

## **Digital Highways, Local Narratives.**

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***The following is the keynote speech made by Peter Dunn at an international conference held at Queens University, Kingston, Ontario in May '91. Called "Fragmented Power: Art Voices for 2000", it marked the fiftieth anniversary of the famous "Kingston Conference" which set the agenda for debates around cultural democracy, public arts and public funding of the arts in post-War North America. Present at the 41' conference where Thomas Hart Benton and members of the WPA's Federal Art Project from the U.S. - initiatives soon to be erased by McCarthyism - Walter Abel and a caucus which formed the National Federation of Canadian Artists, leading to the creation of the "Massey Commission" and the founding of the Canada Council. The '91 conference aimed to bring those debates into 90's and, as the title ambitiously states, to set an agenda for greeting the new century. It was accompanied by an exhibition of videoworks by Rebecca Belmore, Zacharias Kunuk, Gita Saxena and Loretta Todd and in the main gallery a large installation work called "Digital Highways" produced as a collaboration between Canadian artists Karl Beverage & Carole Conde and British artists Peter Dunn & Loraine Leeson.***

Let me begin by saying what a privilege it is to be asked to address you this evening as the keynote speaker. I must admit that when I was initially invited to do this, I was somewhat surprised and puzzled as there is certainly no shortage of eminent artists, theorists and academics, both here in Canada and over the border in the States, who could have been asked.

However, when I read the texts of the previous conference, especially the address by Thomas Hart Benton, I think I began to see what the organisers had in mind. And gradually my puzzlement faded and was replaced by gratitude. Gratitude firstly to get more of a glimpse into to the ideas of Thomas Hart Benton, about whom I previously knew very little - just the usual brief references to "regionalism" in the History books. I didn't agree with every thing he had to say at that conference in 1941 - and certainly there was a male/Anglo ethos that pervaded all the proceedings, not to mention an extraordinary enthusiasm for artists to contribute to the War Effort which, in the wake of recent events in the Gulf, may seem rather alien to us today to say the least. Nevertheless he did raise some important issues at that conference which, far from decreasing their relevance today, are becoming even more vital. Secondly, I would like to thank the organisers for making the connection between those debates and the ones that I, my partner Loraine Leeson, and our co-exhibitors in the Digital Highways exhibition - Carole Conde and Karl Beverage - have been involved in for a number of years, both in our words and, more pertinently, through our practice. As indeed have many others elsewhere, and here as participants in this conference.

The connection I'm referring to concerns the importance of "*local narratives*" in the practice of art and in life. "Local narratives", as opposed to the "Grand narrative" claims of International Modernism in art, Multinational Economics and its Corporate Culture. "Local narratives" - not just defined by geography but as the specificity of what it is like to be working class in this society, to be a woman, to be black, a person of colour, to be gay, to be differently abled. "Local Narratives", in other words, as the voices of all those suppressed and marginalised - defined as 'other' - by the arrogant claims and practices of the greatest and most pernicious cultural imperialism the world has ever seen. And it's not just The West which is responsible for this - though it has a lot to answer for - we are now witnessing the results of decades of suppressed "Local Narratives" in the Soviet Union, and in many other parts of the world. Whether or not we are comfortable with what they have to say, we ignore them at our peril. Unless this arrogance is at the very least blunted, then it will not just be the many rich and diverse *cultural* narratives that will become extinct but the countless biological narratives that sustain life on our planet. In short, opposition to the "Grand Mono-Narrative" *mentality* is not simply about the ideological differences or the opposing aesthetics of elite art movements, it could well turn out to be *the* crucial factor in a life and death struggle for the future of our planet.

But before I get carried away on a grand dooms-day narrative of my own, I'd like to come down to earth with something Thomas Hart Benton said at the last conference here in 1941, in the midst of the second 'War to End All Wars'. He termed himself an "environmentalist", long before that term became popularised by the ecology movement. And this is how he characterised that approach.

