



Grid



MOIRE

Issue 5

KEN LUM

and space, Across time

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A composition of five pillows sits on the couch. Packed in



plastic and sheltered from light, it had been traveling for a long time. Out in the open, it has a chance to reflect. Settling in but too subtle to make an imprint, it finds a resting spot like the comfort portrayed. Their lines and creases, shadows and shading complement each other as a conversation on relief fluffs into shape. Within these two frames, the grid reveals a technical means of representation while affective methods

of process are uncovered through the soft smudge. 1

The eyes tell of sleep, though the mask could be hiding intentions. As I stand in the room I focus on the mouth—agape—while a slight feeling of uncertainty takes hold. What am I doing here? turns into, What does this pillow want? Aware that this might not be a particularly meaningful question, still, I look closer at the shaggy and green form sitting in the corner and think about how pillows remind me of travel. Like the blue ones purchased in Victoria, the kinds used on planes and the overnight car trip from Toronto. Or the other one given by a friend. And those that just show up unexpectedly to give comfort. But imagining this particular thing in use—perhaps while being cuddled or carried in hand—is difficult. It has an autonomy that asks for nothing. Like a cat. 3



1 – Photograph from spring 2019 of *Study Drawing for Cushion Painting Series*. “Orange Painting with 5 Cushions” by Ken Lum, 1990.

Working as Ken’s research assistant, we came across *Study Drawing* while clearing out his UBC office in spring 2007. This preceded one of many shared experiences and conversations that greatly influenced the way I see and understand images. Our discussion that afternoon considered the practice of translating ideas into both life and art. What has crept along with me after all these years is the significance of looking for nuanced processes of understanding based on a consideration of how something presents itself, instead of how you think it should look. This necessitates a commitment to looking closely, spending time, not accepting what appears at face-value. In short, a critical eye that opens space to consider something on its own terms. An eye that does not itself seek to reduce, but rather, seeks traces of reductive apprehension.

2 – Photograph by Ken Lum from 16 September 2009.

In the fall of 2009 Ken visited Beijing to install his work at Arrow Factory. (<http://www.artlinkart.com/en/exhibition/overview/a19awBtm>). Over the weekend of September 16, Ken made a trip to our home in Tuan Li—a smallish rural compound surrounded by a mix of agriculture and industrial land. We went out that first night in an open-air bus to Tongzhou, an eastern suburb. A meandering walk ended at dusk and was followed by delicious Xingjian food at a lively local restaurant. The way home was dark—in both the bus and on the streets—yet comfortable, with a warm breeze and the energy of autumn. The next morning, we went to the nearby outdoor market, sampling street food on our way, passing many vendors selling their wares. Ken borrowed a small digital camera and took some pictures while we walked. Additional images are included in the following interview.

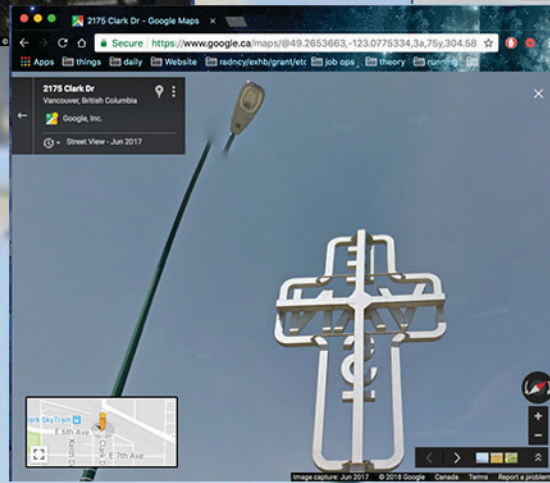
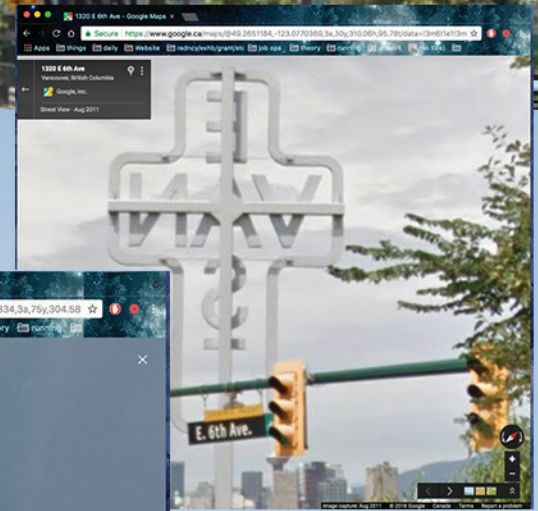
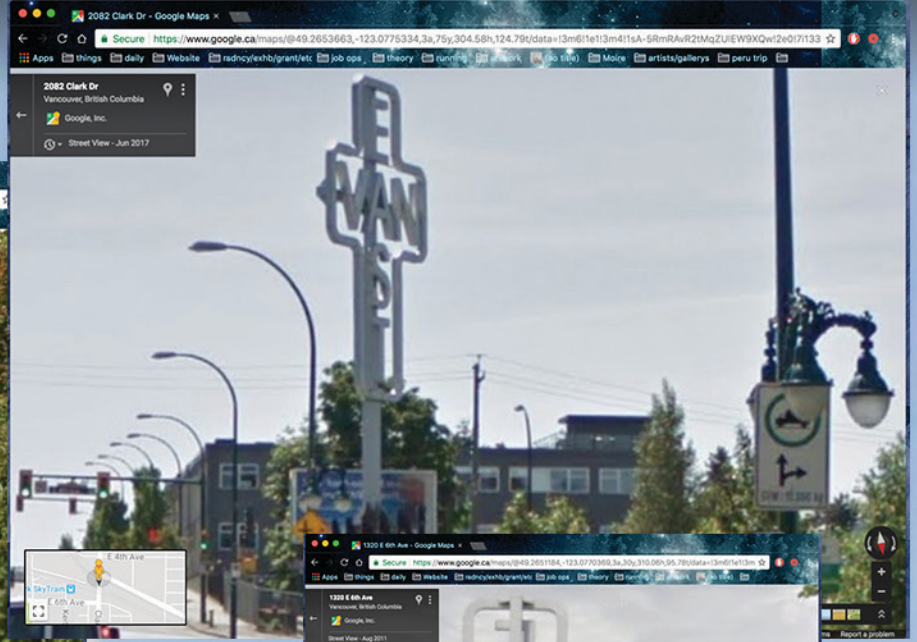
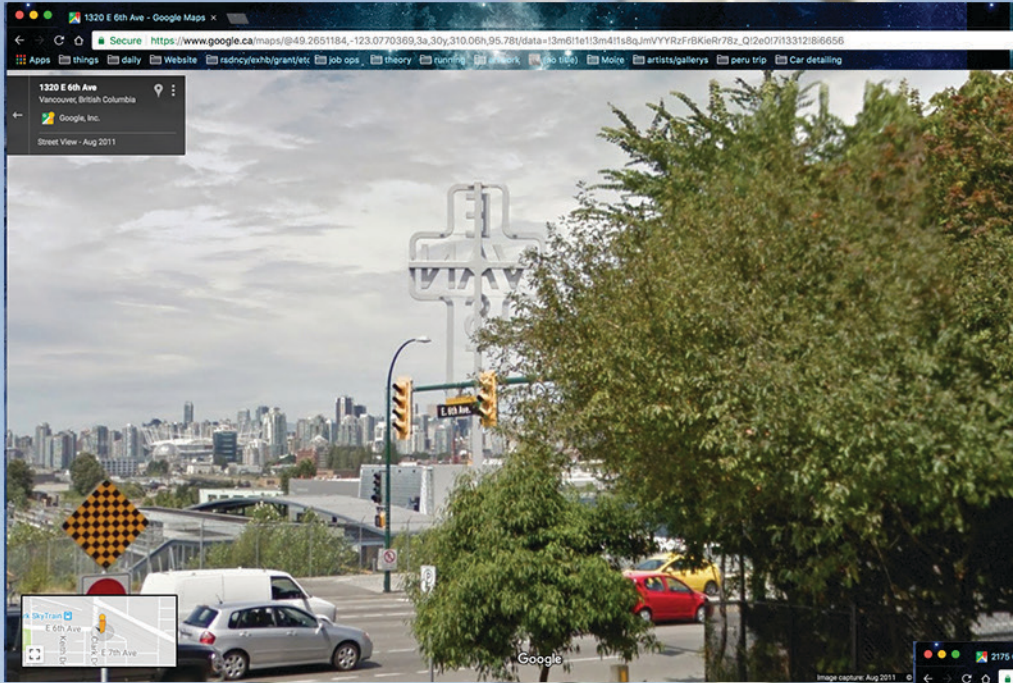
How it got there no one quite remembers. The water leaking into its shadow suggests a pose solidified into a fixture. Modestly comfortable with a slight slouch and sag, the discrete stains appear essential to its character. Despite an unassuming pretence, it facilitates a place of assembly for disparate entities. Some companions, like the one with wheels, are less likely to stick around, while others stand firmly by its side. 2

