NS: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design), 7. Wick-Kmoch echoes this in her summation: “Let this oscillation (in Haacke’s work) between art and science produce cognitive dissonance—if it is art, if it is science, both, or none of the two—so it is the indissolubility of this ambiguity which makes the stimulus work.” Wick-Kmoch,142. [my translation]
with objective information (text from the annual report), a dialogic tension between Benjaminian modes of the auratic and the reproducible.16

As an artistic strategy, the insertion of text into works by artists has been analyzed by Simon Morley in his study *Writing on the Wall*. Morley identifies several strategies used by artists: transmedial (substituting word for image), multimedial (co-existing side by side), mixed media (intertwined), and intermedial (the visuality of written elements). From this perspective, we could cast our eyes back in the discussion so far and identify the artists who have combined textual elements as part of montage: John Heartfield’s book covers exemplifying transmedial and intermedial usage of text elements and his *AIZ* covers integrating both multimedial and mixed-media approaches; Hannah Höch’s *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* deliberate scrambling of mixed-media fragments; Hans Haacke working from the template of modern advertising by creating largely multimedial works with distinct zones for image and text.

**Here/Not-Here**
The layering of the work, textually as well as physically, provides many points of entry into the production of meaning on the basis of the integrated fragments. One key narrative strand is geography. While *Voici Alcan* is very much about the corporate activities executed and displayed on Canadian soil (*here*), it is also integrally about what takes place under corporate purview in another differently modelled social apparatus (*not-here*). Haacke, in the assembly of his triptych, asks us to look at the generally invisible gap of what we do not see here in order to form moral questions and resolutions about our connection to *not-here*. The *here*, I would argue, is represented synecdochically through the prominent presence of Alcan’s aluminum frames and the privilege given in positioning the corporate texts. These components stand for Alcan as a giant corporation with transnational affiliations and activities. So, in this sense, *Voici Alcan* represents at once geographical specificity but also its inverse, vagueness or *not-here*. It is also useful


to observe that a related work by Haacke was acquired by the NGC with the purchase of 
Voici Alcan. *Alcan: Tableau pour la salle du conseil d'administration* [Alcan: Painting for a Boardroom] [fig. 3-3] is an oil painting by Haacke based on a colour photograph of Alcan’s Arvida smelter (so-named after Arthur Vining Davis, first chairman of Alcan) which appeared in the company’s promotional brochure *Voici Alcan.* Haacke later recalled the circumstances of creating this painting:

I painted it after a photograph that I found in an Alcan P.R. pamphlet. It is a cheerful, sunny picture. Into the bright sky I painted a short caption that announces, in a tone of pride, that the workers at Arvida have an opportunity to contract bone fibrosis, respiratory diseases, and cancer. The painting is framed in aluminum siding. Obviously, in all three cases, I chose to paint because the medium as such has a particular meaning. It is almost synonymous with what is popularly viewed as Art—art with a capital A—with all the glory, the piety, and the authority that it commands.

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18 *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, 250-251. This work was also acquired by the National Gallery of Canada, but to my knowledge not displayed with the *Voici Alcan* triptych.

The original photograph from which the painted version is based is an aerial view of the smelter. The painting itself is set into an aluminum frame, so that the total piece both depicts the site of aluminum extraction and its end product. Framed to mimic the typical corporate boardroom painting in its scale, style and banality of vision. In both pieces, Haacke uses irony to draw attention to the specific location and actual appearance of the Alcan plant and thus its particular regional and national significance to Canadians. In addition, the text outlines the physical dangers to which the employees are exposed in their work with carcinogenic and other harmful substances.

Haacke’s work, which reveals the systemic operations of a specific time and geography, invites comparison to a work by his American contemporary, Allan Sekula, entitled Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes (1986). In Sekula’s installation, 79 wall-mounted photographs are arranged in grids, with an accompanying booklet-format text on a nearby reading table. The images depict sites in Ottawa (Parliament Buildings, the Bank of Canada, the National Gallery of Canada) as well as the northern community of Sudbury, the site of Inco, the world’s leading producer of nickel for much of the twentieth century. Sekula presents a critical narrative to point to ways in which the concepts of natural resources and scenic landscape collide, and where

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20 This aerial photograph selected by Haacke (commissioned by Alcan for promotional purposes undoubtedly to emphasize the scale of operations), recalls the elevated view of massive blocks of factories and stockyards selected by Heartfield for his dust jacket design for Der Sumpf, the German edition of Upton Sinclair’s novel The Jungle (discussed in an earlier chapter), and also invites linking to the extensive series of photographic images, or typologies by Conceptual artists Hilla and Bernd Becher of industrial buildings and structures in the Ruhr Valley created between 1968 and 1972.

21 The text (translated in English) reads: Arvida. Alcan Factory at Jonquière in the Saguenay/Work in tank chambers allows workers to contract certain respiratory diseases as well as Osseous Fibrosis. Their risk of cancer increases and it is possible for them to suffer from “plaques de pot”, red spots covering the body.


23 The use of grid format is an oft-used installation format by many post-Conceptual artist/photographers, such as Martha Rosler, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Jan Zimmer, Arnaud Maggs. I read this kind of ordering as a device to invoke the idea of the evidentiary, of rationalism, of the orderly and the objective, even as it is a deliberate manipulation of the work’s reading as such. Also, the weight of each image invites that accrual of a collective proposition. For more analysis of the operations of the grid formation, see Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” October 9 (Summer 1979):50-64, and Sophie Berrebi, The Shape of Evidence. Contemporary Art and the Document (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2014).
Canadian landscape is appropriated for corporate, industrial and government purposes and uncovers this discourse by documenting the site where Canada is represented in various sites.

[figs. 3-4, 3-5] Allan Sekula, images from Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes, 1986
Because the aggregate effect of the work synthesizes Sekula’s microanalysis of specific intersections between landscape, resources and power, it is worth identifying the constellation of references within specific frames. In fig. 3-4, a woman holds a (now obsolete) dollar bill printed with a view of Parliament Hill from the Ottawa River, with the silhouette of the actual Parliament Hill from the same viewpoint visible in the snowstorm. This “doubling” of the seat of Canada’s government is actually “tripled”, as the view printed on the currency is itself derived from a photograph by Malak Karsh (brother of famous portraitist Yousuf Karsh), a point of origin known to many Canadian viewers of Sekula’s work. In this way, I read the image (one fragment of a complex grid) as a pointing to of the connection between the construction of iconic landscape and its multivalent uses: aesthetic, political, and economic.

Another Ottawa landmark is depicted in fig. 3-5, a view of the Bank of Canada, the central currency regulator, located just a few blocks to the west of Parliament Hill. Sekula’s representation of the Bank shows the conflation of two buildings: at the centre, the retrained classicism and muted grey stonework of the original building designed by S.G. Davenport in the late 1930s; and behind this, a 1979 modernist steel-and-glass expansion designed by Arthur Erickson.

Sekula provides image tools by which to consider the systemic interconnections between kinds of systems and currency. The juxtaposition of images in the grid formation create photographic narratives: An image of an Inco smelter in Sudbury, Ontario depicting the extraction and conversion of raw materials is juxtaposed with symbolic representations of nature reconstituted as “Canadian landscape” located on Canadian currency; in the reception room of Eldorado Resources Limited (a uranium mining and processing firm); in the president’s office at the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union Local 598; and at a permanent installation of Canadian landscape painting at the National Gallery of Canada. The examination of these images suggests the systemic nature of corporate and federal management of resource extraction, and the appropriation of “landscape” as an aesthetic concept within this system. Sekula identifies his subject as “late capitalism”, the present economic epoch characterized by the increased invisibility of the mechanisms driven by profit, particularly in the suppression of social and environmental conflict. This dialectic is enhanced in accompanying texts that point to
soothing voices that assure Canadian consumers, concealing the associations underlying the forces of “late capitalism”:

A nostalgic voice recalls the immensity of Canada’s natural wealth. The bourgeoisie hears this whisper absent-mindedly; it knows that this wealth may not even be Canadian. A second whisper is more insistent: ‘Invest abroad, trade freely, you citizens of the world’. Working-class Canadians are encouraged to hear only the first voice, to accept their relative comfort in the world of nations, this wealth that is theirs only in the imagination.24

In his review of Sekula’s installation, Richard Bolton directly refers this work as a speech act, a form of address, and then connects this with commentary on the then-preciousness of photographic film/practice in the pre-digital era, likening the image’s symbolic currency to the early linkage to the photographic image as a bank note produced by nature by Oliver Wendell Holmes in his 1859 essay “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph”25. In Sekula’s project, he “flattens” photographic documentary practice by photographing sites of systems of exchanges, and implicates photographic production “between labour and capital”26: the bank, the office, the office complex garden, the city, the neighbourhood, the factory, the mine. Like Haacke, Sekula uses the photographic image as a form of address to show how these normally invisible systemic connections are actualized in space, as Bolton elaborates, in rhetorical space, transnational space, imaginary space, and the space of the image.27 The space of Canadian landscape and the space of the museum also circulate and intersect in Sekula’s grid installation:

Every social group in Sekula’s analysis has established a museum of some sort. The history of Canadian capitalism is told through the Currency Museum at the bank; the history of Canadian naturalism (and nationalism) can be found at the art museum28; the offices of the union local, and the mine itself, serve as ad hoc museums of labour.29


26 I refer here to Sekula’s essay “Photography between Labour and Capital” in Mining Photographs and Other Pictures, edited by Benjamin Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (Halifax, NS: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), an earlier Canadian-based project by Sekula exploring the intersection of nature, community, labour, capital and photography preserved in the photographic archive of Cape Breton mining town commercial Leslie Shedden.