"I think that if you are going to have any kind of living art of genuine cultural expression yourself, that you cannot buy it and you cannot borrow it. I think you have to make it yourself, and that the only way you can make it is out of your own experiences.....within those environments or locales or regions which are familiar and on the go. That is, in life. All the art of the past has been made in that way. It has been conditioned by the pressures to which the artist, as a living individual, was submitted in the environment within which he lived and at the time when he lived".

Apart from the reference to the artist as "he", I would agree wholeheartedly with that statement. And as for his view of the international art market, he also has my full endorsement:

"In this curious and precious field, disconnected from the run of contemporary life, every kind of commercial and intellectual fraud is practised. Symbols of culture, i.e. objects of art, become great according to the price that gets attached to them. A great collector is a person whom the dealers skin for the most money. His culture increased by the number of times his nose is pulled".

Nevertheless things have changed in some fundamental ways since 1941. Mass media was in its infancy, T.V. didn't exist, and computers were little more than

crude counting machines. Communication has changed radically, and if you will allow me a brief diversion, I would like to say something about the relations of communication and cultural exchange in historic terms. I'm going to use a broad brush here just to sketch in some general points, and some fairly obvious ones, although I'm aware it's much more complex. However, I think it might be useful to lay things out simply and schematically at this point to prepare the ground for what I want to say later.

The flow of information and cultural exchange has always been associated with trade routes. But in the West, the infrastructure, the *means*, of communication has undergone a series of 'epistemological breaks' or 'paradigm shifts' which now have global implications.

For example in ancient times cultural exchange happened along the caravan routes and seaways, on foot, horse, camel, by oar and sail. It took a long time for influences to spread. The Romans, through the necessities of a far flung empire created their famous roads in order to speed up the process. During the period of European expansionism, from the Renaissance and the so-called 'Voyages of Discovery' onwards, these communications routes and systems were continuously refined and improved. However, with the Industrial Revolution, the development of the railways and steam powered ships, the infrastructure of communications underwent a profound shift. This was rapidly followed by the invention of the internal combustion engine, the telegraph, telephone, and air travel; so that shortly after the middle of this century terms like "Global Village" were being used.

Now, I believe, we are entering a whole new era, the era of "Digital Highways" where satellite, microwave and laser technology have created the means of a virtually instantaneous information exchange which will set the ground for the new millennium. So, what are these "Digital Highways" and what are the implications for our culture, other cultures, and for our practice as artists?

Digital Highways are the Corporate lines of communication that crisscross the globe, spanning time zones, national boundaries and cultures. They link the financial centres of the world, dealing in electronic money transfer, carrying the information and value systems of multinational culture. Along these nodes of power come the technological hardware, the "Fordist" business practices (now updated as the AJ - After Japan - strategy) and the steel and concrete infrastructures that support them. In short, they have a profound impact upon the communities and work places that immediately surround their nexus points and have a ripple effect in terms of the development or underdevelopment upon whole regions of the globe.

The perspectives of the Digital Highway are those of a minority, but a very powerful and increasingly internationalised one. They are undemocratic in their operations yet exert a major influence upon the democratic institutions and "free markets" of many nations. There is no place for the needs and concerns of local identities, disenfranchised minorities (or majorities for that matter), for non-western thinking, for difference of any kind. Its whole ethos is that of the "Grand Narrative" of Western Modernism. And far from being "dead" as some Post-Modernists claim, it is

currently engaged in major projects of Regeneration in cities around the world (of which we have had direct experience in London's Docklands). To paraphrase Habermas, Modernism may be dead but, behind the facades of post-modernist architecture, it is certainly dominant.