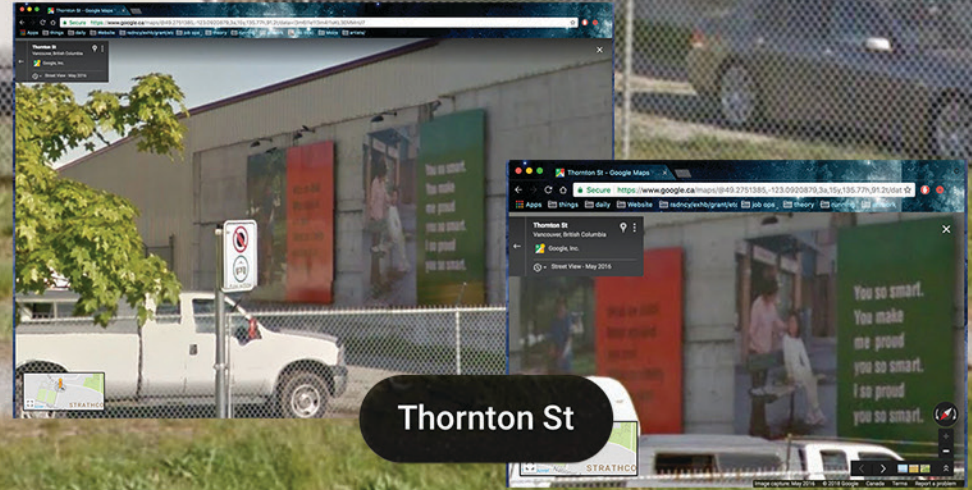
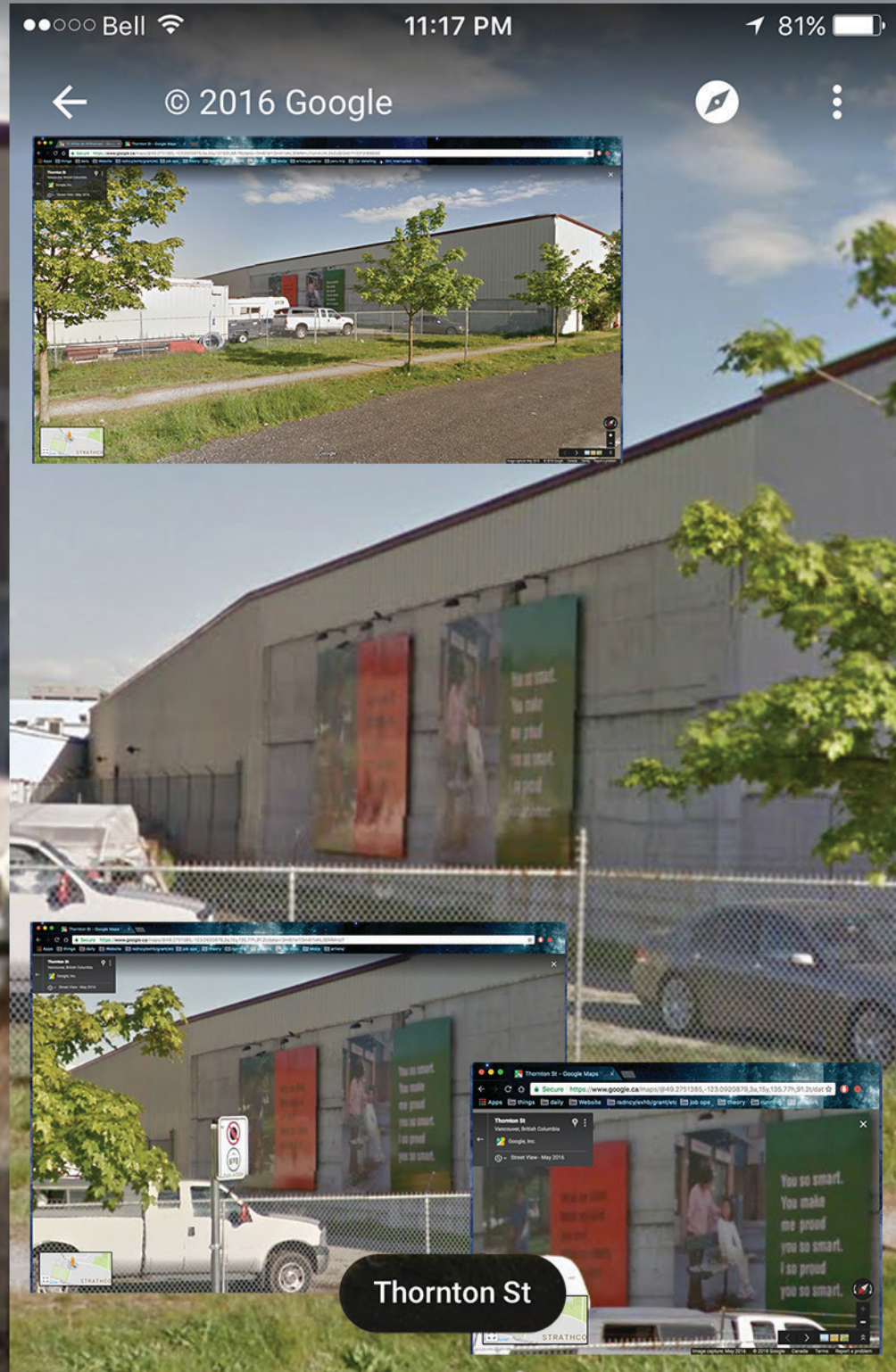
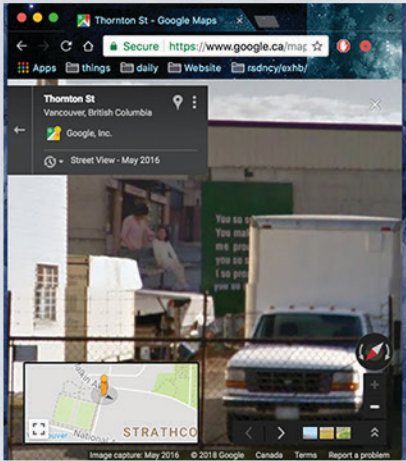


Within Ken Lum’s work the personal and the public open up as entwined fields. By calling attention to moments of social encounter, his practice engages the ways in which images and identity co-develop. Realities are shaped by socio-political factors and particular economies of means. However, through mobilizing hidden, obscured, partially revealed, and dislocated subject positions, the unstable nature of ontology is disclosed. At times uncomfortable, yet always moving, Lum asks us to imagine subjectivities outside ourselves.

3 – Photograph from 4 December 2016.

Early one morning, coffee in hand, I found myself in a somewhat empty room, staring at a pillow. What a strange pillow! I thought. Wandering, my mind considered its position in Ken’s Philadelphia home that I was visiting for the weekend. As a personal reference, it was reflective of an ever growing understanding of the various qualities of generosity, expectations, and difficulties that context can pose. There are many positions we must move between, especially in the visual arts where the personal, the public, and the professional habitually fluctuate.





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Written by May Chew

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The singularly strange exercise of attempting to write about an artist and their work is one that asks the writer to research, analyze, interpret, but also scavenge, weave, and conjecture. Ideally, the writer starts from a place of being moved by the artist’s work, which compels her—hopefully—to maneuver clumsily toward eventual understanding. But, in the writing, she might admittedly devise small fictions or build bridges from her own narrative preoccupations, pains, and blindspots.

What follows are four provisional entry points into Ken Lum’s work.

+ Landscape +

One is struck by how much of Lum’s work centres on making visible histories that have so long been marginalized and occluded. His is a kind of archaeology that dredges up variously obscured narratives, and ensconces them in public space as a way to usher them into public consciousness. *Four Boats Stranded: Red and Yellow, Black and White* (2001) is most indicative of this. The installation features four boats set on the parapet of the neoclassical former courthouse that now houses the Vancouver Art Gallery. There is a First Nations longboat (in red); the 1990s Chinese cargo ship which brought migrants over from Fujian Province (in yellow); the Komagata Maru whose Punjabi passengers were turned away from Vancouver in 1914 (in black); and Captain George Vancouver’s HMS Discovery (in white). Pointing north, south, east and west, these nautical vessels are meant as “directional markers”¹ that invite audiences to (re-)orient themselves in relation to canonic history. They also inscribe Indigenous and racialized histories (back) onto white civic spaces, stitching the idea of fractured arrivals, diaspora, and in/hospitalities into the fabric of the colonial imaginary.

Lum’s childhood neighbourhood of East Vancouver can be seen as a psychic or terrestrial lodestone for many of his pieces. One of his most iconic works, *Monument to East Vancouver* (2010), is a 17.4 metre sculpture of the words “East” and “Van” spelled out in white LEDs in a cross formation. It sits at the periphery of East Vancouver, but is positioned such that it faces the city’s downtown core, in a pointed remark on the city’s class divisions. With this piece, Lum takes a somewhat ubiquitous but free-floating signifier—for locals, the East

Van Cross is a recognizable vernacular emblem—and accords it permanent roots in place. In the dark, the sign lights up, becoming a glowing semaphore in the night, marking this neighbourhood, and also directing the city's attention to a fragment of itself that had in many ways been shunned or overlooked. Apparent in Lum's work is an interest in contending with marginality, which he has spoken about in context with his upbringing in East Vancouver, and also as a child of Chinese immigrants to Canada.

The paradox of un/belonging—especially through artistic assertions of territorial grounding—for diasporic Canadians becomes considerably more fraught when one considers the complexities of how home can be made on Indigenous lands. Lum's work dwells exactly in the impasse that marks the impossibility of making-home. As such, his art also confronts issues around gentrification, and the more recent economizations of land through the global real estate market. *Vancouver Especially* (2015) and *from shangri-la to shangri-la* (2010) force audiences to think about the ever-shifting understandings, uses, and abuses of land from indigenous history, through to the current revitalizations and re-economizations spurred through transnational flows of capital. In this way, we as audiences are also forced to examine our own situations in, and complicities with, these entangled strata.

