

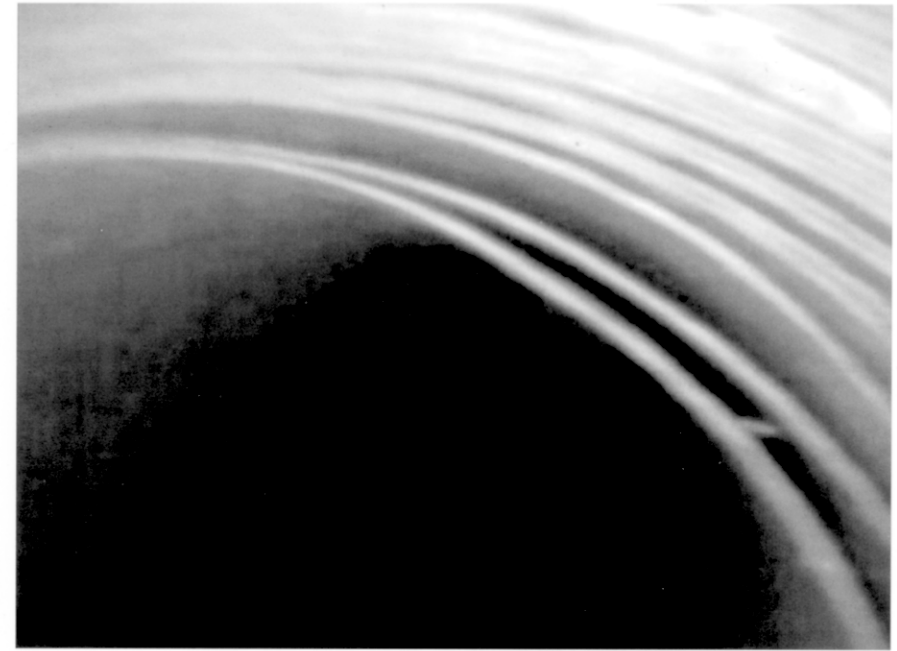
COVER
JAN PEACOCK still from *Account*,
video, multiple LCD screens,
dimensions variable, 2009



JAN PEACOCK still from *there there*,
digital video projection, sound, dimensions
variable, 2009

JAN PEACOCK is an interdisciplinary artist working with video, sculpture, performance and text. She has exhibited in North America, Europe, and Japan. Her work is in international collections including the National Gallery of Canada and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She has received awards at international festivals. She lives in Halifax where she is Professor in Intermedia at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

PEGGY GALE is an independent curator and critic based in Toronto. She specializes in time-related and media works by contemporary artists.



JAN PEACOCK

Finder



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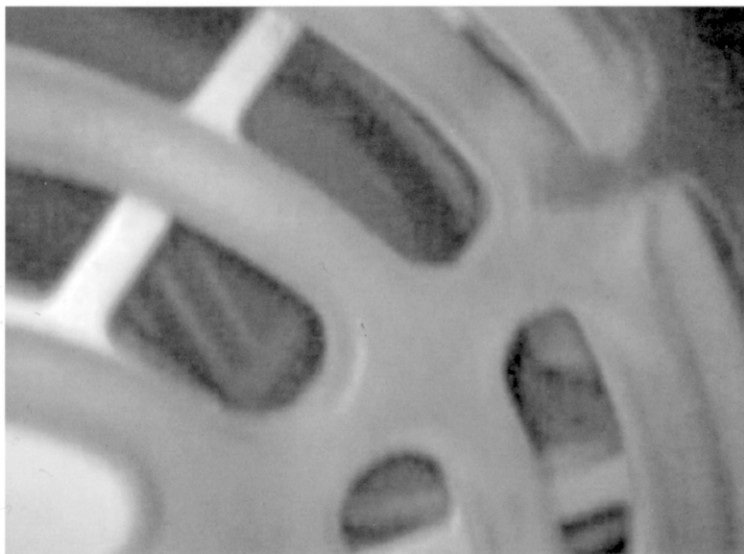


MARCH 6 TO APRIL 11 2009

OPENING RECEPTION
Friday March 6 | 6 to 9 pm

ARTIST TALK Saturday April 11 | 4 pm

SCREENING AND DVD LAUNCH Saturday April 11 | 5 to 7 pm



JAN PEACOCK still from *Account*, video, multiple LCD screens, dimensions variable, 2009

Eyewitness Report

by Peggy Gale

FINDER OFFERS A PORTAL to another world – a rabbit hole – as a form of interactive narrative with uncertain rules. Information is provided but is dispersed; meaning must be inferred and supplemented by personal experience. Suspicion is inevitable: which bits of information are most relevant? Are there hidden meanings?

'Finder' is the first word at the top left on a Macintosh computer screen, between the Apple logo and menu headings for File and Edit, etc. As Wikipedia explains, the Finder "is responsible for the overall user management of files, disks, network volumes and the launching of other applications."¹ Mac's website is more direct: "See what you seek ... Look deeper."² At Gallery 44, Jan Peacock's exhibition *Finder* considers the nature of scrutiny along with business-as-usual. We confront the nature of evidence compiled, its relationship to privacy and the issue of culpability when seeking meaning.