28 This refers to the National Gallery of Canada, then located within an adapted office building until the completion of Safdie’s new purpose-built gallery: Sekula includes installation views of iconic paintings of Canadian landscape by Group of Seven painters on display.
Us/Not-Us

The works by Haacke and Sekula foreground specific geographical locations around which diverse narrative voices focalize as stakeholders: in the works discussed, the artists foreground the issue of here/not-here, and so too do they invoke the oppositional concept of us/not-us in the positioning of each narrative’s personae—privileged corporate figures juxtaposed with disempowered labourers. In so doing, they also force recognition that here/not-here is also as much about racial distance as it is about geographic distance, as the not-here ultimately is constructed as not-us. In Voici Alcan, this occurs initially through the selection of the three photographs: the black-and-white publicity photographs are protected behind framing glass within the construct of the aluminum window fitting, while the posthumous photograph of is without protective glass, or “exposed”. Haacke’s selection of the three photographs is also suggestive in terms of the possibilities of intertextuality in the genres and themes depicted, as discussed in reference to Martha Rosler’s Bringing the War Home series in the citation of war images from newspapers conflated with photojournalistic depictions of civilians caught in the Vietnam War. As Sophie Berrebi has argued in The Shape of Evidence, the appropriation of the document by contemporary artists is a frequent and integral element of critical strategy, the migration of the evidential into the imaginary. Another instance is the extreme emotion and violence integral to both the operatives of tragic opera and civil rights struggle, although the class differences between the modes (bourgeois/dispossessed) create obviously distinct and perhaps obscene phenomena.

The works by Haacke and Sekula discussed above are designed as systems analyses implicating/exposing the cultural operations of the museum as a subset of the manufacture of economic capital and the exertion of state power. In this context, it is useful to link these two artists to a third contemporary, Conceptual artist Fred Wilson. In the exhibition Mining the Museum held at the Maryland Historical Society in 1993, Wilson interrogates the erasure of histories that can be achieved through the smoothing

29 Gallery text quoted by Bolton, “Notes on…”, 5. Interestingly, neither Sekula or Bolton make reference to Sudbury’s actual museum established in 1964 featuring Inco’s mining story through the perspective of earth sciences and mining experiences.

narrative of curatorial selection. Commissioned by the Society to stage a curatorial intervention, Wilson selected examples from the collection: rather than telling linear story of Black history, he sought to reveal the hidden history and relations of colonization, slavery and abolition. Wilson created new adjacencies between museum artifacts, a decisive move that is, in effect, a three-dimensional montage, such as the “Metalwork 1793-1880” display featuring iron slave shackles in the same display case as ornate silverwork such as pitchers, flacons and teacups. In this way, as Oliver Winchester notes, the museum’s arrangement of a particular set of relations and meanings between objects—in this case, the privilege of one group through the subjugation of another—demands contemplative attention to recognize the previous

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erasure through museological practices in which iron “tools” and silver “decorative arts” would not intersect.32

Wilson’s détournement of the contemplative overturns the visitor’s engagement from reverence for the object to cathartic awareness of the real relations between collections, people and history, and the irreducible link between the aesthetic realm and the political. This recontextualization invites viewer contemplation and opens a new conversation in three ways: excavating the collections to extract the covert presence of racial minorities; planting emotionally explosive historical material to raise consciousness; and finding the reflections of himself within the museum as in “making mine”.33 The disjunction “restores” the actual historical condition of the creation of both kinds of objects, and pivots the perspective of colonial acquisition to acknowledge possessions both material and human. This new narrative also interrogates museum practice by undermining the curatorially forced segregation between objects, here in this instance, the diverse metalworking for the privileged and the enslaved, the utilitarian and the decorative.34

The Torture Aesthetic

The manner of appropriating and displaying Stephen Biko’s post-mortem image points to many paths of exploration. I will discuss the evidentiary function and iconography of the central image firstly, and then explore Haacke’s framing of Biko’s image in the context of historical altarpiece


34 The legacy of trauma and violence in more contemporary systemic racism is the subject of works by Andy Warhol’s Race Riot series (1964). Marcel Broodthaers Le problème noir en Belgique (1963-64). The former example addresses the spectacularization of racism; the latter, like Voici Alcan, between capitalism and racism via the extraction of raw resources and manufactured commodities.
[fig. 3-7a] Hans Haacke, detail of Biko panel, *Voici Alcan*, 1983

[fig. 3-7b] Peter Jordan, autopsy photograph of Stephen Biko, 1977 [licensed for sale through Alamy Photo]
Biko was a leading intellectual, heading the South African Students Organization (SASO), South Africa’s Black Consciousness Movement and an internationally recognized prisoner of the apartheid regime. He was the 46th person to die in custody since detention without trial was legalized in 1963. After 27 days of detention by Security Police in Port Elizabeth, a city 1048 km south of Johannesburg in South Africa’s Eastern Cape Province, Biko was transferred to police custody in Pretoria on September 11, 1977. He was discovered dead, naked and manacled, the following day, September 12. An autopsy was conducted in presence of his family the next day, on September 13.

The photographic representation of Biko’s dead body is somewhat complicated, and is best introduced in three parts:

a) Presumably, first there were photographs taken for evidentiary purposes at the time of Biko’s death by the state’s forensic team.

b) The image that Haacke has incorporated as the centre of his triptych [figs. 3-7a + b] is credited to photojournalist Peter Jordan and appears to have been taken after the body was delivered to the mortuary in Biko’s hometown, the Ginsberg section of King William’s Town (250 km north of Port Elizabeth) for burial. Jordan also photographed the funeral itself, one of the first mass-attended anti-Apartheid


36 For a full account of Biko’s role in the history of apartheid, transition to democracy and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, see South African History Online www.sahistory.org.za. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, launched after South Africa was transformed into a democracy in 1994, brought out further details regarding Biko’s final detention, and the illegal actions of both attending police officers and medical personnel.


37 I have been unable to locate reproduction of or discussion of the original autopsy photos in the Commissions’s review of evidence.
protest events.\(^38\) Jordan’s image(s) also had an evidentiary function, clearly showing Biko’s beaten body and massive head injury contradicting the state’s claim of starvation from a protest food strike as cause of death.

c) There is also a reference to post-mortem images contesting the state’s cause of death pronouncement by Biko’s friend and supporter, white South African journalist Donald Woods (editor of the Daily Dispatch). It is possible that Woods’ Daily Dispatch photographer, Gavin Robson, actually took these photographs.\(^39\)

Regardless of the source of death photos that were ultimately published worldwide, they performed as a visual testimony pointing to the violent death of the activist in the face of the specious claim that Biko had died in jail as the result of his own hunger strike action. The published images catalyzed immediate national and international support of the anti-apartheid movement, and by November 4, 1977, the UN Security Council voted to ban military arms to South Africa as a punitive measure.\(^40\)

Jordan’s image, the one chosen by Haacke, shows Biko “at rest” on a steel morgue gurney with his head supported on a block, the sutures of his autopsy visible running down the centre of his chest. Symbolically, he is shown simultaneously permanently detained and also freed from further harm. Marian Eide discusses Biko’s death and its subsequent representation in popular culture in song, film and stage formats, an iconography of political martyrdom she calls the “torture aesthetic”:

\(^38\) When the image is reproduced in the context of its role as historical document, it is rarely given its original credit (SYGMA/Peter Jordan). If you look for this image today via online search engine, it is readily located in Alamy’s stock photo library and high resolution copies licensed by the photographer can be purchased for as little as $15USD [http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-stev-bikos-body-in-the-ginsberg-section-of-king-williams-town-1977-7454130.html](http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-stev-bikos-body-in-the-ginsberg-section-of-king-williams-town-1977-7454130.html).