*It is through art that I am constantly challenged to understand the world and my place within it, even if that place is one that I am not entirely at home in.*²

+ Language +

A demonstrable fascination with language—its forms, ambiguities, and fallibilities—is a traceable throughline in Lum's life and work. Growing up in Vancouver's Chinatown, Lum spoke only Cantonese with his family at home, and did not learn English until he entered school in the first grade. He has previously recounted the trauma of this experience.³ Cultural critic Rey Chow writes of those who have been subjected to colonial education: "the colonized is much closer to the truth of the mediated and divisive character of all linguistic communication."⁴

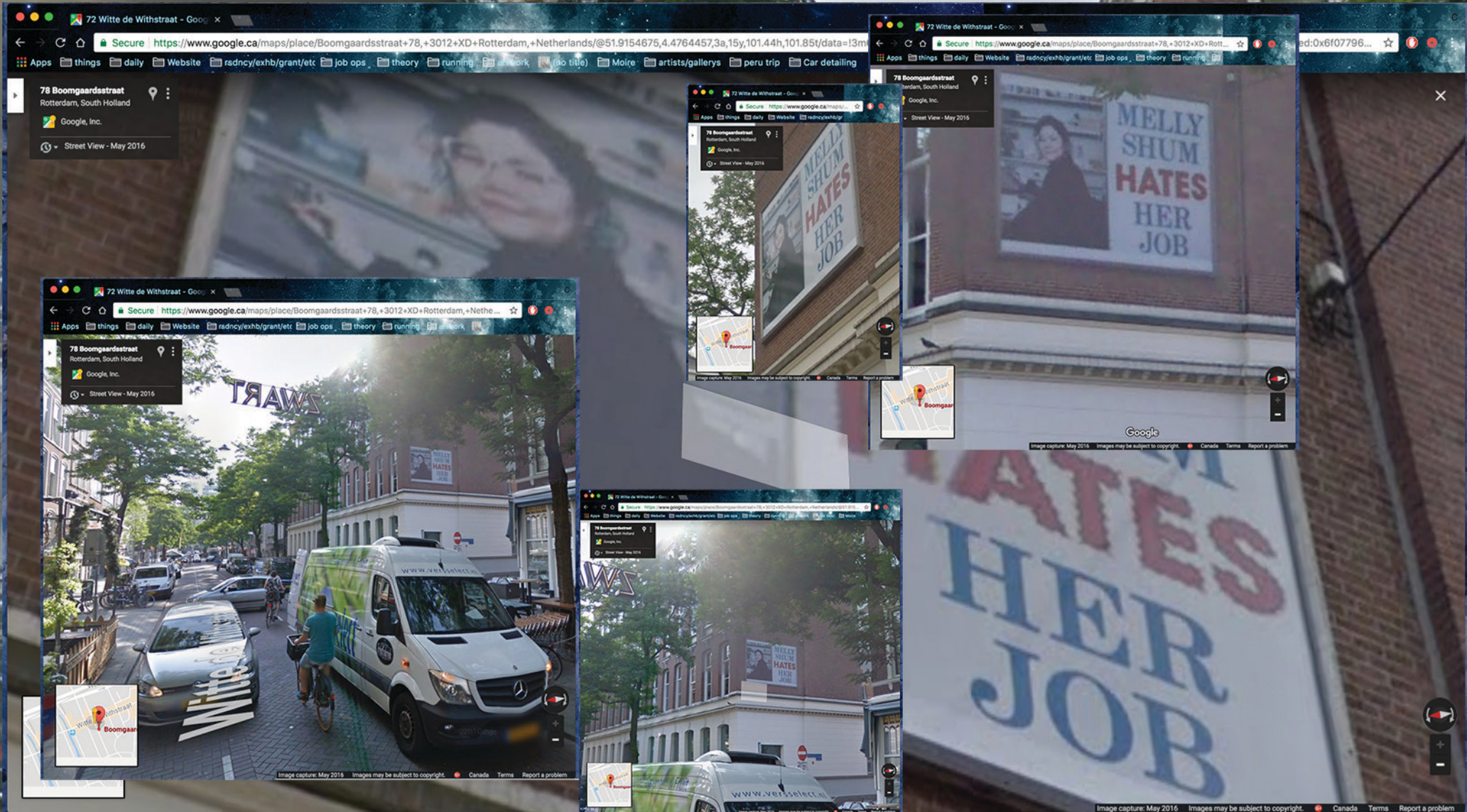
Being caught between unequal languages, and being alienated from the linguistic—and thus cultural—codes of a dominant community, can in turn grant one an intimacy with the shadows, slippages, and contradictions inherent in all language. This early jolt of linguistic estrangement, and the understanding of the importance of language in one's inclusion into, or exclusion from, an imagined community, might explain Lum's decades-long commitment to deconstructionist interrogations of language and meaning, and his sustained experiments with signs, semantics, and language. These experiments linger on the uncanny impression that there is always something alien lurking in the language.

Rather than offer straightforward relationships and narrative resolutions, Lum's photo-text works play on audiences' assumptions and expectations. *Shopkeepers Series*, for instance, marshals often suppressed discursive contradictions to the surface of the image. Lum's teasing out of the aporiac element in the text/image isn't steered by the nihilistic aim to obliterate meaning. Instead, it complicates the representational plane in complex and generative ways, such that the disjunction between text, graphics, and images multiplies and extends—rather than collapses—the diegetic possibilities of the work.

Another fascinating aspect of his work is that, like the most successful iterations of public art, they also turn urban spaces into unfinished dialogues. This is especially evidenced by his recent *Monument Lab* project in Philadelphia, which invited Philadelphians to (re)imagine the function and purpose of the monument, and how public art can give shape to civic life. Space becomes not merely a terrain that invites conversation and linguistic play; it is also a process activated in and through public intercourse—messy and unresolved as the latter might be.

+ Labour +

Labour and work are crucial touchstones in Lum's practice, most apparently in *Phew, I'm Tired* (1994); the *Necrology series*; and *Melly Shum hates her Job* (1990). The latter was initially a temporary billboard placed outside the Witte de With Center for Contemporary



72 Witte de Withstraat - Google
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78 Boomgaardsstraat
Rotterdam, South Holland
Google, Inc.
Street View - May 2016

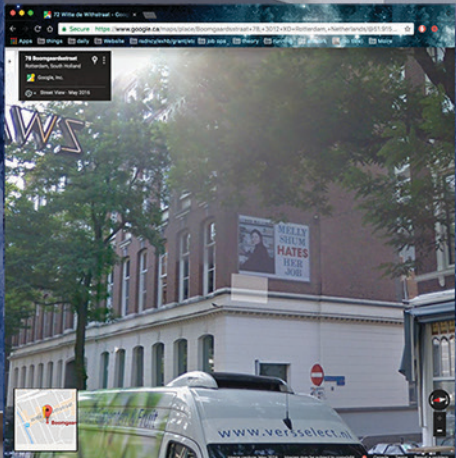
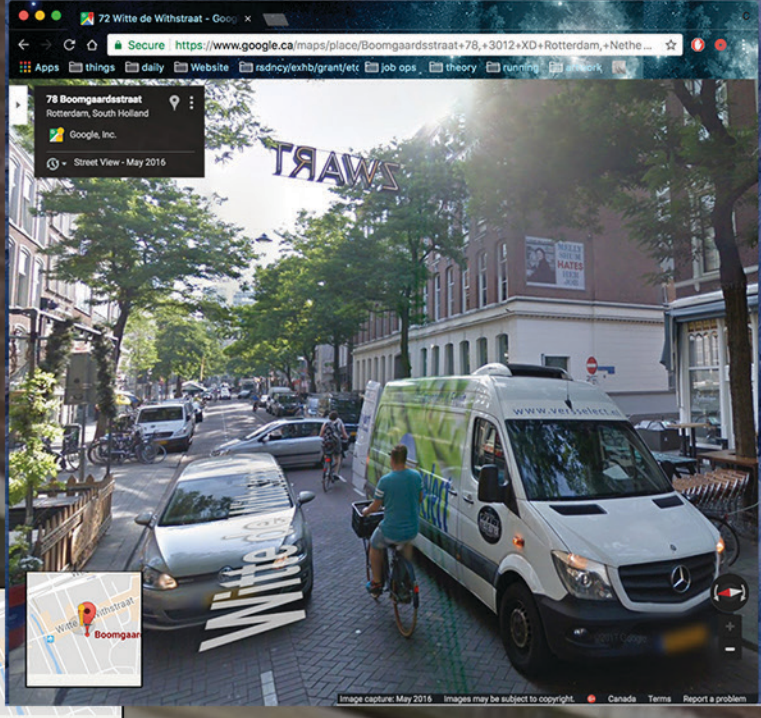
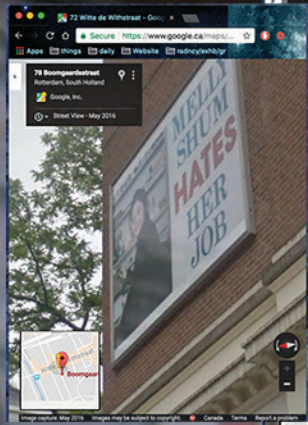


Image capture: May 2016. Images may be subject to copyright. Canada Terms Report a problem

Image capture: May 2016. Images may be subject to copyright. Canada Terms Report a problem

Art in Rotterdam to advertise Lum's show at the museum. The image portion of the diptych features a bespectacled young Asian woman—whom we assume to be Melly—seated at a desk in a somewhat disorganized office. She is smiling at the camera. However, the caption next to the image reads, "MELLY SHUM HATES HER JOB," with "HATES" emphasized in red, wavy font. Civilians in Rotterdam walking by the piece every day grew so attached to Melly's public declaration of workplace discontentment that when the piece was eventually taken down, the museum received a small avalanche of requests for her return. The museum decided afterwards to make Melly a permanent fixture.