From the perspective of the "Digital Highways" it is the lot of other cultures, and "Local Narratives" within the dominant culture, to vie for attention. That which does gain attention is 'packaged' for consumption, usually in two basic categories: as "threat", or as that capable of assimilation. And, apart from the most obvious one of commercial exploitation, there appears to be no simple rule of thumb for what is capable of assimilation. Its very arbitrariness maintains its promise; like a lottery. The music business, with its 'star' system, shows this process very clearly. It thrives on the exploitation of "Local Narratives" - whether it be from ethnic sources or from urban street life - these provide the driving force and constant revitalisation. The exotic, the outrageous and the oppositional, can with the right packaging be bought and sold. If we are not hypocritical about it, that's what makes it interesting, that's what provides the pleasure. This is the case in other spheres of culture too, though perhaps not so obviously. If we are critical, we are critical consumers; if we are discerning, we are discerning consumers; if we are revolutionary, we are revolutionary consumers. From the perspective of the "Digital Highways", those who seek attention are "attention seekers"; in this narcissistic view it is the "oxygen of publicity" that sustains acts of terror. Therefore the voices at the extremes must be silenced. But if we accept this, then we are accepting that we, in our turn, may be silenced too. After all, if you are 'other' then you are accepted under sufferance. This may sound rather melodramatic, but it is at a culture's extremes where its values become most sharply defined. If the material possibility for oppression exists, it has subjective reality; the fact of discrimination affects all those who may be discriminated against.

Now apart from the obvious social and economic implications of all this, the world of "Digital Highways" presents us with a **New Visibility**. Automatic cameras and monitors survey us in supermarkets, on the streets, around the walls of factories, in apartment blocks, and around the security-gated YUPPY ghettos on the gentrified waterfronts that have mushroomed at the centre of our ravaged inner-cities. These are just by-products of the even more sophisticated military and police surveillance systems. We are rapidly developing countless mini "Strategic Defence Initiatives" in all of our commercial, social and domestic spaces. This omnipresent gaze, does not communicate anything to us, except to tell us we are being watched. It is a one way relationship. Like a spot-light it illuminates us as form - the one dimensional shadow of potential threat - but in content it refuses to illuminate. It does not communicate, it contaminates. Paul Virilio has described this "blind gaze" or "gazeless vision" as *viral images*, as a logical extension of the Western Gaze, or the "Vivisecting Gaze" Michael Foucault analysed so well in the Birth of the Clinic - "the medical gaze is in reality the scientific gaze of the West. And it can only lead to the vision machine. A closed circuit".

And where do we fit into this closed circuit? Apart from those who control it - and maybe even them too - humanity is being pushed out of the system. Our delay

response is too long. Computers do these systemised tasks much quicker, and they are getting faster all the time. We get replaced and we are replaceable. That has always been the object of Fordism - as the maximisation of productive profit with the minimisation of labour costs - but now we are, as human beings, enclosed in a regime of temporality that is rapidly being superseded. However, it is important to remember that this is only - for the time being at least - within certain systemised tasks that this is the case. Neither do I agree with the "saturation despair" of Baudrillard; we still have room for manoeuvre. And there are ways that we can turn some of these developments to our advantage. But I will come back to that later. Suffice it to say - putting aside for the moment the prospect of major ecological disaster or the collapse of Capitalism - that Digital Imaging will have at least as profound an impact upon our culture in the coming century as optical imaging has had in this. And if we are to remain visible within this 'New Visibility' then, like it or not, that is a future we have to engage.

Another area of visual experience that has changed radically since Thomas Hart Benton spoke here at Kingston is that of visual memory and image association. In his time, it was much more possible to have one's own visual memories. Relatively unmediated. If you were an artist of course, there was always the problem of "seeing through the eyes of others" - and he talked about that, and the need to use the lessons and conventions of received and understood visual languages in order to communicate effectively - but he also spoke of the necessity to find and refresh one's own vision. But that was before the "image explosion" of mass media. Today, of the countless images that dangle on our association chains, many (perhaps even most) belong to someone else - from television, film, advertising bill-boards, magazines etc. When we look at something, we cannot help but see it through this "memory screen", coloured - some would say polluted - by these 'borrowed images'. We have witnessed in those fifty years an Invasion of the Memory Snatchers. A shift from the corporeal memory to the Corporate. And that, I believe, has made a profound difference between us and all those who have gone before.