Rather than returning the victim helplessly to the traumatic past, the torture aesthetic works on its audiences to produce a shared obligation to a future freed from such violations; in other words, the work of art, through the (perpetual) victim of torture, claims the power to activate an audience’s latent potential for political involvement by raising consciousness, changing attitudes, and creating a sense of belonging to and even responsibility.\(^\text{41}\)

Eide cites intellectual historian Dominick LaCapra’s observation on how the tortured body is transformed into an icon spurring others to moral agency:

Thus, we might distinguish between traumatic time, which requires a perpetual return to the place of suffering in psychological processes of working through traumatic memory, and martyrrological time, which freezes torture in the perpetual present of cultural memory to forecast political possibilities.\(^\text{42}\)

Eide also cites Elaine Scarry’s study entitled *The Body in Pain*, which points to the presence of absence in the representation of torture: while the aftermath of bodily harm may be attentively catalogued, the torture itself is cloaked. The unrepresentable stands in for the incommunicable.\(^\text{43}\)

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\(^\text{43}\) Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). While Scarry and Eide see the artistic re-interpretation of the tortured body as catalytic, W.J.T. Mitchell notes that behind the evidentiary archive is a shadow archive, that of the art historical tradition of aestheticizing domination and torture, a pathos formula indissolubly linked with the glorification of power, and which has inured spectators to the moral horror of what they are seeing. *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the present* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 116. Another entrenched aesthetic tradition is that of portraiture, and in *Cloning Terror*, Mitchell cites a 2004 photographic work by Haacke entitled *Star Gazing*, which addresses and interrogates, the Hooded Man meme, by featuring a man seated for a formal portrait wearing a star-spangled hood over his head. The hood has now replaced the tortured prisoner’s individual physiognomy, and preposterously suggests that the figure has agency in sitting for his own portrait.
Art historians Karen von Veh and Shannon Hill have each written about South African art in the wake of Biko, exploring what Hill refers to as the “metaphoric index of their nation’s sociopolitical pain.” The fact of Biko’s death is due not merely to the fact of his activism in a police state, but to his racial disposition as the politically disenfranchised Black/Other. Through visual representation, the figure of the martyr in the history of Black resistance fuses the private/individual experience of dying with the public/collective experience of political reform. For Black artists working in South Africa in the 1970s, allegory and metaphor were essential codes for critiques against the state.

expressing suffering in the present and the possibility of future redemption. In particular, religious iconography was applied as a vehicle for “struggle” commentaries such as Charles Nkosi’s martyrdom of Black Christ linocut series, which emphasizes the brutalism of bodily wounding as well as pinioned “containment” of the subject. [fig. 3-8] von Veh points out that during the same period leading up to the revocation of apartheid in 1994, White artists were able to be more openly critical, being positioned in relatively safer environments such as universities and art institutions. Paul Stopforth’s scratched wax and graphite drawing Elegy (1980-81) [fig. 3-9] presents Biko’s full corpse as an evanescent medical scan resting on a handled surface, positioning the mutilated corpse in a way that suggests the coroner’s gurney visible in Peter Jordan’s photograph. A field of bright red surrounds the figure, an allusion to bloodshed and violence but also serving to distinguish the figure, making it appear to float. We are invited as privileged witnesses to the miraculous ascent of the martyr’s body, as well as accomplice autopsy examiners of the system Stopforth condemn as “from top to bottom, through and through, sickening, repulsive, and essentially evil.”

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This lamentation for the dead martyr recalls iconographical precedents in the figure of Christ in Andrea Mantegna’s *Lamentation of Christ* (circa 1480). In this scene, the point of view of the beholder regards a foreshortened figure of dead Christ laid out on a marble surface (known as the stone of unction) with Mary, John and Mary Magdalene positioned on the left as weeping mourners. Mantegna presents a harrowing study of trauma showing the puncture wounds of crucifixion with clinical accuracy. In this liminal moment, the figure of Christ transitions from human criminal cadaver to lamented martyr.

Paul Stopforth is also implicated as yet another photographer of Biko’s body, attributing to him pictures that later served as the basis for a series of drawings. This translation of Stopforth’s Biko figure is rendered as an opaque form without realistic scrutiny; the body floating in the crimson composition representing enduring martyrological time. Stopforth’s (unseen) reference photographs are transformed from their potentiality as forensic evidence into the visual imaginary of the artist’s sketchbook. In this way, the image speech act moves from the propulsive immediacy of photojournalism to a meditative high-art requiem inviting aesthetic contemplation. There are no mourners, no threshold moment of identity shifting from active agent to silent martyr. The clinical regard for the open-eyed corpse, alone on the slab, points to the tragedy of human trauma only, and not to posthumous spiritual redemption.

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46 Xolela Mangcu, *Biko: A Life* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 263. Mangcu notes that Stopforth’s photographic documentation depicted how Steve’s body was cut in the process of the autopsy, but in his artistic representation he had sewn it back together to restore his wholeness.

47 His composition featuring the unattended body is finds artistic precedent in Hans Holbein the Younger’s *Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1521-22). Holbein’s work is marked by extremely gruesome realism featuring the body’s emaciation and putrefaction of dead flesh.
The central figure of battered Biko is echoed in a photomontage/collage created six years after Haacke’s *Voici Alcan*. In the work *It Left him Cold – The Death of Steve Biko* (1990), by South African artist Sam Nhlengethwa, the figure of Biko is confined in a “cell” with a single window (and door) onto the world at the back wall\(^{48}\); instead of the frontal antagonism of Heartfield’s radiating manic anger, Biko’s prone body is reposed, his eyes closed, unable to challenge our gaze. It was in this room that Biko was placed on September 6 after 20 days’ detention (naked and manacled) at the nearby Walmer Police Station, and in which during that night, as later established by the proceedings of the

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\(^{48}\) Biko was detained in Port Elizabeth in Room 619 of the Sanlam Building, named after its owner, a big Afrikaans insurance company: the unassuming six-story building was used by Security Police as the site of detention, torture and death of several anti-apartheid activists. In 1997, on the twentieth anniversary of Biko’s death, the building was renamed the Stephen Biko Building, but today stands in disrepair. See *The Art of Truth-Telling about Authoritarian Rule*, edited by Ksenijila Bilbija, Jo Ellen Fair, Cynthia E. Milton and Leigh A. Payne (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 54.
Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Biko’s head was rammed into a wall, whereupon he was left frothing at the mouth manacled to the metal grille of the room’s door.49 Biko’s body is a composite of six postmortem photographs, his portrait face made from clipping and pasting photographs of the head wound area twice to form a fully realized fractured head. 50 Nhlengethwa’s montage strategy conflates the location of Biko’s detention cell (Port Elizabeth) where he was taken on September 6, his last day alive, as well as the site of the autopsy (Pretoria); thus the portrait depicts Biko as both dying and dead.51 The title It Left Him Cold comes from a callous statement made by South Africa’s Minister of Justice, Jimmy Kruger, to the National Party Congress on 14 September, two days after Biko’s death, in which he asserted that Biko had died as a result of a hunger strike: “I am not pleased nor am I sorry. Biko’s death leaves me cold.”52

In the discussion above, I have been addressing the iconographical implications of Voici Alcan’s central “Biko” panel, specifically addressing the representation of Biko’s traumatized body and his pictorial afterlife as martyred figure. I would like to return now to the composition of the whole work as a suspended aluminum triptych in which the image of Biko forms the centre. Haacke’s composition points to both the mundane of contemporary residential window fixtures as well as to the majesty of Renaissance and Baroque altarpieces.


50 Shannen Hill identifies the source as “taken at Biko’s autopsy and reprinted in the popular press” but as I have shown above, there are multiple possible provenances.

51 This emphasis on giving expanded form to the protracted process of cruelty brings to mind Shklovsky’s citation of Tolstoy’s use of defamiliarization: “In the article ‘Ashamed,’ L. Tolstoy enstranges the concept of flogging: ‘People who have broken the law are denuded, thrown down on the floor, and beaten on their backs with sticks,’ and a couple of lines later: ‘lashed across their bare buttocks’.” Viktor Shklovsky, Art, as Device,” [1919], translated and introduced by Alexandra Berlina, Poetics Today 36/3 (September 2014), 163.