Lum has explained that his interest in issues of labour stem from his family's early experience in their working class neighbourhood. As a teenager, his grandfather migrated from China to Vancouver, where he became a labourer for the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1908, before being employed by the Second Hotel Vancouver and Only Seafood restaurant, two Vancouver institutions. His grandmother toiled as a garment worker in a Chinatown sweatshop when she immigrated to New York from China in the 1960s, while his mother, Jane, was a sweatshop worker who died of Benzene exposure when Lum was in his twenties. Lum wove his mother's experience into one of the narrative threads in his *Necrology* series. Lum's practice prods audiences to think about the kinds of bodies that are typically tasked with absorbing the pains and injuries required to keep the well-oiled machine of market-driven liberal multiculturalism happily churning. Similarly, we are encouraged to think about how creative cities, sustained through the exploitation of cheap, often racialized labour, mask their economies of violence through hyperbolic appeals to the "good life."⁵

Interestingly, Lum's own foray into the art world was a decidedly working class one. He learned the crafts of sign painting and clay modelling from a stevedore who lived nearby in his East Vancouver neighbourhood. As young as eight, Lum served as an assistant to his mentor, painting signs for local shops and businesses. Demonstrating an early knack for figurative work, he also worked for the Provincial Government to produce flora and fauna ink drawings as a high school student. Lum's first encounter with contemporary art wasn't until his final

year of undergrad study in Chemistry when, wanting to branch out, he enrolled in an art class taught by a young Jeff Wall. The experience was transformative, although Lum was at first scandalized by transgressive declarations of what contemporary art could be and do. The supposed frictions between 'high' and 'low' art continue to animate his work.

+ Love +

Lum's work compels unblinking confrontations with race, class, and colonial history. One exemplary work is *There is no place like home*, which was installed on the façade of the Kunsthalle Vienna between 2000-2001. It was arranged in a grid with six large-scale, 54m x 10m billboards, and included portraits of people with accompanying captions about home. In one panel, an angry white man with a clenched fist is presented alongside text that reads, "Go back to where you come from! Why don't you go home?" In another, a brown woman in head covering is shown with the adjacent text reading, "I'm never made to feel at home here / I don't feel at home here." There is also a smiling white woman, presented with the text, "Wow, I really like it here / I don't think I ever want to go home!" Lum conceived this work in response to the rise of far right parties in Austria and other European countries. Originally presented as a proposal for a public art billboard commission in Vienna, it was rejected by conservative city officials, but was subsequently developed as a Museum in Progress initiative. Along with the billboards, *There is no place like home* was simultaneously featured in multi-page spreads in the Austrian daily, *Der Standard*, and projected in trains and stations throughout Vienna. It later travelled to other sites around the world, including the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography in Ottawa, where it included texts in both French and English. The work calls into question prevailing myths around home and belonging. It does so by surfacing the unsavory affects—aversion, fear, hatred—enfolded into Western nations' ideas about identity and citizenship and, subsequently, spilling these dissonances out into urban thoroughfares and other public spaces, where they ripple the placid veneer of multicultural politesse.

This attention paid to the margins in much of Lum's art is a kind of a labour of love in itself, a gesture to his own upbringing, familial history,

as well as early awareness of his alienation from venerated discourses and images of nation. Some of these ironic contentions with official imagery are depicted in works like *Mounties & Indians* (1989) and *Mohammad and the Totems* (1991), which illustrate how Lum's work can be seen as a constant and inopportune turning of the soil of national narratives to expose the insufficiencies of long-standing structures. Liberal multiculturalist discourse is most comfortable with conciliatory narratives about immigrant success, whose ultimate premise rests on the benevolence of the colonial state and its assumptions around progress and modernity. Lum's work points to the fact that there are still litanies of hidden and inconvenient tales to be told about the spaces we live, love, and labour in. His practice stirs up the supposedly dormant ghosts and traumas that we inherit as settlers, traumas that are written into our spatial fabrics.

This said, Lum's art does not treat difference as sacrosanct, but presents it as remarkably banal. Race and class become taken-for-granted "problematics" that surface the quotidian violences of everyday life, rather than things to consume, fetishize, or transmogrify. Identity also becomes a question posed, rather than a conclusion landed. The mundanity of difference in turn exposes that a certain amount of minstrelsy is otherwise demanded from the kind of multiculturalism that purports to love the other. In Lum's work, we can figure love as the artist turning to peripheries as places of value and meaning. It is an intending-towards the other that does not fetishize alterity, but holds difference as an ultimately banal, matter-of-fact presence sutured onto the collective landscape. This is love that unsettles rather than consolidates, love that flouts utopia for an ethos of relationality that admits violence, pain, skeletons.

+ + +

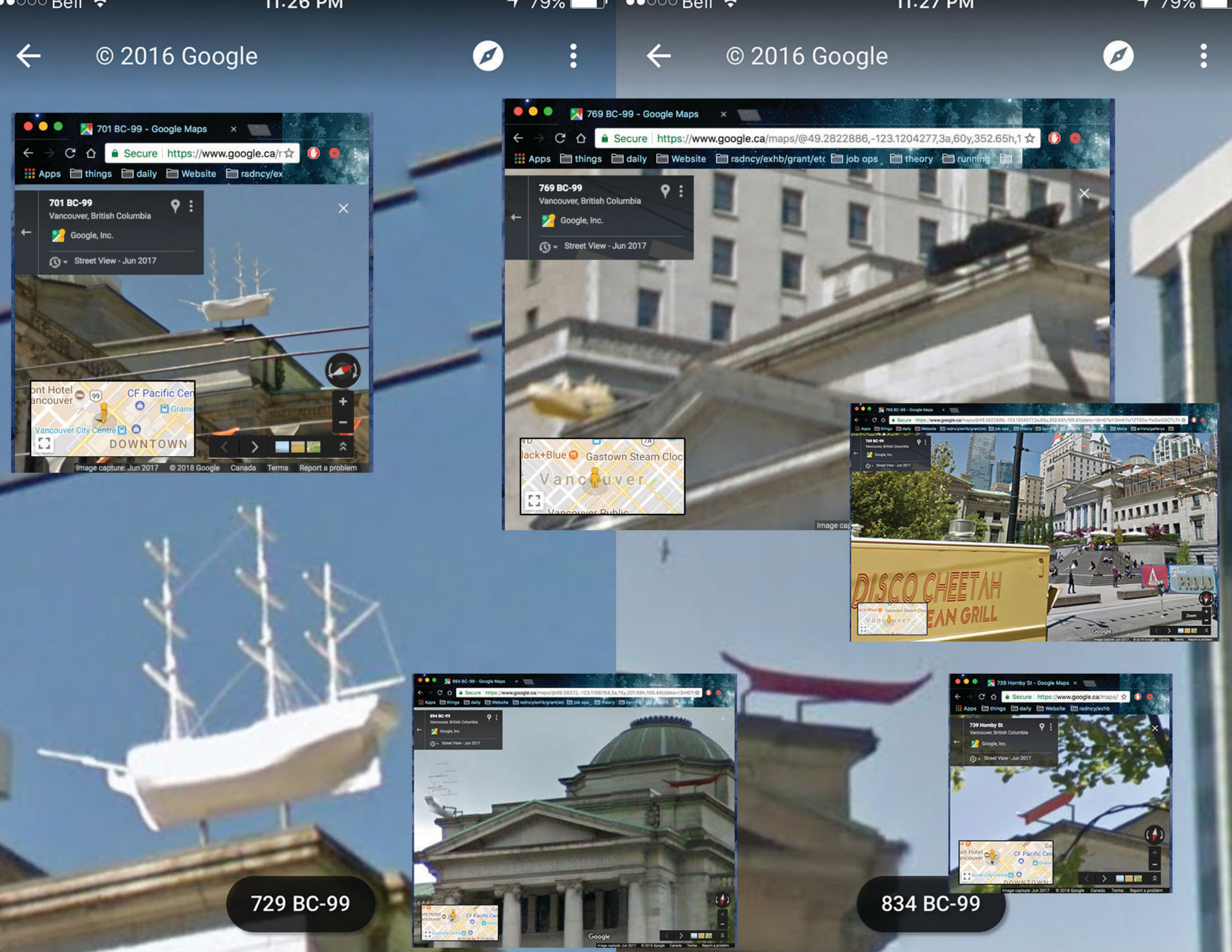
The role of (auto)biography when considering an artist's motivations no doubt deserves critical attention. It is usually marginalized artists who are asked to make their autoethnographic declarations available for public consumption. In other words, while some are expected to tether their artistic practice to a confessional biography that enunciates their difference, others' claims to creative genius are allowed to remain

unrestrained by biography. However, Lum's attention to the ways in which personal and cultural histories are woven into the work wears away at the fantasy that art exists separate from private and cultural contexts. Lum himself has also remarked that his family's story exemplifies the ways in which the fraughtness of multicultural politics play out directly on the body. Indeed, telling parts of this story functions as a significant act of political indictment that bares the scars of history upon the skin.