Now Thomas Hart Benton talked about the necessity to 'deconstruct' the forms of the past - although he didn't actually use that expression of course - in order to understand how form works when it communicates effectively. At the same time he said that it is important to go beyond this phase of 'deconstruction' in order to find one's own, individual and environmentally specific forms of the here and now. I believe that still holds true. But now, we need also to take into account the 'memory screen' of Corporate Images I talked about. We need to be able to deconstruct that, critically, in order to see how it operates. And a lot of artists in the 70s and early 80s were engaged in just that. But again 'deconstruction' on its own is not enough, it so often leads to another academic pursuit which - although it may be grounded in popular culture - nevertheless ends up as just another genre within elite art circles. We need to move beyond that.

As artists, student artists, practitioners, how do we begin that move? Clearly, we must start from where we are. We exist and operate in a variety of communities. In our daily lives we engage with interconnected and overlapping spheres of discourse; a web of different communication forms and channels. It is within this

web that the issues of power and privilege, oppression and dispossession are played out. This is not just a 'microcosm' of the larger forces at work *elsewhere*, it is the point of impact - the cutting edge - where the abstractions of the "Digital Highways" and "Grand Narratives" are realised in their material and subjective effects upon our daily lives. The great universal dramas of human existence are all enacted upon local stages - I think it was Brecht who said that, or something like it. If he didn't he should have.

Having indicated what I mean by "Local Narratives", and - I hope - the importance of them, I think it's now time to address the *Process of engagement*.

Raymond Williams in "Culture and Society" put his finger on a very important part of this process when he said:

"Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change".

Firstly, by stating that "the process of communication is the process of community", he is making it clear that "community" is not a geographic thing like a neighbourhood, although of course it can occur in neighbourhoods. It is a "communion of interest"; a discourse. He then goes on to describe this process in two parts that are interrelated. The first of these is the recognition of common ground - "the sharing of common meanings and thence common activities and purposes". This is the *Sustaining* element that nourishes and maintains social meanings and resources. It is both inclusive and exclusive; it welcomes fellow travellers and responds to external threats. The second element is the *Transformative* - "the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change". What is clear is that it is the relationship between these two which produces the dynamic. However, if the *Sustaining* elements are too much in the ascendant, advocating conservative values above all else, then the *Transformative* elements cannot function as they should, they are regarded as too much of a threat and are excluded, marginalised or attacked. And there are obvious variations on this interplay of forces that may result in inertia, instability or schism. This I, believe, can be seen at work on the micro-level - I'm sure we've all witnessed this among artists or political groupings at some time or other - as well as the macro level.

Therefore in a society as complex as ours, it is clear we cannot address all "communities" - even if we wanted to - and expect them to share our meanings and goals. We have to make choices. I suppose this is just another way of saying - we first have to recognise what "communities" we actually belong to; secondly, those we we want to belong to, have connections with or wish to ally ourselves to; then work outwards from there to make contact with others who may be interested in dialogue and exchange. It is obviously more complex than a linear one, two, three; these levels happen simultaneously and cross refer. But putting this way helps to clarify what our role might be at various moments in the process. As

communicators, to help 'the sharing of common meanings', to build the bonds of solidarity - that's our *Sustaining* role, at times even a defensive role. And it's an important one, where there is a value in "speaking to the converted", and an opportunity for *celebration* which is vital. The other role - the *Transformative* - is in "the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings". And this - the point of intervention - is obviously where we are most likely to engender conflict. Here again we have to make choices. With those whom we choose to ally ourselves, we have to be aware of, and sensitive to, the new directions that community wishes to take; to be part of its *becoming*. Against those whom we oppose - those who oppress - I believe it is important to make our critique hard hitting, not to convince *them* because they are not interested in genuine dialogue or exchange. It would be against their interests both materially and subjectively. (There is a poster for the latest Godfather movie that says, "Real power cannot be given, it must be taken"; there is some truth in that statement.) But there are many people who do not deliberately ally themselves with the minority interests of the powerful, who are nevertheless caught up - at varying levels - in the momentum of power. And if any real change is to be effected, they have to be reached. We also have to be aware that, in certain instances, the *they* in question might well be ourselves.