In the use of monumental scale, a tripartite field of “panes” occupied by standing figures, and the sequencing of narratival excerpts showing different moments, Voici Alcan can be compared to multi-panel works such as Matthias Grünewald’s Isenheim Altarpiece (ca. 1512-1516).\(^{53}\) The altarpiece structure, carved by Niklaus Hagenauer, is intended to be displayed both with hinged wings closed, and open, to reveal another set of images. There are six painted wings—three on each side. This “modular” design allows the attendant/owner to change the displayed image to suit the

\(^{53}\) A Baroque example of the multi-panel narrative is located in the Lamentation of Christ, also known as the Michielsen Triptych, (1617–1618). This work was not created as an altarpiece, but as an epitaph in honour of Jan Michielsen, an Antwerp merchant who died in 1617. Like the Grünewald polyptych, the Rubens’ example features panels that show different moments in time and space. The disjunction of the narrative in the two historical examples intentionally amplifies the reading of the thematic program of the whole: the aggregation of the whole structures relations between the various meanings in the life and theology of Christ across time and location, linking the infant Jesus with his death and later teachings. See Lynn F. Jacobs, “Rubens and the Northern Past: The Michielsen Triptych and the Thresholds of Modernity,” Art Bulletin 91/3 (September 2009):302-324.
needs of the religious calendar. With all the hinged wings closed, the central panel shows a depict a horrific, night-time Crucifixion, with the tortured and twisted Christ attended by a kneeling Mary Magdalene, Mary comforted by John the Apostle, and, on the right, John the Baptist standing; at his feet a lamb holds a cross.54

The flanking panels depict St. Sebastian, long known as a plague saint because of his body pock ed by arrows, and St. Anthony Abbot, patron saint of those suffering from skin diseases. Commissioned for the hospital chapel of St. Anthony’s Monastery, which tended to sufferers of a painful skin disease popularly known as St. Anthony’s fire—a kind of poisoning (a disease known as ergotism) caused by consuming rye grain infected with fungus—marked by hallucinations, skin infections and spasms of the central nervous system.55 As a tripartite visual representation, the panels, like Haacke’s assemblage, conflate distinct narrative moments with the flanking figures representing third and fourth century CE spatial and temporal points in time.

In this way, the historical altarpiece shares with Haacke’s work the strategy of montage as a conflation of disparate visual and semantic elements, a fact that Haacke consciously pointed to.56 In the case of the historical altarpieces, each panel abuts another, with the frames around the panels marking a threshold between them. These thresholds delineate the container (frame) from the contained (panel), so that there is an ambiguity in attempting to read a continuation of natural spaces across the thresholds: they are neither fully united nor fully divided. As hinged panels, the wings of the

54 http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/famous-paintings/isenheim-altarpiece.htm. If one pair of wings is opened, three scenes of celebration are revealed: the Annunciation, the Angel Concert for Madonna and Child, and the Resurrection. With the second set opened, polychrome sculptures of St. Anthony, St. Jerome and St. Augustine are featured, as well as a picture of St. Anthony with St. Paul the Hermit, and one of St. Anthony Being Assaulted by Demons. A fourth panel, a “plinth” below the upper panels, shows the lamentation of Christ attended by John, Mary and Mary Magdalene.

55 A complete identification of the elements of the work and its contemporaneous symbolism is given in Dr. Sally Hickson’s article “Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece” https://smarthistory.org/grunewald-isenheim-altarpiece/. Of particular pertinence to my discussion of Haacke’s triptych is Hickson’s observation that “the complex program of emphatic physical suffering depicted on the panels was intended to be thaumaturgic (miracle performing), a point of identification for the denizens of the hospital.” (n.p.)

56 Hans Haacke, quoted in “A Conversation with Hans Haacke,” (with interviewers Yve-Alain Bois, Douglas Crimp, and Rosalind Krauss) October 30 (Autumn 1984): 24-48. In this interview, Haacke talks about his stylistic references to historical and avant-garde art as coded elements, as well as the composition of alternpieces and tapestries as formal arrangements.
triptychs (then called “panels with doors”) function as doors that require opening and closing, as do the Alcan aluminum window frames used by Haacke as framing devices. The operations of mammoth scale vis-à-vis the presence of the viewer is also significant. The central panel alone of Isenheim Altarpiece measures 294 x 327 cm; the Michielsen Altarpiece measures 138 x 178 cm when open, making the depicted figures life-size or nearly so, and situated from a dominating height over the viewer.

Haacke arranges the three suspended window frames to juxtapose the image of dead Biko between the animated figures of the opera performers. Here, we could read the thresholds between the images to mark the visual contrast not only between living/dead, but also the implied contrast between loudness and silence. The (non-Black) opera singers are depicted in mid-aria, with open mouths emoting the libretto; by contrast, the horizontal window hinge of the Biko frame is positioned so that it masks the Black activist’s mouth and renders silent the organ that vehemently denounced apartheid. The silence of incarceration without legal representation, of torture and death where no sounds escape, is perversely adjacent to the deafening volume of operatic voices projected to the back of the concert hall, singing in a language that the Canadian audience is unlikely to have mastered. Carrol Clarkson points to modalities of speech acts in a South African context in her review of Mark Sanders’ analysis of testimony given during the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996—1998). Sanders points

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58 Jacobs traces the development of the triptych structure, focusing on Rubens’ altarpiece as an example of a threshold of modernity, a “miraculous threshold” suggesting unification and divisions at one and the same time.

59 Jacobs discusses Renaissance triptych panels as symbolic windows offering visual access to a purported live event, and even the practice of *tableaux vivants* wherein stage set doors opened to reveal living actors, such as that performed for Charles V in Bruges in 1515. See Jacobs, *Opening Doors: The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 7, 11.

to the *different ways of saying* that emerged during the hearings, observing not only *what* was said, but also *how* words were used in disclosures about the operations of apartheid, and the traumatic effects on its victims, such as factual or forensic truth, personal and narrative truth, social truth, and healing and restorative truth, many of which uttered in languages other than English. Haacke’s juxtaposition of silenced and exaggeratedly emotive voices, and of accessible and unfamiliar languages, brings to mind Austin’s consideration of variables in the performance of utterances. Austin is interested in how words produce social effects as deeds through frameworks of social conventions and context (mood, voice, cadence, physical gestures, intensity, circumstances), in other words, the socio-linguistic norms and conventions governing the performance and reception of the speech act. The modes of saying at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings brings to the surface many kinds of utterances such as “truth”, “forgiveness”, “amnesty,” “reconciliation,” and “reparation.”

Opera as a genre is the domain of melodrama and the invitation to lurid spectatorship; the two turbulent operas depicted in *Voici Alcan* concern themes that are not unrelated to the narrative derived from the silence of the death head in the centre of the installation. *Norma*, Bellini’s 1831 tragedy, is the story of a Druidic high priestess scorned by her Gallic husband for a younger woman, and the eventual redemption of all three characters through sacrifice and immolation. *Lucia di Lammermoor*, written by Donizetti and first performed in 1835, instructs its audience in the tragic consequences of illicit love between members of feuding families in Scotland. Interestingly, both of these stories concern Anglo-Saxon cultural codes, and both of their conclusions require the sacrificial death of the female protagonists, portrayed in the respective performance photographs kneeling beneath the dominating presence of their male guardians. In Haacke’s proposition, the transgressive behaviour of Norma and Lucia is eventually silenced through death and resuscitated through martyrdom, as is the transgressive activism of the Black leader who is situated between them. The controlling principles of patriarchy against the dispossessed Other (black/female) are thus tied into the related activities of resource extraction and production of capital, presented in the concrete terms of actual linkages. The texts at the lower portion of each image are now deployed to

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complete the mapping that Haacke seeks: all three texts describe Alcan activities in South Africa that contribute to the erasure of economic or civil freedoms.

Temporality is also represented, as it is in the historical works discussed above that feature different yet very precise moments in the Christological narrative. In my view, Haacke’s choices point to a durational—if not exact equivalency—alignment: the time it takes to stage an opera; the time it takes to extract raw resources and ship them overseas; the time it takes to die in police custody; the time it takes to contemplate a work in the museum.

2. Being Framed: The Museum Stage

In the preceding discussion, I have opened a number of ways of reading the work from inside its own literal aluminum frames, and linked it across artistic practices, past and present. The historical altarpieces not only share a number of important characteristics with Haacke’s composition (such as the presence of flanking figures who are related to, but spatially distinct from, the central image of the dead martyr), they share the appearance of theatrical performances on stage sets in which we are assigned the role of beholders. All are presented in a real space environments that exude both the authority of the powerful (church, museum) and the protection of the vulnerable (traumatized bodies, works of art). In one sense, it is possible to draw upon the structural reference of the historical triptychs discussed above to locate a secular semantic parallel that addresses the viewer: He died for your sins, imbricating us as citizens/consumers into the moral dilemmas presented in the work. It is also possible to construct a reading of the flanking opera figures as grieving mourners of a beloved martyr on a gurney in an autopsy examining room, a clinical setting that could be conflated with the austere white cube of the museum gallery. As an object encountered in real space, Voici Alcan constitutes a complex, layered work that speaks to me beyond the parameters of its frames in powerful ways.