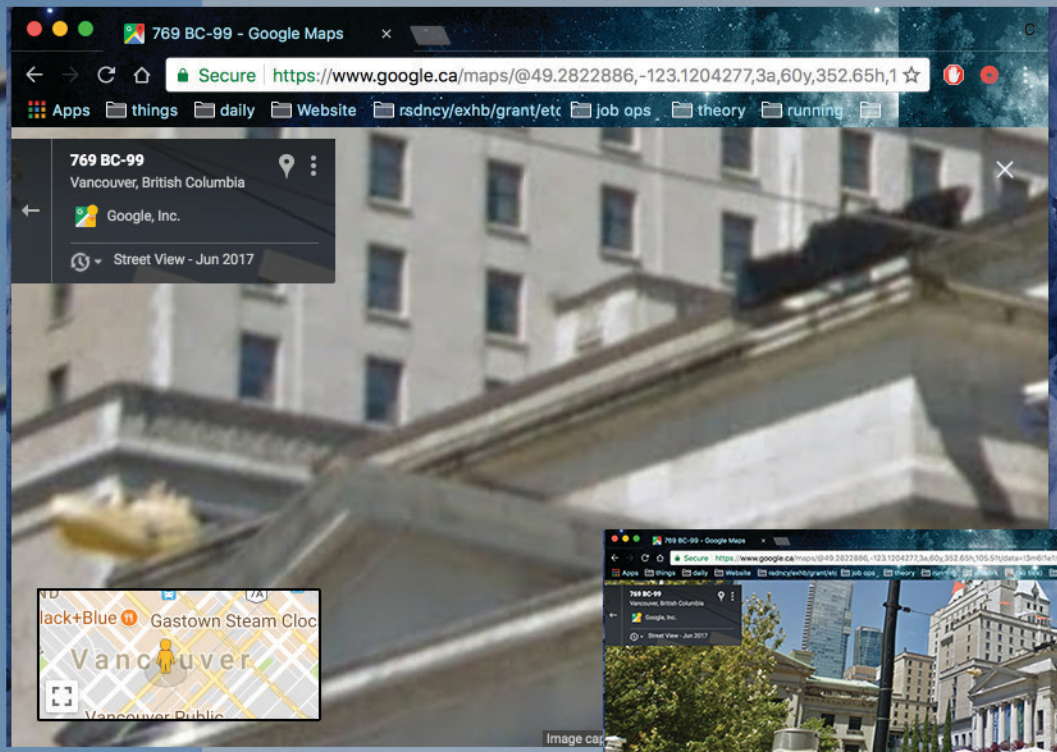
Avery Gordon has written that haunting, as a sociological concept, "thickens" social life by pointing to the presences which are written over and repressed.⁶ Lum's work, in a kindred way, densifies landscape, language, labour, and love, presenting them as replete with bodies and histories that have been previously omitted. He reminds us of shadowed histories terrestrially inscribed, of dominant languages beset by their own unravellings, of supposedly civil spaces haunted by undecidedly uncivil economies of material exploitation, and of love predicated on elisions of strange others (and ultimately, the strangeness in our selves).

NOTES

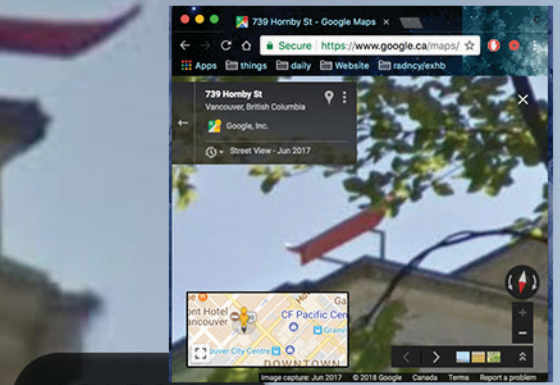
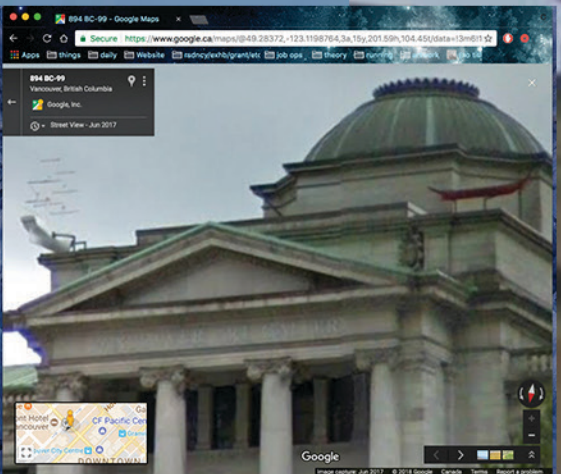
- ¹ Ken Lum, "Identity Politics is dead. Long live identity politics!" (Lecture, Daniels Faculty's Master of Visual Studies Proseminar, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, 19 October 2017). Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-0z-icBTtE>.
- ² Ken Lum, "Canada vs the USA." *Ken Lum* website. Accessed 2 June 2018. <http://www.kenlumart.com/canada-vs-the-usa/>.
- ³ Ken Lum, "Identity Politics."
- ⁴ Rey Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Language as a Postcolonial Experience* (Columbia University Press, 2014).
- ⁵ See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).
- ⁶ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997).



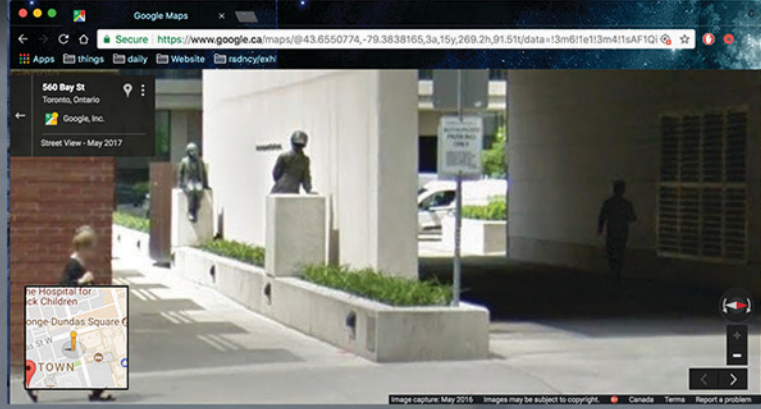
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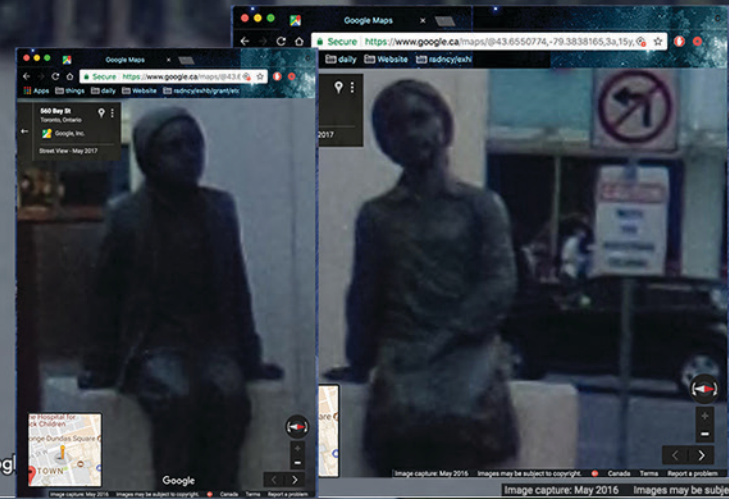
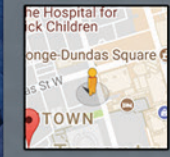
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560 Bay St
Toronto, Ontario
Google, Inc.
Street View - May 2017



Across time and space,



KEN, IN CORRESPONDENCE

Ken,


A proposal and an explanation. The ensuing questions are the result of extended conversations between Moire's collaborators and yourself. We ask that you write your answers, questions, and comments directly inside the text using a font of your choice.

Will do.

Since we began discussing this extended project, my life has been punctuated by a series of hurdles. Importantly, my mother's slow departure that culminated in June and previously, during a sweep of pneumonia, my father's death in March. But also a decision to pursue doctoral studies with the accompanying applications; the spring spent teaching a course that circled writings by Heidegger, Agamben, Scarry, and Uexküll that teased the difference between *umwelten* and *umgebungen*; and an extended period coasting Vancouver Island.

I refer to these events not as solicitation for sympathy or exemption, but rather as a method of situation. Because, throughout this period, I have often returned to a late night exchange over tea where you explained how your work continually attempts to imagine the subject positions of others.* Perhaps to demonstrate to your viewers a way to do this work for themselves? At a time in my life when the artworld seems particularly frivolous, I am struck by the proposed utility of your practice. I am relieved by its potential efficacy. However, I am made self-conscious by this (potentially, naive) interpretation.


Our parents could be described as a consummate example of 'the other'—screens on which to project a fundamental set of emotions, love-fear-admiration-hope-hate. As such, they remain absurdly unknowable. And yet, despite the fact that we understand this chasm, we keep trying to imagine who they are, who they were. I am interested in this fundamental gap between knowing and imagining. What role does imagination play within epistemology? Does it offer an opening, or a bridge, that other forms of understanding—like analysis—deny?



What role does the imagination play in terms of knowledge production? Without the capacity to imagine, there would be no human development. All experience is rooted in the imagination in the sense that we draw lessons from what we experience in terms of what we felt and sensed and what we imagine to be otherwise of what was experienced. The imagination is in everything we are as humans. I'm rather struck by your comments about your parents which I am very sorry also the sad news of their passing. I have children and I am always struck by how my children will act in certain ways that recall traits of mine and at other times traits of my wife or their mother. I am also struck by how they are neither of their parents. In my daughter, I can see traits of my grandmother and my wife can see in her traits of her grandfather. I can imagine how every human being extends backwards to the dawn of humanity and that I think is a profound thought to always hold, however obvious such a thought may be.

While you often describe personal experience in your writing and lectures—for example, the story of your grandmother finding her way to an important opening in New York is ever prescient—your work has, for the most part, occluded direct reference. Nevertheless, you mentioned a new public work that will feature a 3D rendering of a photograph of your mother as a young woman. Does this explicit representation mark a difference? If so, what initiated its incursion? Was it precipitated by your recent sculptural project depicting concealed figures of Philadelphia's historical development? To my mind, these works stand out as 'actual' portraits in contrast to the hypothetical portraits of your influential "Shopkeeper" and "Portrait-Logo" series.

