stage upon which America's malfunctioning deviants of all shapes are offered up for judgment. On the whole, "Realities" brings an archeological dimension to latent baroque tendencies at work in the American imaginary. With emphasis on the plural, "Realities" can perhaps be seen as a well-timed rejoinder to the current fetishization of autobiographical work that uses the camera to stake claims to direct, unmediated experience, stressing, once again, the tangled play between the representational and real.

– LEE RODNEY

Parachute #95
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YVONNE SINGER

The Red Head Gallery, Toronto, November 4 – 28

YVONNE SINGER, THE VEILED ROOM, 1998, INSTALLATION VIEW; PHOTO: ISAAC APPLEBAUM, COURTESY THE ARTIST.

The incorporation of time-based media into installation is by now a familiar tactic in art addressing issues of memory and identity. Within the *mise-en-scène* established by installation components, both the archival capacity of video and film and the narcissistic function of the luminous screen support a reviewing of the past and investigations of "self" and "other." It is this strategy that Yvonne Singer adopts in *The Veiled Room* (1998), where a "home movie" transferred onto video suggestively positions her family history in relation to the historical context of Weimar Germany.

Walls of sheer white curtains mark out the triangular space of *The Veiled Room*. These veils are suspended in two layers with entry through a parting on one side. Viewed from inside, the exterior layer is printed with twenty-one pages of Sigmund Freud's writings selected from English and German versions of the *Standard Edition*. In front of this grid of texts is an interior layer of names printed in German gothic script, names synonymous with the intellectual patrimony of German culture (Goethe, Nietzsche, Wagner) and with the turbulence of the Weimar period (politicians, artists, philosophers, writers, scientists and social theorists). The forty-six names are arranged in alphabetical order, a roll-call of the famous – Alfred Adler, Bertolt Brecht, Albert Einstein, Hindenberg, Hitler, Wassily Kandinsky – and the more recently revived, Walter Benjamin and Charlotte Salomon.

The artist's statement tells us that these names are a personal, idiosyncratic selection representative of Germany's first democracy, the Weimar Republic, established in 1918 and dismantled in 1933 when Hitler was appointed Chancellor. Art historically it is a period commensurate with the modernism of the Bauhaus, first established in Weimar, which is where Singer's installation was originally exhibited. The legacy of the Weimar Republic as a time of great cultural innovation was secured by the mass emigration of intellectuals that attended its collapse. The failure of Weimar democracy to forestall the ascendancy of fascism and the genocidal plans of Hitler's Nazi party precipitated both a world war and the Holocaust. So the spectre of historical catastrophe and exile, and the fate of European Jewry, surfaces alongside the names in Singer's personal pantheon, printed in *fraktur* font, a script so indelibly linked to the frenzied nationalism of Nazi Germany that its use, Sander Gilman tells us, was reserved like park benches for Aryans only.

At the apex of the triangle a video monitor, positioned on the floor, features a single scene in continuous replay – a love scene, performed for the camera by an attractive young couple whose fashionable attire dates the original film clip to the early 1950s. The setting appears to be a summer seaside location. The lovers stand on either side of a set of stairs leading down through a concrete breakwater. As they approach each other with arms outstretched, the man appears to stumble and begins to fall down the stairs, catches himself and then, faltering, turns to the woman. They smile, embrace, kiss. The exaggerated style of acting verges on slapstick, so it is not clear whether the man is clowning around or actually suffering an accident, incurring an injury. However one reads intentionality into this dramatic narrative, the averted catastrophe is followed by the happy ending.

In the video there is no voice-over, no music, to supplement the visual. The scene unfolds again and again in silence like a screen memory. Nor is there anything to identify the lovers as the artist's parents, a connection that can only be surmised from the vintage of the film, and through recourse to Singer's selection of Freud's writings.

Excerpts from *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Short Account of Psychoanalysis* underscore the primacy of the Œdipus Complex in Freud's account of the subject, that is, the importance in adult mental life of the emotional relationship of the child to the parents. Freud famously argued that civilization is founded upon the conflict within these very family relations, the prevailing of the reality principle over the pleasure principle, that keeps the expression of love and aggression in check, in accordance with the prohibition of the father. All of Singer's texts touch upon this central tenet of the Œdipal triangle: *The Ego and the Id*, "Infantile Genital Organization," "Anatomical Sex Distinction," and the frontispiece of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, all refer back to the triangular structure of the installation and to the boundary of the veils as marking both a psychic interiority and a corporeal one. The latter is suggested by the German text *Das Ich und das Es* in which Freud conceives the Ego as a function of touch and body perception, most acutely the body in pain, which provides both new knowledge of the body and the model for self-representation in art. Finally in "The Goethe Prize" Freud interrogates the desire to know the artist's biography

as a means of understanding the art. He claims that psychoanalysis can "demonstrate new connecting threads. . . between the instinctual endowments, the experiences and the works of an artist."