The work was initially displayed as a new acquisition in 1988, showcased as part of the fanfare surrounding the inauguration of a newly completed and celebrated National Gallery of Canada, the nation’s flagship showcase for Canadian and international works of fine art. The contemporary galleries themselves are unremarkable standard rooms in
the white cube format, located on the second (uppermost) level of the NGC. To reach the Canadian galleries, one must physically experience the processional monumentalism intended by the architect, Canada’s Moishe Safdie: a lengthy walk is required from the museum entrance at street level, ascending a concrete walkway through the glass- curtained Colonnade [fig. 3-12a] to the Great Hall and the monumental Roman Steps, the location of the 2013 Nadia Myre beadwork installation discussed in the Introduction. [fig. 3-12b]

[fig. 3-12a] Installation in contemporary galleries (National Gallery of Canada, 1988  
[fig.3-12b] Colonnade leading from street level to the first level of galleries, National Gallery of Canada, 1988

The experience of the museum from the street entrance to the upper contemporary galleries is thus spectacular, ceremonial and beyond human scale through its iterative references to past architecture. In the procession to the foot of Voici Alcan, the viewer is implicated in the ideology of the museum as a vehicle for the transmission of sanctioned culture, aesthetic virtue and, in the case of Canada, its postcolonial maturity as an autonomous nation.
The National Gallery of Canada is not unusual in that it participates in much of the optimistic vision that has shaped the twentieth-century museum based on the conception of the museum space (and by extension, its treasures) as public space held in trust for the entire community, as a separately defined sanctuary that invites contemplation away from the jarring tumult of everyday life. Here, contemplation refers to beholding, the experience of concentrated perceptual and intellectual attention in a collective space. Reflection centres not on ethical considerations but aesthetic judgements apart from life, a dominant practice in museums until the disruption of this cordon sanitaire by the avant-garde at the start of the twentieth century.

In addition to the capacity to encourage visitor participation through mechanisms fostering agency, play and creativity, there is also a trend toward exploring the catalytic effect of emotional engagement. This is the interesting point where Austin’s theory of language use as communication between speaker and hearer, meets the rise of theories of reception and reader/response in the opening new pathways to understanding the effect of works on audience rise of reception theory, moving the addressivity of the work from the limits of its own pictorial space to activation by the audience as a transactional space.

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63 See also J. Falk and L. Dierking’s excellent study Lessons without Limit: How free-choice learning is transforming education (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002).

64 The role of audience was earlier explored in 1898 by Leo Tolstoy, in his collection of essays published as “What is Art? and Essays on Art,” translated by Aylmer Maude (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1938). Tolstoy places emphasis on art as an accessible communication activated by the general public, not restricted only to an educated or elitist class trained to appreciate aesthetics. Of significance to this study, Tolstoy likens visual utterances to rhetorical propositions: “Speech, transmitting the thoughts and experiences of men, serves as a means of union among them, and art acts in a similar manner.... By words a man transmits his thoughts to another, by means of art he transmits his feelings.” (121) The communication is considered to be successful if the spectators or auditors are infected by the feelings with
Jacques Rancière argues aesthetics and politics overlap in their concern for the distribution and sharing out of ideas, abilities, and experiences. The purpose of art is to restore the social bond (inclusion) and to witness what is excluded, arguing *le partage du sensible* (the distribution of the sensible) as a specific mode of experience.65 As Micela Deiana observes, Rancière’s perspective positions emancipation as an *individual* experience, first of all, within the personal perception and enjoyment of artmaking, able to create an interrogative moment that pierces habitual experience.66

Moving from object-centered theory to viewer-centered theory, the notion of the work as a dynamic entity activated by the viewer posits meaning as an interaction between work, stage and beholder as an effect that is experienced.67 The effect of Dada action, as Benjamin still felt it some twenty years after the event, was akin to that of a missile or an instrument of ballistics, “it jolted the viewer, taking on a tactile [*taktisch*] quality”68 leaving the spectator dazed and confused, reeling at the sustained intensity of the visual arrays.


The concept of affect is a cathartic reaction, an intensity of emotional feeling; it can run the gamut from a pleasurable *jouissance*, a sudden orgasmic bliss or shocking outrage. The concept is most closely bound up with the idea of emotional intensity as expressed by Roland Barthes’ term *punctum* (puncture) and, a decade or so earlier, by Lacan as *tuché* (trauma point). Barthes, writing on the viewing of straight photographs in *Camera Lucida*, calls the *punctum* “this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, pierces me.” In his eleventh annual seminar, “The Unconscious and Repetition”, delivered at the École normale supérieure in 1964, Lacan outlines the concept of *tuché* as an unexpected and potentially painful irruption of the Real into the smooth functioning of the unconscious where symbolic order is produced. Hal Foster characterizes this traumatic intervention as “a rupture less in the world than in the subject—between the perception and the consciousness of the subject *touched* by an image.” More recently, Caroline van Eck has traced the history of the cathartic effect of the sublime in oratory and art, noting Longinus’ remark: “A well-timed flash of sublimity shatters everything like a bolt of lightning.” Van Eck examines the term *ekplexis* (to strike, confound, paralyze, or invoke fear, surprise, or amazement) as a phenomenon in which the subject becomes *enthralled*. It is the experience of seeing that produces affect in the audience: “Statues or paintings do not by their vivid lifelikeness miraculously dissolve into the living being they represent. Instead, they excite living beings, and thus recreate not their presence, but the experience of their presence.”

Bal argues that without this profound emotional penetration, the rhetorical address of an intellectual idea (such as argumentation seeking social reform or redress) cannot

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73 Ibid, 3.
take hold. She positions the experience of affect rather than the specific political propositions as the critical component in engaging spectators:

[…] intensity without particularizing expression, so that the viewer can experience the affect on her own terms. Only then can affect be relational, the experience of art subjective, and art still be political. Indeed, by using the medium of affect rather than thematizing affect, [the work] enters the domain of political efficacy.\(^74\)

In this way, Bal maintains, the *event work* must address the viewer in an intensely affective and *visceral* way that brings the viewer into the awareness of his/her political space; it cannot posit a specific political position to be effective.\(^75\) Moreover, as Irit Rogoff stresses, it is the viewer/visitor who is in dynamic movement with the work as installed, whose attention is or is not engaged, and who has the agency to look at, or to look away.\(^76\)

The entirety of my study here examines the validity of this assertion, and the affective implications and limitations of various performative strategies that do, in fact, address real-world issues in a radical way that Jill Bennett terms *practical aesthetics*. For Bennett, the political is not in the theme but the collision point, a means of inhabiting the event’s *affect* produced by the space itself.\(^77\) Affective transactions (between objects in a gallery, between subjects and subjects or between subjects and events) create new spaces that are by definition transdisciplinary.

As Diane Drubay asks provocatively, can we say that “being human” is the new business of museums?\(^78\) Martha Nussbaum, writing in *Upheavals of Thought* offers a


theory of emotions best conceived of as thoughts; fostering emotional connection by focalizing an object can lead to an entirely new way of seeing. This model has been adopted by several institutions, for instance, by the MOMA series Quiet Mornings, held each Wednesday morning where visitors may arrive early for quiet reflection and guided meditation:

[...] we encourage visitors to take time to look slowly, clear your head, silence your phones, and get inspiration for the day and week ahead. From Impressionist canvases to minimalist structures, enjoy the serenity of being surrounded by modern and contemporary artworks during this intimate event. A drop-in meditation space with be provided, with guided meditation sessions [...] 80

There is also an emergent trend to consider the potential of museums to foster happiness. In her book How Art Can Make You Happy, Bridget Watson Payne reframes the lay public’s artgoing experience as one fuelled by (collectively shared) aesthetic or educational objectives to one of a deeply personal therapeutic nature involving introspection and emotional catharsis. Kiersten Latham has a different take on this, asking if we need a positive museology, envisioning a museum environment that fosters joy, compassion, connection, understanding, personal growth, and self-efficacy:

Positive Museology then, focuses on human flourishing in museal contexts, that is, in those spaces and places where humans and objects interact in meaningful ways. Using positive concepts, theories, approaches, applications and intentions, we can work towards making the museum a place for people to flourish, for well-being, mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, resilience, strength of character. 82

While it for now remains unclear how Latham’s conception of positive museology works in practice in terms of museum operations, the function of the museum as a locus for “contemplation and quiet reflection” remains largely intact, while also recognizing its capacity to engage emotions.


80 https://www.moma.org/calendar/programs/77?locale=en


In this space-apart-from-life, there should be no infection in the form of intrusions from *vita activa*, which explains in part why Heartfield’s participation in the 1920 Dada exhibition marks a kind of rupture, an erasure of artificial boundaries keeping art and life in separate realms. Until the democratization of the museum experience beginning in the 1960s83, this contemplation-apart-from-life has belonged to a privileged class, those with the requisite leisure time to engage in non-purposeful viewing; the forming of aesthetic judgement has belonged to a more rarefied subset with a knowledge of art history and the means to access important collections as collector, curator or dealer. The public museum was constituted by its makers (public officials, art experts, trustees and patrons) as a site for the education of the citizens of a democratic society and is designed to function as a mode of education and marker of a “higher” civilization. In this model, the museum is invested with the ambitious ideals inherited from the Enlightenment and the regard for the artist as a special citizen connected to the processes of creativity, imagination and freedom. The powerful mechanisms that ground the authority of the museum are conferred to the objects it has selected, catalogued and displayed. In this model, the very idea of the museum, distinct from the encounter of the contents consigned to it, is positioned as the locus of human self-liberation: as participants, it is where we behold the diversity of the human imagination and bind ourselves as citizens to the larger notion of civilization through our participation in aesthetic contemplation. Above all, in contrast to the relative critical freedom afforded by specific temporary exhibitions, the operations of the museum serve to foreground the authority, and to some degree, the acceptability, of the material culture contained within. Curatorial choices also frame the parameters of interpretation of the works contained therein. For instance, a history or science museum may present objects and works with a great deal of accessible contextualization; most art museums, including the National Gallery of Canada, provide minimal information beyond the artist name, title of the work, date and medium. In the absence of an explanation of what the work is about, and how it relates to its neighbours in the same gallery, is for the beholder to decipher.