You're right, I have been very reluctant to avoid any direct reference to my biography in my work. And the proposal you cite regarding my mother was a proposal I tussled with a long time. No matter. The proposal along with all other outdoor proposals by many other artists were nixed due to budgetary cutbacks by Museum M+ of Hong Kong. That said, M+ asked me to come up with a public sculpture proposal that linked my work to HK. I have a photograph of my mother taken in 1955, the year prior to her arrival in Canada as well as my birth year. She spent 1955 in Hong Kong, having somehow been able to leave the mainland of China. The photograph shows her in her very modest room. There is a cot



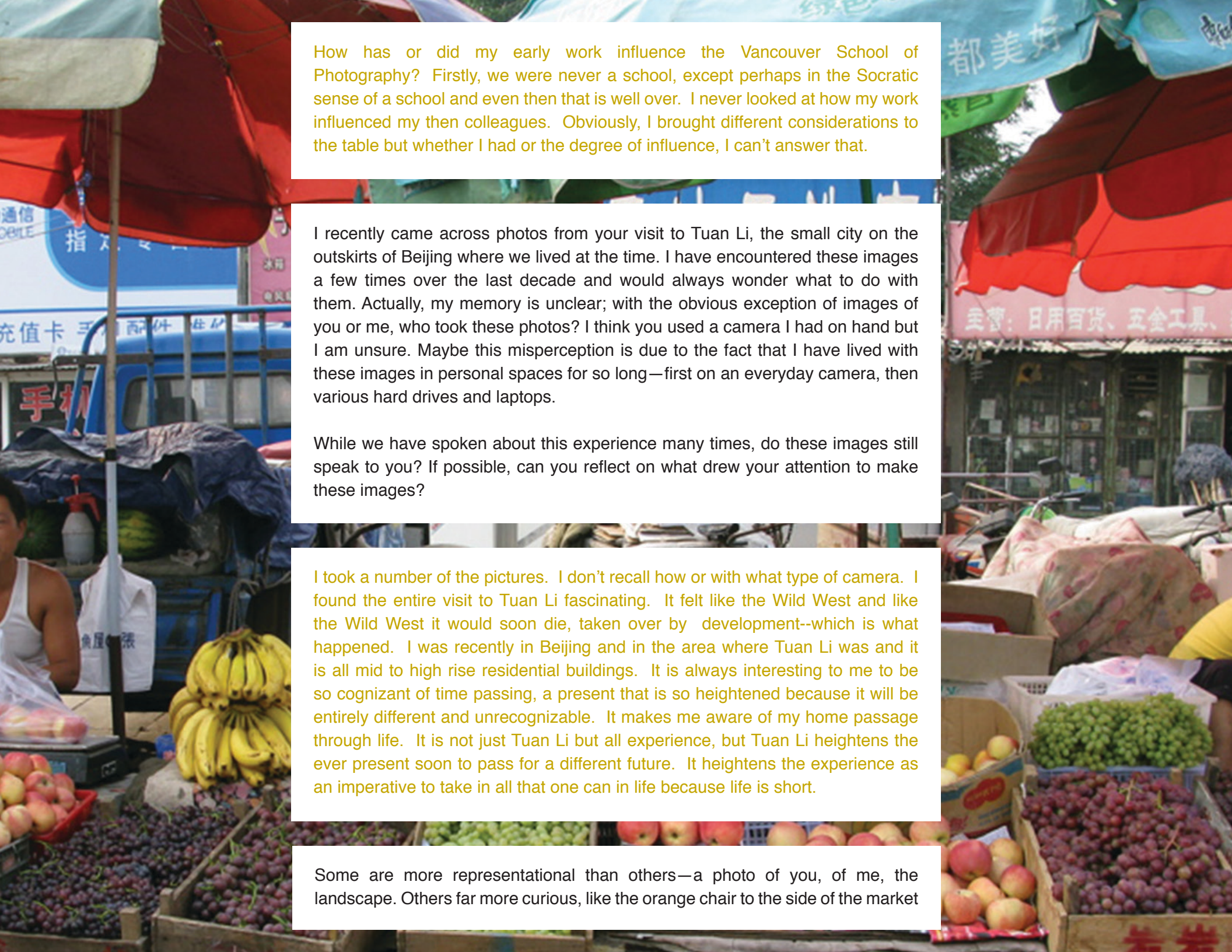
and a portable record player on the cot as well as a suitcase and a clock on the window sill. The room is probably about 2.2 by 2 meters in area. I proposed to M+ a bronze sculpture of this room with its implements. The proposal was titled: "The Artist's Mother's Room in Hong Kong 1955, moving to Canada." Now, to answer your question. I am not sure this am not sure this proposal represents such a leap for me in terms of my thinking. Afterall, I have been quite direct in terms of what I say about my upbringing in many interviews. I have always been interested in the affecting character of art. But I also have to acknowledge that I am getting older, even old and less inhibited by self-imposed restrictions to what I want to express.

With this shift in mind, Colin has some questions:

Over the years we have shared a number of intriguing discussions. A recent conversation that follows me was about your move away from the image. You cited Cheeseburger (2011) as perhaps your most recent image-based work employing photography. And, while I recognize a continued interest in images, by way of text, drawing, sculpting, working with space, public sculpture, etcetera, I wonder why you are no longer using photographic images as a primary medium?

I don't know why you say I have moved away from photography. I don't look at photography as anything special over and above any other medium that I may find useful to my thinking about art. Further, I have always been more interested in the image than photography per se. We live in an image world and I would say as important as photography has been to the image world, it is also inadequate to it.

Following, in a podcast from mid-late 2000s you were asked about the Vancouver School of Photography's influence on your practice, at which point you acknowledge this common question but hope, that someday, the question will be rephrased. So Ken, I feel this is my opportunity to ask, how do you think your practice and work in Vancouver during the 80s and 90s influenced the Vancouver School of Photography?

A vibrant outdoor market scene with various stalls and goods. In the foreground, there are baskets of purple grapes and red apples. A woman in a white tank top is visible on the left. In the background, there are blue and red awnings, a blue van, and a shop with a sign that reads "主营: 日用百货、五金工具、".


How has or did my early work influence the Vancouver School of Photography? Firstly, we were never a school, except perhaps in the Socratic sense of a school and even then that is well over. I never looked at how my work influenced my then colleagues. Obviously, I brought different considerations to the table but whether I had or the degree of influence, I can't answer that.

I recently came across photos from your visit to Tuan Li, the small city on the outskirts of Beijing where we lived at the time. I have encountered these images a few times over the last decade and would always wonder what to do with them. Actually, my memory is unclear; with the obvious exception of images of you or me, who took these photos? I think you used a camera I had on hand but I am unsure. Maybe this misperception is due to the fact that I have lived with these images in personal spaces for so long—first on an everyday camera, then various hard drives and laptops.

While we have spoken about this experience many times, do these images still speak to you? If possible, can you reflect on what drew your attention to make these images?

I took a number of the pictures. I don't recall how or with what type of camera. I found the entire visit to Tuan Li fascinating. It felt like the Wild West and like the Wild West it would soon die, taken over by development—which is what happened. I was recently in Beijing and in the area where Tuan Li was and it is all mid to high rise residential buildings. It is always interesting to me to be so cognizant of time passing, a present that is so heightened because it will be entirely different and unrecognizable. It makes me aware of my home passage through life. It is not just Tuan Li but all experience, but Tuan Li heightens the ever present soon to pass for a different future. It heightens the experience as an imperative to take in all that one can in life because life is short.

Some are more representational than others—a photo of you, of me, the landscape. Others far more curious, like the orange chair to the side of the market



entrance. When I see this chair I instantly think of your early furniture works. During a recent talk, I recall you mentioning an orange couch that your parents loved, and your current couch is orange. Any connection?’

No explicit connections but there are connections in the sense that I love thinking about the reality that someone else knows. It is so mundane an observation to make but I think it is profound nonetheless--I love the connectedness of people to all other people. No matter where, people eat, shit, sing songs, party, get bored, wash clothes, whatever. The customs are different and sometimes the differences can heighten the foreignness but at the same time I don't believe any cultural practice is foreign. I love the idea of sameness, despite differences.

In keeping with this theme of private experience within public space, the people of Rotterdam petitioned the Witte de With to make Melly Shum Hates Her Job (1990) a permanent feature on the gallery's façade—your first, unexpected, public work. How did this episode influence your decision to invest so much time and energy in public art? How has this arm of your practice changed and developed over time?

Even before the Melly Shum circumstances of an unintentional work of public art--it was initially conceived as temporary publicity for my Witte de With exhibition--my work generally have had a public character. After all, much of my ideas issue from street life. While it is true I have worked on a number of public commissions, I never strategized such a move toward public space despite my interest in the subject of public space which I have written on and even co curated a show on called Monument Lab. Besides, in today's art world there are many opportunities to make site specific work such as in many of the biennales. It really is a continuum of different spaces and publics where one can exhibit work.

Shadowing this anecdote, Liza offers these questions:
Beyond public sculpture, why is the nexus between private and public of such

The background image shows a multi-story building with balconies. In the foreground, a large, dense pile of yellow corn cobs is spread out on the ground, covering most of the lower half of the frame. A person is riding a bicycle on the left, and a woman and child are standing near a doorway in the middle ground.