Much as Freud's science of psychoanalysis mapped a topography of the unconscious, the printed grid of texts lends definition to the surface of the semi-transparent veil, and suggests an underlying structure of connecting threads, through which to assimilate the names printed on the interior layer. Yet the significance of these texts in deciphering the mute image of the video remains elusive, beyond recasting the love scene as "family romance," hence, aligning the position of the spectator with that of the child/artist. We are confronted with the failure of representation to return the gaze, to ensure a coherent identity. More disconcerting, however, are the questions that arise given the proximity of the Weimar legacy. Are we to deduce from their appearance that these lovers are Europeans? Jews? Precisely what would we look for? How would we know? Is this the truth of the text, or a detour? There is, after all, a happy ending. Singer's strategy is the inverse of Adrian Piper's video installation *Cornered* (1988) where the artist's direct address confronts the spectator with the "truth" of her black heritage, producing quite another kind of discomfort. In Singer's installation, the veil that would reveal the trauma marks the boundary of the work and of our understanding.

– CHRISTINE CONLEY

EUAN MACDONALD

Centennial Gallery, Oakville, December 18 – February 7

The installation of Euan Macdonald's installation of drawings and paintings was supplemented by three single-shot, looped videos. Or rather, Macdonald's presentation of his videotapes was surrounded by a series of cartoon-like drawings and minimalist paintings. Within one exhibition of work, you could hardly ask for a greater contrast of medium – or of value associated with each – the currency of video and its spectacle status overwhelming the capacities or appeal of the traditional medium of drawing (or painting). Hence, the ambivalence of association or issue of hierarchy proposed above.

Yet, in this exhibition, drawing and video complement each other, not, however, because of any truth to medium, one being able to depict what the other cannot. Rather, the two are in dialogue in the installation, and this dialogue is set in motion by the viewer. Drawing and video enter each orbit, so to speak, with a states), that torques each medium at a different pitch of rotation. Each medium seems keyed to a different speed, and not necessarily one associated with it. The buzz around video is reduced to a monotone, whereas drawing displays a bejewelled vitality. But as in any elliptical orbit, to choose this figure, the travelling object speeds up or slows down depending on its trajectory, so in the end we find that this contrast of velocity actually is enacted not only between the two media but within each as a countermotion.

Take Macdonald's one-note videos. Almost nothing happens in them. An action is sustained, then repeated in the looping of the tape. In the earliest, *Interval* (1997), two directions of multi-lane traffic pass through the frame, the vehicles' passage determined by density or the rhythm of off-screen traffic lights. In the breaks between traffic, the shadows of two royal palms, which had been visible all are phenomena we register but don't necessarily pay attention to, shadows even less so, being an absence of light only, and at an opposite extreme from traffic's impact and force of velocity. Here, in intervals, the shadows' images dominate the screen. The palms sway langourously, like slow metronomes, lulling us in their shadows' rhythm. There is no force of rupture here, as if beneath the pavement were the beach. Rather, the palms present a counterpoint to that of the traffic: their shadows almost seem to bounce off the pavement from the depth of the screen back towards us instigating another temporal rhythm. That *Interval* is composed of a crane shot helps to place the viewer above the "action," distanced but entranced.

In *Two Planes* (1997), we gaze up through the camera to follow the slow path of two passenger jets flying in tandem; rather, one plane has been computer duped to achieve the effect. The hand-held camera traces the meandering manoeuvres of the planes against a pure blue sky and records the low rumble of the planes' engines. But as we stand in front cameraman's feet. Because of our focus on the central visual image, we hear the drone associated with it. Now the audio track splits our attention between the near and the far, and thereby disconnects the senses of the eye and the ear. So doing, the track returns us to our bodies and secures us in our place. Our senses now dissociated, we once more turn our gaze to survey that uncanny image of the nearly conjoined planes, *forever* aloft and aloof.

Brakestand's title describes itself: with brakes on, a driver spins the wheels of his dilapidated BMW, going nowhere fast, like a pathetic cartoon bandit. This succinct video from 1998 runs contrary for a wearying fifteen minutes thanks to computer looping. Entropy is rigged; the artist plays god digitally with nature. But to what end? Because of the computer looping in all these tapes, the start of a shot, its "narrative" origin, is lost. Except in *Brakestand*, although one could miss it, if you entered this unvarying videotape other than at the first second. The car starts, and the brakestand persists, impossi-

EUAN MACDONALD, INTERVAL, 1997, VIDEO STILL; PHOTO: COURTESY ROBERT BIRCH GALLERY.