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83 One of the most notable champions of the free museum was George Salles, a leading French curator, collector and administrator, whose work was important to Walter Benjamin in the 1930s.
For the visitor, the museum is a place for looking, in a sense apart from the zone within the object frames, a pictorial space. But the place for looking also has other constructions of space that are not necessarily distinct from one another. The museum is an ideological space borne of historical circumstance and present-day institutional practice, as well as a constructed space of social practices. The presentation of political art therefore does not occur in an empty or neutral space, white cube or otherwise, but into a heavily programmed discursive environment, sacralized, David Gopnik suggests, as a sanctuary for plunder or a national mausoleum, and more recently, as a utopian “machine” for public education or consumer mall featuring art and non-art attractions. 84

Other models, such as that advanced by Rancière, position the museum less as a sanctuary or treasure chest and more as a space that promotes self-directed discovery and escape from the requirement of incessant consumption. 85 Claudia Horwitz, during her tenure as director of the Mark Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas, noted the function of space as a secular site for mindfulness and reflection, a space that asks only that you remain quiet, so that experience can unfold without distraction. 86 Douglas Crimp proposes a key characteristic of site-specificity as a transitive event, “a displacement of the viewer’s attention toward the room in which both she and the object occupy. … the viewer confronts her own effort to locate, to place the work and so her own acting out of the gallery’s function as the place for viewing.” 87

I would argue that the museum, in its display of visual discourses ranging from identity politics to ecological activism, transforms the “image act” to cult object, and in so doing re-inscribes these potentially performative images as separate from (real) life, a place to go when we need to be “cleansed”, as the container of ideas that we cherish but do not embody. Such contemporary works are vulnerable to recuperation and re-


presentation within the museum. Here the dangerous tendency on the part of museum operations is to engulf and display the weapon, which is still not the same thing as encountering it, and in so doing, graft the social relevance of the visual utterance onto a renewed societal relevance for the museum. A second danger surfaces which is located in the critical discourse about these intriguing works that we will meet: because of its extra-museal nature, most of the work falls outside the notice of art discourse; because of its visuality, it tends to fall outside the notice of political discourse.

As one of the leading proponents of institutional critique, Haacke points to the role of the museum as a “manager of consciousness,” and its operations contained therein as part of the “consciousness industry.” 88 In this way, the museum is already a political institution; its invitation to invoke consciousness in the contemplation of works on view “is not a pure, independent, value-free entity, evolving according to internal, self-sufficient, and universal rules.” 89 Haacke’s position has been supported by critics such as Rosalyn Deutsche, who holds that museum spaces are sites of cultural privilege that foster the encouragement of contemplation abstracted from historical circumstances, and Benjamin Buchloh, pointing to the “supposedly all-embracing liberalism of high culture institutions and of the market [which] may be far more selective than is generally believed, and that those institutions can be rather rigorous in their secret acts of revenge and clandestine repression.” 90 Haacke himself has stated early in his career: “Artists, as much as their supporters and their enemies, no matter of what ideological coloration, are unwitting partners in the art syndrome and relate to each other dialectically. They

88 Haacke’s own interventions as curator, such as the 1979 resistance project at the van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, and his 1999 critical curatorial project Viewing Matters at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, seek to de-naturalize and expose systemic museum operations. See Viewing Matters (Dusseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1999).

89 Hans Haacke, “All the Arts That’s Fits to Show,” Museums by Artists, edited by Peggy Gale and A.A. Bronson (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983 [1974]), 151-152.

participate jointly in the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work within that frame, set the frame, and are being framed.”

3. Operations of the Contemplative
In his Harvard lectures, John Austin encouraged his audience to think in terms of the circumstances of enactment, the reliance on known conventions, the validity of the person making the utterance, rather than only the literal grammatical construction of propositions. Austin also distinguishes the illocutionary as the force of the speech act, and the perlocutionary as the impact of utterance on the hearer: for instance, “by saying I would shoot him, I was threatening” as distinct from “by saying I would shoot him, I alarmed him (intimidation)”.

Austin also outlines three ways in which speech acts produce an effect on the viewer: first, by securing uptake; secondly, by taking effect; and thirdly, inviting responses.

Austin did not envision the creation or beholding of cultural objects in his concept of speech act, or the museum as a kind of total speech environment. In drawing upon Austin’s delineation of specific speech act functions, I argue for a mode of address that we can term the “contemplative”, and indeed, I would characterize the operations of the contemplative as the most immediately recognizable speech act mode. Works of art are staged in physical spaces where the public is welcomed to voluntarily take a pause from other concerns, to behold images that invite our gaze, to engage in sensory stimulation, to think about the poetic imaginary.

What is the action that contemplating is doing? I will outline the contributions of Hannah Arendt and Ariella Azoulay to this question and consider their views in the context of the spectator’s experience in the museum galleries. In The Human Condition (1958), Hannah Arendt recounts the classical concept of the political public sphere (polis) presented by Plato and Aristotle (a collective space that came to mean more narrowly the sphere of commerce and material distribution after the Enlightenment). In this classical

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91 Hans Haacke, “All the Arts That’s Fits to Show,” Museums by Artists, edited by Peggy Gale and A.A. Bronson (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983 [1974]), 151-152.

92 Austin, 122.

93 Austin, 121.
view, *Vita activa* is where the political and commercial life of the community is transacted, a turbulent and unpredictable realm. The complementary inverse to this is *vita contemplativa*, a philosophical realm apart from action, the life of the mind. This private sphere is the locus of respite from the rigours of public life, the domain of private ethical contemplation.94

From Arendt’s political perspective—also Heartfield’s perspective of the rise of National Socialism in Weimar Germany and the gradual stripping of rights of the Jewish population—*vita contemplativa* is where private reflection and ethical consideration become connected to the responsibilities of citizenship. The space apart from *vita activa* is where we consider our ethical responsibility as citizens, an engagement in critical thinking and awareness that is taken up subsequently by Habermas. Arendt conceives of a public realm constructed as an activity of the imagination and of meaning: it is through our engaged connection to citizenship that we fully realize liberation.95

I would add here that because this definition of *vita contemplativa* is set apart from the functionality of the world in the form of commercial or political transactions, it can be linked to the post-Enlightenment idea of the disinterested nature of art, and the judgement of taste, beholding of aesthetic experience as a part of the cultivated, contemplative life for privileged connoisseur. In this way, Arendt’s political model of the contemplative connects very strongly to one of the historical roles of the museum, namely, as a reflective sanctuary dedicated to *looking at art*, purportedly separate from the utilitarianism of commerce. The strategy of the contemplative as activated within the discourse of the museum is at once a potent tactic and one inherently problematic, as we shall see, because the processes of *framing* and *being framed* are fluid and relational.

The exploration of contemplation of the image as moral activation is explored by Kaja Silverman and Ariella Azoulay (to name two examples), linking the practice of (privileged) aesthetic looking with the direct address of the dispossessed and the subaltern. Silverman positions the term “the productive look” as a kind of juncture

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between Barthian punctum and Lacanian agency to negotiate between the self and the subject: we behold objects in the museum perceptually locating them as such, and also analyze, assimilate, displace or refute what has been presented. Through these stages of perception, conscious realization, unconscious realization, the beholder’s gaze accrues an independent momentum or agency.96

Ariella Azoulay continues along this path, specifically connecting dynamic spectatorship, the act of looking, with engagement in a moral multi-verse that includes the intertwined subject positions of photographer, image referent, and beholder. In The Civil Contract of Photography, Azoulay considers the specific practice of documentary photography in the Middle East, arguing that the image becomes a joint civil space, the meeting point which binds those affected by violence, oppression and injustice to those who can work toward its remediation.97 In this context, Azoulay extends Arendt’s concept of the contemplative in several ways. First, she points out the important distinction between citizens who possess rights and are governed by the state, and non-citizens who are governed but do not have rights.98 Where subjects in front of the journalist’s camera are themselves dispossessed of political citizenship (for instance, a Palestinian refugee, that is to say, a non-citizen), their occupation of visual space asserts their being-ness, their agency.99 (Recall here Sontag’s trenchant observation from On Photography: to photograph is to confer importance upon.100) Viewers of these images behold the existence (literally and politically) of individual non-citizens; they are sutured into a sphere of intertwined visual and moral perception. For Azoulay, to see is to know, a renewed conceptualization of the status of photography and its capacity for truth telling.