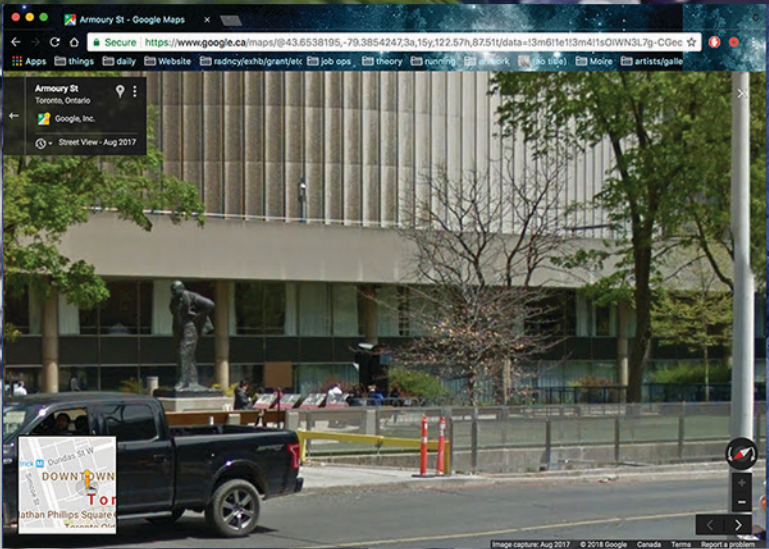
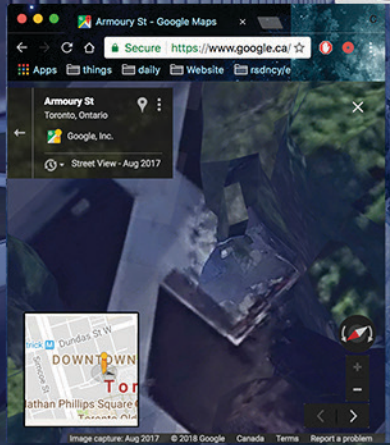
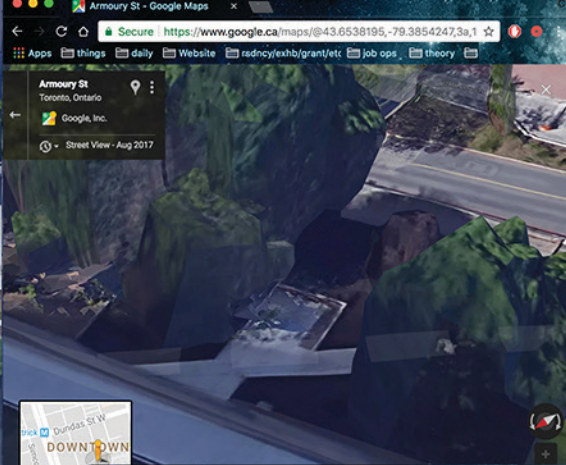
interest to you?

I'm interested in the intersection between public and private space. A longtime fascination of mine relates to what Foucault called Subject Formation or the ways in which we become subjects in a rule bound society. How do we as individuals negotiate the transition from private or individual self to public or social self? There is no singular way for negotiation. We are always creating new selves, often contradictory selves. I'm also interested in the stresses such negotiations place on our biological selves. All of this reveals a lot about our amazing capacity as humans to endure through self invention but also how self invention is painful and even self negating.

A lot of your work appears to conflate, or explore, dichotomies between art-objects and functional-objects; can you talk about your interest in this spectrum? How do material choices inform this approach?

I think that's correct. I am very much interested in the liminality of art to non-art or for that matter the liminality of non-art. The operations of art fascinate me since art is fundamentally about signification production and the enthrallment of art is due to the ambiguous and disorienting character it can produce in terms of the viewer's sense of experience. In my own work, I am interested in deferring the recognition of art or suspending its recognition as long as possible. Part of this is purely my interest in producing a recursive reading, a possible self-critique of the terms of experiencing art. But I also like to think that the deferment of recognition of something as art means the viewer can only make sense of the work through associations from non-art. That is to say, something that is out there in the world and real. At some point, when the viewer recognizes the work's status of art, a deeper real is experienced. Or, at least, that is my ambition.

With much respect,
Ella / Moire



TYPE(S)

Written by Liza Eurich

Effective typographic choices often go unnoticed. As silent influencers they help shape and contextualize the content they carry. Formatting choices subsequently reflect an expression of tone, tethering the aesthetics of delivery to subject matter. All typefaces belong to one of two categories; this distinction is based on the presence or absence of short lines attached to the ends of strokes. **Serif** means with feet, while **sans-serif** means without.

Introductory design theory often specifies that serif typefaces are traditional and conservative, used in prominent newspapers like *The New York Times*, a palimpsest of unbiased facts. For legibility and contemporaneity sans-serif typefaces are preferred, these are your billboards of Helvetica. Further specialized typefaces become branding tools, synonymous with particular companies and products. Courier was initially designed in 1955 by Howard Kettler to be used with IBM typewriters.

Consciously or not, we often assume typefaces will function a

certain way, that they will carry a particular kind of message. This relationship is the central focus of various works by Ken Lum. For instance, in his “Shop Keeper Series” (2001) slick commercial signs with bold text feature enigmatic narratives, personal confessionals, and unexpected phrases. While their compositions mimic the motif of everyday signposts, constructed and outfitted for public spaces, their content is furnished with private thoughts and intimate dialogues. Through this juxtaposition the barrier between these distinct spheres collapses, allowing the subjective to contaminate objectivity, to peel away at its veneers of neutrality.

This brings us to another thematic in Lum’s practice—use value.

Governed by a simple purpose, signs are meant to be concise informants. As such, they are often typified by reproducible aesthetic markers geared towards legibility. This functionality manifests via the use of simplistic fonts, suitable scaling, a material resilience to weather, and vibrant compelling colours. Like their commercial counterparts, Lum’s “Shop Keeper Series” purposefully imitates these guiding principles.

Given our continued exposure to signs and the subsequent assumptions we make regarding how they operate, Lum’s portrayals are so convincing in their appearance, that we almost gloss over them. However upon reading, these expectations—the commercial impetus’ of

these signs—are quickly undermined. They no longer function as placeholders, pandering to consumerism with pithy statements or denoting standard information like store hours, menu items, and weekly sales.

By overlaying generic formal signage motifs with intimate and personal content, Lum asks his viewers to question the possibility of objectivity, to recognize the seemingly benign as often inherently biased, and to forgo the ubiquitous for the personal and the specific.

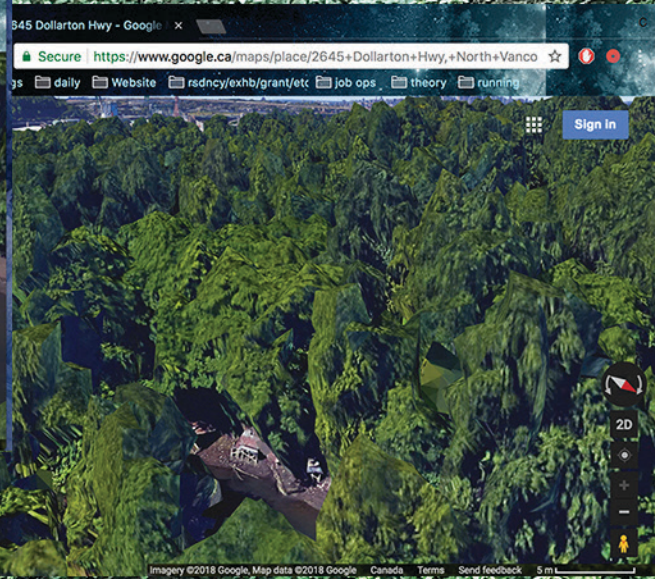
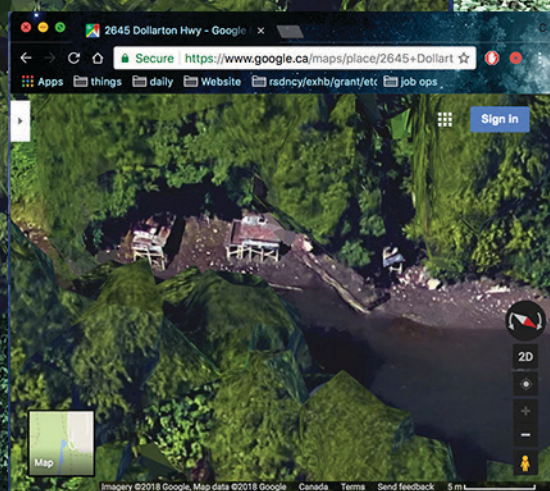
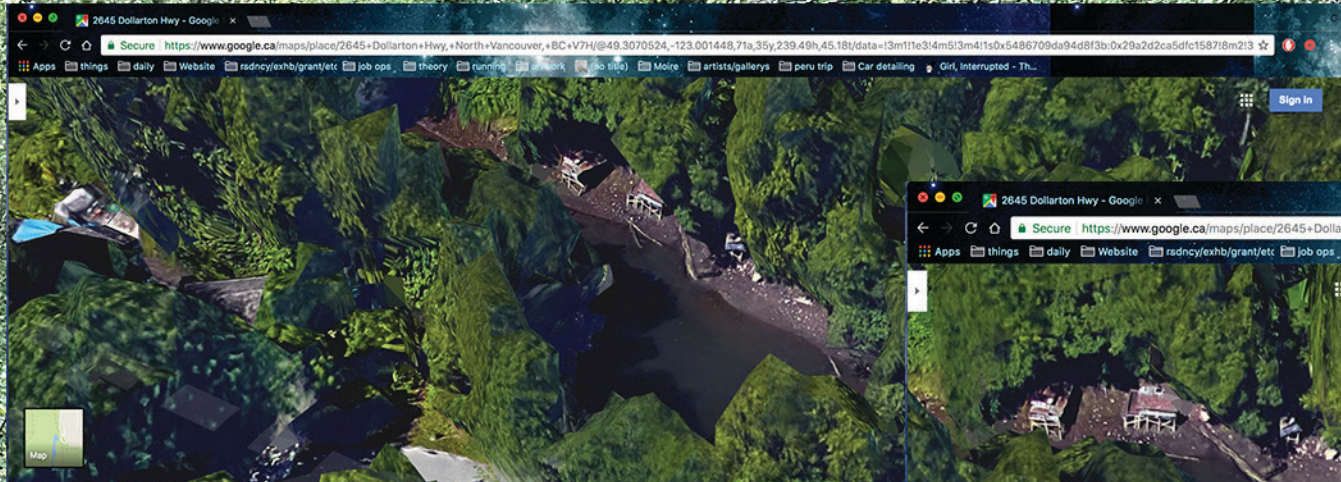
The conventional selection of typefaces helps to foreground content, but as generalized vehicles they can be used towards misleading or divergent ends. For instance, like *The New York Times* gossip columns and voyeuristic publications like *People* and *Playboy* legitimize themselves through the similar use of serif fonts. Our assumptions, or feelings towards type, as well as their plasticity, allows for a potentially uneasy duality. Instead, what if typefaces embedded specific meaning(s) within their structure? Shifting functionality in this manner directs our attention to this aesthetic and contextual matrix. Rather than maintaining a pliable universalism, these typefaces would become highly specialized—useful for that singular purpose alone.