This may sound obvious - and in this context possibly "preaching to the converted" - but nevertheless I think it needs to be stated. The value of oppositional culture is in its ability, firstly, to signal that there *is* a debate around what may be seen as accepted values, norms and goals - to put them on the agenda. Secondly, to map out some of the terrain of the debate. Its creativity lies in its ability to invent forms and structures to *engage* us in this unfamiliar terrain - or it may even be all-to-familiar; the point is to make us think, feel and respond. That response may be anger or outrage, or the joy of recognition. Its approach is not always that of the serious and overtly campaigning - though this is clearly needed at times - humour and celebration, as I said earlier, is important to the *Sustaining* role, but it can be equally damning of the dominant culture, and often is, especially where there is contradiction and hypocrisy, where those in positions of authority are pompous, arrogant and without humour. For example, in London's Docklands, events like the "People's Armada to Parliament", which involved thousands of people taking to the river in boats, with music, theatre, a whole range of cultural activities, proved that a political action can also be a fun day for all; for kids and elderly people, not just the usual activists. It changed the whole mood of campaigning, stimulating confidence and imagination. Also, the last administration of the Greater London Council - as well as its radical social and cultural programmes - turned County Hall into a "People's Palace". It became accessible for the first time and host to many festivals and cultural events. As the Thatcher government and the Whitehall bureaucrats tried to close it all down, these took on the force of major rallying points. The government and right wing press tried to portray this as 'Loony Left' money-wasting frivolity. Nevertheless, a poll on the eve of abolition showed that, had there been an election, the GLC would have been returned with a vastly increased majority - highlighting that the abolition was not about reforming local democracy but attacking it. And that the reason it was attacked was because it was not only successful but popular. What is evident from these examples - and there are many more - is that culture played a leading role in broadening the range of people

involved, stimulating imagination and the vitality of expression. Far from diluting the power of intervention, it was greatly enhanced.

We need to be creative in our strategies because if we are trying create the building blocks for a new culture, it surely needs to be one that is rich, diverse, and fulfilling; it needs to offer the prospect of greater pleasure than that which exists now, otherwise it will fail to capture the imagination of the majority needed to make it happen.

If we accept what Raymond Williams said in the quote I used earlier : "Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community". Then I believe that culture is the site where the struggle to create a new society will be won or lost.

I have chosen to use the term "Local narratives" (borrowed from Lyotard) because some of the work that has previously attempted to address these issues has been lumped under various umbrellas such as "Community Art", "Political Art", "Women's Art", "Black Art", Ethnic Art" and so on. These terms - usually created by funding bodies or critics I have to say - are convenient labels for bureaucrats and have, at times had short term strategic uses for practitioners too in creating a profile for a previously marginalised activity. Let's face it, the marginalised and dispossessed have to be opportunistic. Nevertheless, in the long term, such phrases are both counter-productive and divisive. It divides the work falsely into ghettos or fashions - I'm sure many of us have heard galleries say "Women's Art (or any of the other of the above categories), we've done that, now we're into so and so". It also limits the reading of the work to one level, the single issue, when clearly the most vital work in these areas - by its very nature - interconnects across many issues and addresses a number of spheres of discourse. And as the chosen means of communication and expression, the visual is primary in this. I make this point because there is a tendency for those still conditioned by modernist thinking to "screen-out" the visual and formal aspects of this kind of work because they think "that's not what it's about". Even when they agree with the politics of the work and are impressed by its visual power, they still say "It may be good propaganda but I'm not sure if it's art". Well I'm not going to get drawn into that old chestnut about what's art and what isn't, but simply to say that the Medicis made no such distinction.