97 Ariella Azoulay, The Civil Contract of Photography (Cambridge, MA and New York: Zone Books, 2008). It is worth noting here that the fluidity of terminology across these different discourses (as Bal outlines in Travelling Concepts) can produce confusion. A good example is the term subject in its linguistic (part of grammar that performs the action or acts upon the verb), political (a constructed social entity), and aesthetic senses (the depicted person or topic of a visual work).

98 Azoulay, 17.

99 Azoulay, 130.

The photograph, then, serves to link the seeing and the being-seen, the making of and the viewing of the image, subjects addressing the viewer and the viewer’s acknowledging gaze.

Whereas Arendt allows the operations of art and the gaze to continue residence in the domain of *vita contemplativa*, Silverman considers the gaze as a form of politicity providing agency to the subject, and Azoulay widens the scope further, positioning seeing (looking, watching) to *vita activa* as actions desirable for basic existence, enabling survival and propagation of life. “I claim that the gaze is an indivisible part of it [*vita activa*], of instrumental activity, of the effort to attain goals and objectives, to become more efficient and sophisticated.”101 Beyond basic survival, the gaze is also part the world of knowledge and deployment of action, which Azoulay qualifies as a directed gaze employed by professionals (and here she names physician, artist, photographer, policewoman, architect, seamstress or educator). “The discourse of art is a part of [*vita activa*] and proposes a framework and tools for professional discourse to discuss images, including photographed ones.”102

In Azoulay’s theory of the gaze outlined above, the contemplative links the individual to the collective, and the act of seeing (by the photographer, by the beholder of the image) with social engagement. I see also a link between the contemplative and fostering of political justice: Austin’s speech act distinction between *describing* (constative) and *doing* (illocutionary) calls to mind Emmanuel Levinas’ dyad of *descriptive* (is) versus *prescriptive* (should be) language.103 The notion of the prescriptive itself can have different inferences: for Levinas, the prescriptive is an

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101 Azoulay, “Getting Rid of the Distinction between the Aesthetic and the Political,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 27/7-8 (2010):255. I make the assumption that Azoulay speaks in a universal sense about the primacy of gaze, which I take to be a synonym of Silverman’s “productive look”, and therefore, a scrutinizing contemplation, visual or otherwise, regardless of one’s capacity for literal eyesight.

102 Azoulay, “Getting Rid of the Distinction,” 256. In thinking about the operations of the contemplative as a kind of visual speech act, it is helpful to consider Austin’s principal respondent, John Searle. Searle locates the performative as a theory of language operating *within* a theory of action. Searle is of interest in this discussion not only because he interrogates and expands Austin’s proposal for classification of the *illocutionary* force of utterances (the speaker’s intentionality), but he also addresses the integral role of the *perlocutionary* force (the consequences or effects on the message receiver): “We need to distinguish what a speaker means from certain kinds of effects he intends to produce in his hearers.” Searle, *Speech Acts*, 31.

oppressive “thou shalt” or “should”, a voice of power to the disempowered, an impediment to justice; however, for Lyotard, the prescriptive works as advocacy to change the world, to design justice through for reform.\footnote{Lyotard, in conversation with Jean-Loup Thébaud, \textit{Just Gaming} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).}

By invoking a speaking subject, a set of conventions, a statement and an audience, we can easily see how this framework could be applied to political image acts. At its most fundamental level, I would argue that the contemplative not only activates a relationship between the object and the viewer, but also between the artist as speaking subject and the viewer, and here it is important to make the link between \textit{saying} and \textit{seeing}. Bal, in her essay “Reading Art?” cautions us not to conflate these two terms, but to see the distinct action of the participants in the discourse:

Speech act theory is based on the notion that speaking is an act which has an effect, which can succeed or fail […] The mode of reading images based on speech act theory rests on the assumed analogy between seeing and speaking. In its simple form, this analogy is untenable for two reasons: it conflates different modes of perception without examining the implications of that conflation – thinking and seeing; speaking is hardly an act of perception – and it conflates different subject-positions in relation to acts – visually representing, not seeing, would be an act parallel to speaking.\footnote{Bal, “Reading Art,” \textit{Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts. Feminist Readings}, edited by Griselda Pollock (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 30-31.}

In this sense, contemplating relates strongly to Austin’s notion of the perlocutionary effect on the addressee.

The discussion above explores the contemplative as the meeting of performative speech and activated beholding. This is a good point to consider how Haacke’s oppositional discourse in the museum performs as an instance of the contemplative as it frames, and is framed by, a nexus of cultural operations. As visitors to museums, I would say generally that we enter into designated spaces to look at pictures, and that this act of looking has manifold layers that comprise both general and specific notions of the idea of contemplation. Visitors contemplate pictures (or sculptures, video installations or live performances) in a traditional sense that is \textit{perceptual}, that is, to behold and consider works aesthetically, with seriousness and perhaps with judgement. The constituency of the museum has traditionally been a privileged class enculturated to appreciate the \textit{fine}
arts. This demographic, as Haacke is keenly aware, is likely also accustomed to the key motifs featured in *Voici Alcan*: appreciation of theatre and opera, and of the systemic flow of capital and commodities.

In the case of Haacke’s institutional critique, the museum is literally “containing” the work as a displayed commodity; the work is actively resisting interpretation by pointing to the complicity of cultural operations in political/military operations. Our position standing before a work, such as *Voici Alcan*, activates another sense of contemplation that is *discursive*: by mobilizing the process of framing the image within the second frame (or metaframe) of the museum’s performative stage. Each entity “acts” interpretively in the ideologically charged space: the picture addresses (along with the opinions, knowledge and biases of the artist), the curator stages a performance (the operations of the picture’s display), the spectator beholds (along with her opinions, knowledge and biases).

Museum visitors are the spectators who stand in the crosshairs of these forces, interpellated as both museumgoers, and as consumers. Paul Valéry notes the active nature of contemplation, writing “Here in this room, and because I concentrate on this one thought, the objects about me are as active as the flame of the lamp.” Gabriel Rockhill also addresses the subjective experience of beholding the work, but tilts the emphasis toward the beholder’s awareness of herself in a “force field”, the nexus of interests (aesthetic, cultural, economic and political) that constitute the modern museum. Mark

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107 Gabriel Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art* (New York: Columbia University, 2014), 236. Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes notes in particular innovative thinking at the Van Abbemuseum, “rethinking what a museum is, how it can operate (with whom co-operate) and how it can make stories with the exhibitions, collections and archives that will be revealing not just about the art itself or societal contexts, but interfere in contexts, histories and power structures.” *Writing Art and Creating Back: What Can We Do with Art (History)*, inaugural lecture 537, University of Amsterdam (June 5, 2015). This returns us to my recurring view of photomontage as a specific kind of minor photography. Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes transfers to the study of post-Joycean art the notion of “minor literature”, as theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who compare a minor use of language with that which a minority constructs within the dominant (major) language through three characteristics, namely, the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, *Joyce in Art: Visual Art Inspired by James Joyce* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2004); and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, translated by Dana Polan.
Wollaeger, discussing Haacke in the context of Joycean subversion, argues for the cathartic effect of employing the visual strategies of dominant discourse to produce a kind of minor photography: Haacke’s works, he writes, “jolt the viewer into a heightened awareness of his physical, economic, and ideological entanglement in a network of global relations that converge on the hitherto ‘neutral’ zone of spectatorship.”

I will now turn the discussion from the spatial dimension of the experience of the visitor in the museum to its temporal dimension. Haacke refers to “real time”, a term derived from social science systems analysis: contemplating is not only the viewing of an object, but also the subjective experience of time and space. Bal calls this the political moment, in which the act of contemplation is also one of deceleration, of slowing down time, so that there is awareness of heterochrony, both the present moment, and also the duration. I would like to point to the sense of simultaneity. At the very moment that visitors are engaged in contemplating the work, they are aware of their own bodies in space specifically, and their identity generally. They are perceptually present. The discussion above has pointed to the overt and covert encoding of the museum space, and indeed, this is the focus of Haacke. As Bal has argued, this connection between the work and the viewer dynamically engaged in the space invokes emotional or psychological


“distance” or “proximity”, an “emotional deixis”.\textsuperscript{110} In this mode, the work’s proposition is not perceived cognitively or with a directed aim, but bodily, emotionally, and this idea can be linked back to Austin’s distinction of message/sender/receiver in the speech act: the illocutionary (to produce an effect) and the perlocutionary (the effect on the hearer/ beholder). This liminal moment of now is poised between a memorializing function of the past, and as an emancipatory moment of the future, a place beyond the social injustice of the apartheid system.\textsuperscript{111}

With the contemplation of the work, visitors are also made aware that their existence as singular individuals, and as members of a collective, exists in the same time frame as the proposition on view, namely, the extraction and export of resources, the cultural endeavours supported by corporate funding, the state operations using vehicles manufactured from the raw resources, what Buchloh has called a strategy of factography.\textsuperscript{112} His strategy places the spectator into the real space of the work as an installation, and the real time of the work’s referents to contemporary events (resource extraction, administration of apartheid, corporate sponsorship of opera). In his juxtaposition of side-by-side images, and their textual support, Haacke draws attention to the simultaneity of these things happening in the (near) present of the spectator’s time. As Jill Bennett writes, “politics do not simply inform the exhibition, but are enacted through it at the level of material and sensate processes.”\textsuperscript{113} [emphasis mine] Emilie Sitzia, in her consideration of the evolving role of museums as a public commons, also points to the


\textsuperscript{111}Amy Sodaro’s book. Exhibiting Atrocity. Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence (New Brunswick, Camden and Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018) discusses many issues germane to the consideration of Voici Alcan (albeit a single work) in the context of violence and suppression of human rights, but I see placing the viewer in an immersive experience designed to evoke multiple moments in time as a key linkage.