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklm
nopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890

Download:

[KenLum.otf \(MAC\)](#)

[KenLum.ttf \(PC\)](#)



LIST OF IMAGES

Documentation of Ken Lum's public artworks by Colin / Moire

05. *Vancouver Especially (A Vancouver Special scaled to its property value in 1973, then increased by 8 fold)* (2015), 271 Union Street, Vancouver, Canada. 49°16'39.8"N 123°05'50.9"W Documentation from 1 February 2018, 15 November 2018, 22 January 2019.

08-09. *Monument to East Vancouver* (2010), Intersection of Clark Drive and East Sixth Avenue, Vancouver, Canada. 49°15'55.2"N 123°04'39.6"W Documentation 1 February 2018, 15 November 2018, 24 January 2019.

10-11. *you so smart! and what an idiot!* (2006), Intersection of Thornton Street and Malkin Avenue, Vancouver, Canada. 49°16'29.9"N 123°05'30.1"W Documentation 1 December 2016, 1 February 2018, 15 November 2018, 22 January 2019, 23 January 2019.

16-17. *Melly Shum Hates Her Job* (1990), Intersection of Boomgaardsstraat and Witte de Withstraat (Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art), Rotterdam, Netherlands. 51°54'55.5"N 4°28'36.6"E Documentation 1 February 2018, 15 November 2018, 20 January 2019.

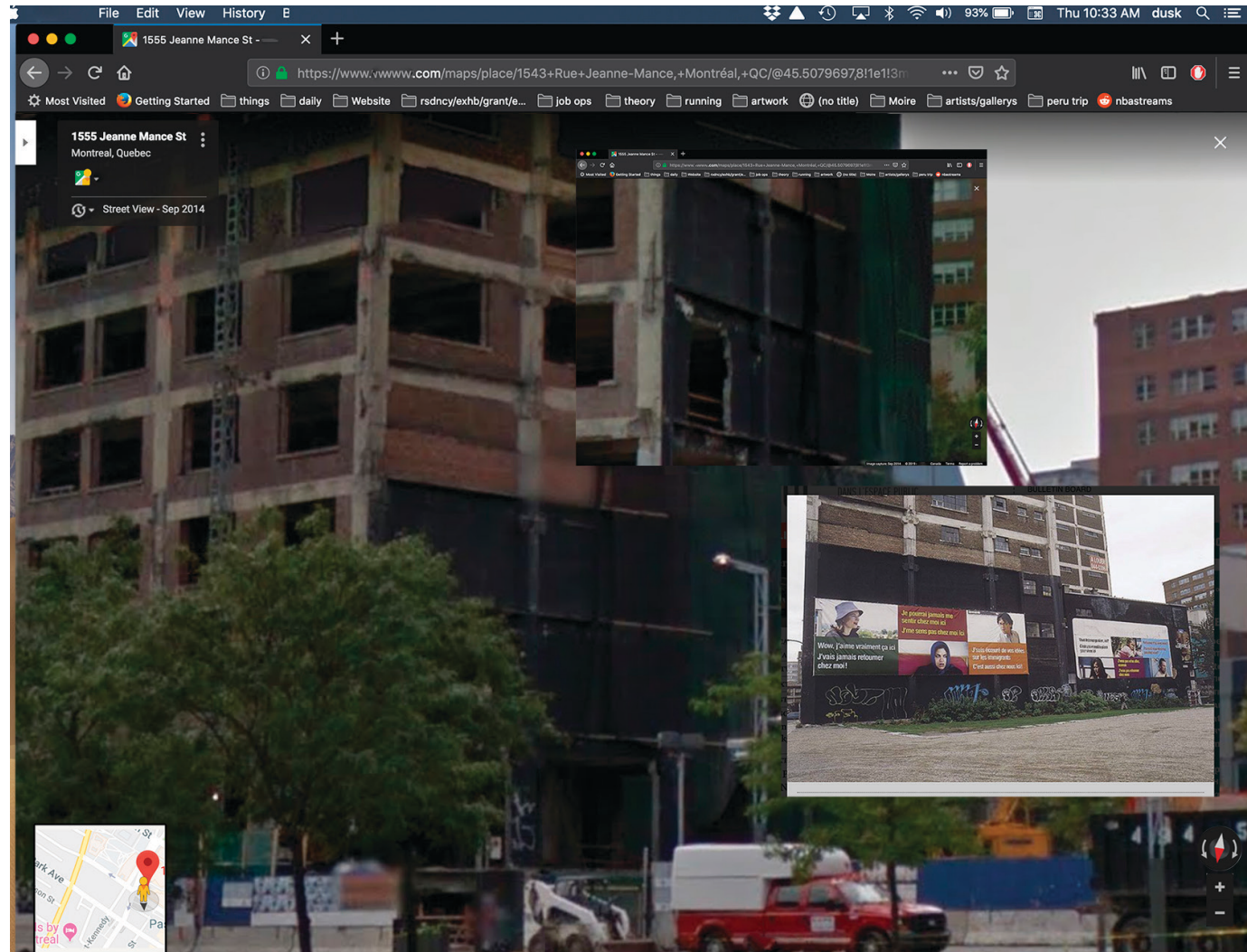
22-23. *Four Boats Stranded: Red and Yellow, Black and White* (2000), 750 Hornby Street (Four corners of the Vancouver Art Gallery), Vancouver, Canada. 49°16'59.5"N 123°07'14.2"W Documentation 1 December 2016, 1 February 2018, 15 November 2018, 28 January 2019.

24-25. *Across Time and Space, Two Children of Toronto Meet* (2013), Intersection unnamed laneway and 542 Bay Street, Toronto, Canada. 43°39'18.3"N 79°23'01.6"W Documentation 13 March 2017, 15 November 2018, 1 February 2018, 19 January 2019.

38-39. *Memorial to the Battle of Ortona: Peace through Valour* (2016), Intersection of Chestnut Street and Armoury Street (Toronto City Hall), Toronto, Canada. 43°39'12.7"N 79°23'06.1"W Documentation 13 March 2017, 1 February 2018, 15 November 2018, 23 January 2019.

44-45. *From Shangri-La to Shangri-La* (2010), 2645 Dollarton Hwy (Maplewood Flats Conservation Area), North Vancouver, Canada. 49°18'23.2"N 123°00'07.0"W Documentation 13 March 2017, 1 February 2018, 15 November 2018.

46-47. *There is no place like home* (2001), 1543 Rue Jeanne-Mance, Montréal, Canada. 45°30'26.1"N 73°34'03.7"W Documentation 14 February 2019, 13 March 2019.





Moire 5 / June 2019

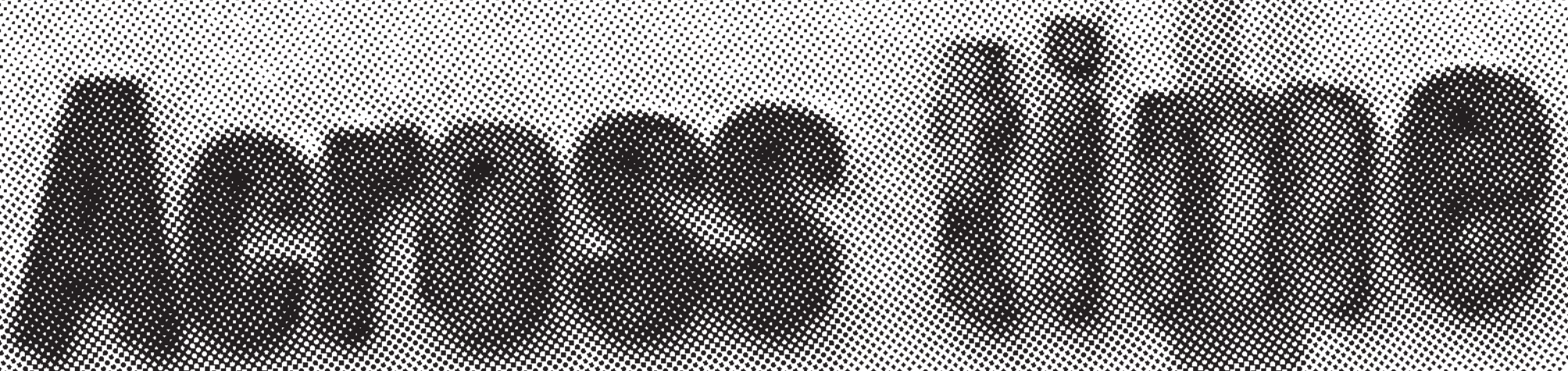
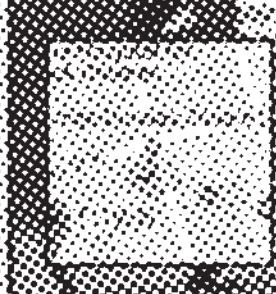
Colin Miner, Ella Dawn McGeough and Liza Eurich

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* drawing of spookfish fish by Linus Lum, 2017



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