What I believe *is* interesting about this fragmentation of discourses that used to be fairly unitary "disciplines" - such as that of Fine Art - is that we are beginning to see new alignments, what Edward Said has described as "interference" across what have become "fiefdoms" for the initiated, and the creation of new agendas. For example my own work has drawn me into the area of Urban Regeneration and Planning. I talk more to, and probably have more in common with, members of tenants and action groups, radical planners and cultural geographers, than I do with a lot of artists. Similarly, many feminist artists might have stronger contacts with women's groups - not necessarily artists - black artists may have more interest in the issues of racism and other matters affecting their communities than they have in the discourses of other white artists. And so on. This, if you like, is a fragmentation of the Art discourse. But in my opinion it is a very healthy one. One that is fanning out, moving away from the dusty museums of academia and the



sterile introversion of modernism, and is remaking networks and realigning narratives to make contact with the pulse of wider social and cultural change; not just formal innovation. And yet this work has to make formal innovations too. Its different contexts demand that.

So to sum up what I have been saying so far; I believe it is vital that, in our different ways and different forms, we oppose the Grand Narrative's mono-vision, its material impositions, and its subjective and cultural hegemony - from the physical pollution of our environment to the pervasive "Memory Screen" which stains our perceptions. And Rather than creating an equal and opposite mono-vision, I believe we need more than ever before to engage and extend our "Local narratives" to achieve a new consensus where it is needed - in matters such as global warming for example - but one which is capable of embracing difference. As artists, we need to develop visual languages appropriate to these new contexts; the kind of language, to quote Thomas Hart Benton again - "if it is to be effective, it must somehow touch the interests of plain people". But this requires the development of new networks, so that we can create channels of cross-fertilisation and strands of solidarity.

Put this way it sounds like a tall order. And a contradictory one. It sounds as though one has to throw one's self into a lot of both intellectual and practical ferment. But to quote Thomas Hart Benton one last time - "Any ferment that throws the artist out of the studio, out of an ivory tower world, is going to benefit art". And, we don't have to tackle all of these issues at once, in every piece of work. We don't have to be, indeed it is no longer possible or desirable to be, the "Renaissance Man"(sic). There are a growing number of us working on these issues. And tackling them from different perspectives. Not just art perspectives. These questions are being tackled across a number of fields and disciplines. So we don't need to take on the whole lot ourselves. What we do need though are *effective networks*. Networks that cross-fertilise "Local Narratives" across geographic boundaries, across issue divides - class, race, gender etc - and across disciplines and fields of endeavour. And that *is* a tall order. But once again, we don't have to do it all at once, here and now. We need to make connections, cumulatively. Maybe conferences like this could begin to tackle these issues, and I hope some of our later discussions will address them more concretely. A magazine, an international interdisciplinary magazine which acts as a vehicle for "Local Narratives", might be another beginning. Maybe we could find ways of using some of the new technology, not just the remarkable imaging techniques now available (though expensively) but also the faxes and computer modems, to make connections outside of the mainstream and - as yet - beyond the control of state authorities. "Faxes to China" during the recent repression is an example of this. This of course limits the network to those who have the resources. But we don't need to think only in terms of one network.

There are other things going on too, specific things, like the fact that the new Ontario government here seems to be talking about embarking on cultural policies similar to those the Greater London Council implemented in London. In other words, prioritising the culture of those previously marginalised. There are valuable practical lessons that could be exchanged there. Of course there is a specificity

here that is different to that of London. Nevertheless some of the contradictions are likely to be similar when a large political institution of this nature, with all its bureaucratic entropy, tries to embrace what, up to now, has been its opposition. For example, what happens when those who have been marginalised for so long are given a voice - they want to use it. And the way they use it may not be what either the politicians or the Bureaucracy expect or like. Inevitably large institutions find it difficult to respond quickly to change, but once the promise of change is there it creates expectations which are bound to lead to frustrations, and the newly found voices will articulate that. Again a source of conflict. Politicians may feel under siege from both sides; from the opposition and those they believe they are trying to help. Another danger is the creation of a dependency culture among the newly prioritised groups. If there is no clear strategy to help such groups use their newly acquired resources to create their own means of self-sufficiency and to strategically develop support networks, then everything falls apart if the administration is voted out or, as happened with the GLC, abolished. Exchange of these nitty gritty practical things are important; we don't have to reinvent the wheel each time we have the opportunity to gain access to the agencies of power. And there are many other means of networking that I haven't talked about, and I'm sure there are others I haven't even thought about.