\textsuperscript{112}Benjamin Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” October 30 (Fall 1984):82-118. Factography as a historically specific Soviet theory and practice is understood an expository mode of writing based on the montage of photographs and text. As a photomontage strategy, its champions argued that it transformed the open-ended “sketch” of semantic possibilities of a single photograph to the fixation and montage of fact. Osip Brik quoted in Leah Dickerman, “The Fact and the Photograph,” October 118 (Fall 2006):132-152.

catalytic role that artworks can play, and proposes how the transfer of knowledge can move beyond (unidirectional) interpretation supplied by experts to (dialogic) self-directed learning by visitors.\textsuperscript{114}

This is one vector, one way of reading the work. It is also true that even though Haacke’s work is rooted in the exploration and consequences of systems and historical specificity, there is also an undeniable materiality and monumentalism to his large-scale work, and in this way he is also one of the early artists to show large-format photography in the museum that “holds the wall” in contemporary galleries, rather than ghettoized limited edition vintage prints shown in smaller photography rooms.\textsuperscript{115} Enter the connoisseur. As Sophie Berrebi notes, the notion of the “vintage” print helped to define and differentiate an authored work from an unprinted negative or later print.\textsuperscript{116} At the same time that photography departments become established in major museums specializing in the acquisition of “pure” historical and contemporary photography as a unique medium, there is competitive acquisition among contemporary curators (and I see the NGC acquisition of Haacke’s work as part of this “get the name” game) for “big pictures” that are considered photo-based more than photo prints. Haacke’s work can in this way be linked to the directorial mode narratives by Duane Michals and Les Krims creating fictions through the appearance of seamless reality, and the dramatic cinematic fabrications of artists of the next generation: Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, the Starn Twins, Joel-Peter Witkin, Gilbert and George, and Barbara Kruger.\textsuperscript{117} While these works proved popular with audiences, in part because of tableau-like settings and accessible content


\textsuperscript{117} Enter the connoisseur. At the same time that photography departments become established in major museums specializing in the acquisition of “pure” historical and contemporary photography as a unique medium, there is competitive acquisition among contemporary curators (and I see the NGC acquisition of Haacke’s work as part of this “get the name” game) for “big pictures” that are considered photo-based more than photo prints.
referencing already-circulating culture, rather than the specific political punctum of Haacke’s speech act, they all perform on the museum stage.

Looking back at Voici Alcan from a distance of more than four decades, I think these concepts of deixis and forcefield are very applicable in the consideration of Haacke’s practice. The imagery and topicality of Voici Alcan invites emotional connection to the presentation of trauma (and its history); his factographic method of recombinant images and texts, referencing both radical avant-garde practice and contemporary social science, prevents the work itself from sliding into a static historical past. The facts and systemic conditions presented in Haacke’s visual speech act persist, even if in other guises118, and the activation by Haacke as the museum’s “manager of consciousness” make us aware of the connective threads between mercantile relationships, political power, and global economies. As Susan Sontag observes, “moral feelings are embedded in history, whose personae are concrete, whose situations are always specific. Thus almost the opposite rule holds true for the use of the photograph to awaken desire and to awaken conscience. The images that mobilize conscience are always linked to a given historical situation.”119

4. A New Context

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Tyson specifically considers Voici Alcan as a printed work reproduced in Benjamin Buchloh’s article “Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason” printed in Art in America (February 1988) and reprinted in Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry. Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975, edited by Buchloh (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000 [1988]), 203-242. He concludes: “Unexpectedly encountering the photo of Biko’s corpse in the art magazine potentially brings the reader from contemplation of aesthetics to politics.” (229) Tyson’s remarks consider the exchange of frameworks in the printed magazine (from aesthetics to politics), in my view, a distinct experience from the gallery encounter of the large-scale suspended work (the conflation of aesthetic and politics).

Chapter 3 The Contemplative 189
In 2013, *Voici Alcan* was loaned by the National Gallery of Canada for inclusion in a major travelling exhibition *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of the Everyday*, organized under the aegis of the International Center for Photography in New York. Curated by Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester, the exhibition and accompanying catalogue presented nearly 500 photographs, films, books, magazines, newspapers, artworks and assorted archival documents covering more than 60 years of photographic and visual production that form part of the historical record of South Africa. The curators assembled images from several photographic practices, and included *Voici Alcan* as part of the historical record examining the operation and dismantling of apartheid. [fig. 3-13]

In this new installation of Haacke’s work, it is possible to see the curators’ choices in the framework of the contemplative as a discursive strategy, albeit through a different lens. In its original presentation in the 1988 National Gallery Canada installation marking the inauguration of the nation’s new flagship art gallery, the work displayed as an example the gallery’s international stature through the acquisition of an important work by one of the leading artists of Institutional Critique. It was also positioned as political speech, an example of the many efforts beyond South Africa’s borders to bring attention to the injustice of the apartheid system, and to point to the complicity of North American corporate interests (and by extension, their shareholders qua citizens) and also the cultural interests implicated in the discourse of the work (the Montreal Opera and the National Gallery of Canada).

In the context of its circulation in the travelling Rise and Fall exhibition, *Voici Alcan* no longer points to the immediacy of contemplation present when created in 1983 and displayed in 1988, that is, as a catalyst for seeing/looking/watching that enjoins citizens of a liberal democracy in recognizing themselves as part of the narrative- part of the problem of apartheid, and its eventual solution. By 2013, the launch of the travelling exhibition, the project of a South African nation transitioning through juridical reform and the reconciliation process was well underway. Rise and Fall was dedicated to a

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constitutive process of assembling a collective memory, and recovery of evidence from the traumatic collective experience. Curators Enwezor and Bester positioned *Voici Alcan* suspended in the centre of one of the exhibition rooms and surrounded by magazine and newspaper articles, and documentary photographs concerning the death of Biko as a pivotal event in the exhibition narrative’s historical timeline.

![Hans Haacke's *Voici Alcan* displayed as part of the travelling exhibition *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 2013](image)

This emplacement strikes me as an important “new move” in the transmedial presentation of Haacke’s work. The focus here is not on Haacke qua artist, but on the dialogue of the component of the montage work with other forms of representation of apartheid, and to a lesser extent, the response of the international community to the crisis of apartheid. In Rory Bester’s catalogue essay, he cites Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” to ask questions about the picturing the everyday as a form of witnessing.\(^\text{121}\) Benjamin stresses the ethical and semantic difficulties in the act of translation (in the context of translation between languages), asking “is a translation

\(^{121}\) Rory Bester, “The Politics and Aesthetics of the Fall of Apartheid,” in *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid Photography*, 508-521.
meant for readers who do not understand the original?" 122 In the context of Rise and Fall, the documentary post-mortem image of Biko printed in newspapers in its mode as photojournalism is “translated” by Haacke from an evidentiary role to one requiring a broader critical framework through which to consider the entire violent project of apartheid. Haacke migrates the circulation of the image from the everyday space of newspapers into contemplative space of poetics. With the shift from present to past time in this instance, there is, I believe, a shift also in how we come to understand the contemplative, transformed from an event of awakening and call to action, as discussed in the work of Rosler and Haacke, to another way of understanding the contemplative, that is, as a mode of slow thought. In contradiction to the constructive nature of political art as a call to action, slow thought is the process of healing the trauma produced by rupture, as Vincenzo Di Nicola argues, whether it resides in an individual or a social body. 123

In this chapter, I have undertaken a close reading of Haacke’s Voici Alcan in order to explore how the operations of the museum intersect with the operations of critical practice. I have proposed the term the contemplative as a performative frame through which to anchor this discussion. I will turn next to consider a specific project by Polish-Canadian artist Krzysztof Wodiczko, examine it as a photo-based montage in both a graphic and filmic sense, and propose the term the interpellative to define the artist’s performative approach working outside the museum in the literal public sphere.