Peacock's exhibition comprises three works. In the main gallery is *Account*, which is displayed on a number of small embedded LCD screens. The images show surveillance footage which was collected by 'snooping' in Gallery 44's office files and rooting through drawers and documents. Peacock's endoscopic camera is a miniature fibre-optic recording device on a slender, two-metre-long cable. The lens' maneuverability and shallow depth of field make image-gathering easy, but the ultra-close-ups lose us in a sea of detail, undermining the possible value of what we see. We then tend to range over the picture surface, noticing unexpected relationships and misleading clues, which may in turn lead us to further (unanticipated) meanings.

A second piece in the exhibition, titled *there there*, is a large projection. The video follows Peacock's finger as it traces the railing of Pont Marie in Paris, from Notre Dame to Île Saint-Louis. Once again the image's tight focus limits our comprehension by removing the broad city context. Yet now we might scrutinize the guiding hand more intently, feel the cold caress of iron and concrete, and really be *there* with grey sky and grey river. An intimate bond is established between eye and hand and between viewer and agent. Unlike Gertrude Stein's San Francisco,³ there is a 'there' there.

Projected further along on the same wall is *Finder*, the exhibition's namesake, which is a working of sequences from Peacock's ongoing *Competence Archive*. Here we observe moments of private absorption: brief sequences of action depicting ordinary people and everyday activities which are brought to our attention by their excision from the background frame of space and time. For the Gallery 44 show, Peacock includes "actions of measuring, marking, physical construction and demolition. Inserted among these are brief and apparently incongruous gestures of a more private order."⁴ We place these comfortable, familiar views alongside the stranger ones that trace a line on a Parisian bridge, or rummaging through private places at Gallery 44.

Completing the installation is a cluster of three ceiling-mounted parabolic speakers near the gallery entrance, collecting the audio elements from the exhibition's three visual components and drawing our attention to otherwise normal sounds made exceptional by isolation from their source. Our first entrance to the gallery, then, introduces the exhibition as a whole – but by *sound alone*. It is only while locating the various moving images dispersed in the gallery space that we make sense of the previously heard aural component ... but while looking at the pictures we lose access to the accompanying sound tracks. Once again, information is made available but is inconveniently placed, rendered mysterious by separation.

Surveillance is at work everywhere today. We constantly seek trust and evidence, yet we are always in doubt. Peacock notes that her ideas for the *Finder* exhibition began as a response to the Bush administration's search for 'weapons of mass destruction' that would justify America's pre-emptive strike at Saddam Hussein in March 2003. The mental picture conjured by teams of specialists *looking everywhere* for damaging evidence, stating repeatedly that the drugs,

1. *Finder (software)* Page. Wikipedia. 19 December 2008. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macintosh.Finder>>

2. *Finder page*. Apple. 19 December 2008. <<http://www.apple.com/macosx/features/finder.html>>

3. Streuber, Sonja. *Tenderbuttons: Gertrude Stein online*. 19 December 2008. <<http://www.tenderbuttons.com/gsonline/alice.html>>

4. Peacock, Jan. Email to the author. 6 January 2009.

missiles, guns and other *matériel* were surely there becomes absurd in its final lack of success and its evident futility. Whose 'truth' is valid?

Beside this extreme example of need-for-proof and institutional responsibility, Peacock places the lack of demand for accountability of state-subsidized businesses against the increasing burden of government scrutiny on Canadian cultural agencies, where masses of budgetary and program detail are required for the most modest sums of financial support. The comparison of scale – responsibility and accountability – for recent government bailout support for banks, stock traders and automotive parts manufacturers renders the caution applied to cultural grants simply absurd.

The works in *Finder* consider daily life and regular habits. Peacock's *Competence Archive* offers a background key, showing moments of focus and attention for the matter at hand, where "absorption in an activity produces a flow of deft and animate reflexes..."⁵ When performed without conscious intention, the resulting deed is expert and certain, a perfect and reliable response coming directly from the process of involvement itself. Walking along a bridge, one is immersed in process, allowing one's attention to wander to the water, the approaching shore, or a passing boat. Rummaging through a file folder or a crowded drawer may seem to focus relentlessly, yet attention remains equally on the desire to find *what is being sought* and perhaps on the potential for being noticed as an intruder.

A puzzle is placed before us here, with ingredients for its solution to be found in flashes of memory and links to current news stories. We are constantly onscreen in the urban environment. Shopping malls, subways, the state of sewer systems or the electric grid, airport and highway traffic patterns and weather forecasts: all this data is collected, assessed, available, and is necessary for the smooth function of urban life. There is little margin for error or delay.

The works in this exhibition run on two levels simultaneously: scrutiny and a search for information, along with interior knowledge and the certainty of experience. The threads intertwine and influence each other. Evidence is everywhere. The outcome cannot be known in advance.

All searches want answers, but results may be unexpected. A treasure hunt offers self-discovery as well as possible reward: a game with multiple answers or endings. Solo travel may bring out an internal voice as narrative companion. Surprise is at every corner. ■

JAN PEACOCK still from *there there*, digital video projection, sound, dimensions variable, 2009