There is a tendency, a pressure even, when you are critical of the status quo, that people expect you lay out an alternative 'vision for the future', a blue-print for The Way Forward. Even if I was capable of doing that, or arrogant enough to try - my whole point is that too many have already attempted that with disastrous consequences. What I have tried to do here is to make a very simple point, but in looking at it from a number of different angles I hope I have also conveyed something of its complexity. In order to embrace that complexity creatively, we need to become more responsive to the specificity of context, find ways of accepting and respecting difference. And I believe we need to do this, not by simply becoming more tolerant, but by *refining* our critical faculties; so that we can understand more about the nature of difference - where it comes from and how it comes about. Uncritical tolerance is so often just another way of being patronising. And that is no good to anyone, least of all to those who are being patronised. It also leads to a paralysing relativism. So perhaps a first step might be a rather painful one, of putting our differences on the table, honestly. Perhaps the Art Voices for 2000 will be those which recognise the creative value of Fragmented Power. Starting with our own.

**Peter Dunn May 1991**

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### ***Digital Highways Installation***

*The installation ran the whole length of a 60ft x 40ft gallery, using the two end walls to represent 'terminals' in London and Toronto (previous works by Beveridge, Conde, Dunn & Leeson were shown along the side walls). The 'terminals' were joined by a laser beam flanked by live TV monitors showing current stock market*

information and a pixel moving message board spelling out " EXCHANGE". Counterpointing this on the floor, like the SLOW signs on a road, where the words "USE" and reversed out of white dashes across the floor where, alternately, "resist" "transform", "transform" "resist".

**Digital Highway - London Terminal; 'The confusion of Tongues' (Peter Dunn & Loraine Leeson 1991)** This work borrows its metaphor from Bruegel's "Tower of Babel" , and as Bruegel placed his tower within his own contemporary setting, so our tower is placed on the site of Canary Wharf. Today, the 'confusion of tongues' are the meta-languages of information technology, the social and economic stratification which means that different social groups have totally different terms of reference - they don't 'speak the same language' -and of course the continuous erasure of one partially grasped impression by another as the media rolls on to another 'current affair'. The thrust is not anti-technological, on the contrary - in keeping with the theme, the major part of this installation utilises computer technology and represents an experiment in new Digital Photography techniques - rather it raises questions about its use. The Gulf War began when we were in the process of producing this work. As the differing practices of imperialism - the early 20th century model of military annexation, and the late 20th Century one of economic domination - faced each other in the desert, we were reminded that the original Tower of Babel was sited on the banks of the Euphrates, yet its 'story' is communicated to us through the 'Western tradition'. And when some Tory politicians described the BBC as the Baghdad Broadcasting Corporation because they believed we, the British public, were getting too much information about what was happening in Iraq, then this obviously became an important element of the work.

The representational tradition of the Tower of Babel sites the tower itself in the background, emphasising its scale against a dwarfed landscape with its uppermost reaches rising above the clouds. Its winding structure usually contains narratives of work. In the foreground you see the rulers and task-masters, and the 'confusion of tongues' is dramatised here by a rhetoric of gestures among those surrounding them. In our interpretation, we split foreground and background into two sections. The backdrop contains the tower, foregrounded by a column of microwave dishes beaming their messages in all directions. In front of this stands a freestanding console of monitors and computers showing a selection of images from news broadcasts during the second week in February - the Gulf, Palestinians, Advertisements for London's Docklands, the Birmingham Six, the bombing of London rail stations, the UN, and an array of prominent leaders currently on the 'world stage'. The sound that goes with this involved the weaving in and out of four simultaneous tracks, a 'babble', taken from these news broadcasts with the music of 'Mars' from Holst's Planet Suite anchoring the whole. Reclining under the tables of these 'consoles' are images of homeless people from Cardboard City.