Liminaire

With the completion of this issue, some major changes occur in the *Tessera* collective. Katherine Binhammer and Jennifer Henderson, two of the editors who assumed responsibility for the journal in 1992, when *Tessera* passed from its founders to a new collective, leave to embark on other projects. During the past decade, Katherine and Jennifer, along with Lianne Moyes, have re-imagined *Tessera* as a more interdisciplinary, post-second-wave journal of "feminist interventions in writing and culture," to use the new tag-line that *Tessera* assumed along the way. At first in Toronto and then from her new home in Edmonton, Katherine has brought energy and vision to the collective, contributing her confident and sexy feminist sensibility to the editing of "Bodies, Vesture, Ornament" and "Seductive Feminisms," and keeping us afloat along the way by writing winning grant applications. Jennifer has demonstrated a tireless dedication to all aspects of the journal, from business matters, to editorial work, to active promotion of *Tessera* at book fairs large and small. Her efforts to solicit exciting new work from up-and-coming and established feminist writers in particular have helped to solidify *Tessera*'s reputation for cutting-edge feminist critique. In issues such as "Symbolic Violence and the Avant-Garde," "Work," "Feminism and Self-Help," and "Fetishism," Jennifer has introduced into *Tessera*'s orientation an attention to the larger cultural and discursive forms which feminism both perpetuates and critiques.

Cheryl Sourkes has served as our visual art coordinator since 1995. Her ability to interpret our issue themes in subtle and original ways – and then to scout the feminist art world for related explorations in the visual arts – has made *Tessera* a venue for the work of Canada's most exciting up-and-coming women artists. Cheryl's artwork selections have consistently served as a provocation and an inspiration to the collective's editors, forcing us to take our themes in unexpected new directions. In 1997, Lauren Gillingham and Julie Murray breathed new life into an exhausted collective with their combined talents and energies. Lauren has carried sole responsibility for the business and production end of the journal since joining us, and her wisdom, organizational acumen, and meticulous eye for detail have not only rescued us from many a disaster but also raised

aesthetic and design standards. Julie's insistence on intellectual currency and sophistication have often clarified our editorial decision-making processes, and these qualities are boldly in evidence in her recent double-issue on *Feminist Ethics and the Law*.

Avec ce numéro, se termine aussi la participation de Nadine Ltaif, co-éditrice depuis 1999. En collaboration avec Lise Harou, Nadine s'est consacrée avec dynamisme aux écrits de femmes francophones dans le but de les publier dans *Tessera*, permettant ainsi à cette revue de se faire connaître davantage au sein de la communauté littéraire au Québec. Nous lui souhaitons la meilleure des chances pour le film qu'elle est en train de réaliser.

Le nouveau collectif sera présenté dans le prochain numéro (33) qui portera sur le sang.

Introduction

Lianne Moyes

Aroma therapy, exercise machines, wave pools, reality tv, flight simulators, surround sound. . . . Sensory experience is everywhere for sale. Contemporary consumer culture exploits the radical continuities between the actual and the mediated, the real and the simulated. A small bottle of lavender oil promises to ease the pain of giving birth; a cross-country ski machine offers a work-out without negotiating trails or facing the wind; Obusforme digital recordings of "nature's most pleasant, relaxing sounds" advertise stress-relief; JVC technology incites us to "excite" our senses. As Martine Delvaux and Catherine Mavrikakis suggest in their conversation about responses to September 11, 2001, we want so badly to feel – and not to feel.

The sensory experiences evoked in the writing, performances and installations featured here are neither for sale nor easily consumed. The small bronze objects which Germaine Koh carries around in her pockets are the closest we come to money and, in fact, they are available to us only in photographs. Watching the wigs twirling in a shop window on Dundas Street in Toronto is a potentially marketable activity. But the movement isn't quite right and we only begin to process it when we step inside the store and hear the music which drives the wig machines. Rather than offering something recognizable, the pieces here confront participants with experiences whose purchase on the senses is neither immediate nor obvious. Several pieces require the participation of audience members: dangling sacks filled with aromatic materials need to be jostled, t-shirts need to be sniffed, a room needs to be lived in, an ear horn needs to be taken for a walk, pastries need to be squeezed. A number of pieces ask us to attend to the interaction between the senses, for example, how what we see is altered by how we move through it, what it smells, sounds and feels like. Others signal the difficulty of recording smell, touch and taste – sometimes called the proximate senses – and of recording performances or installations which involve a body's sense of its movement, balance, position in space and so forth – what Jennifer Fisher calls the haptic. To con-

jure experiences of the proximate and haptic, artists draw variously upon body memory, imagination and writing. They use the figurative possibilities of performance, installation, video image and language to capture or evoke sensory experience, often generating synaesthetic effects in which one realm of experience speaks for another. Writing, in the form of dialogue or poem, becomes a way of negotiating a relationship to sensory experiences which are not immediate to us – either because they have passed or because they belong to others.

As Jennifer Fisher points out, the sense of touch is often engendered as feminine – not only in contemporary feminist theory but also in premodern allegorical representations of the senses. However, rather than advocating touch as an alternative to vision, Fisher considers the senses "in constellatory terms." She is particularly interested in the haptic, a relational sense which extends beyond touch to the body's experience of movement and interaction. In her terms, "where the visualist logics of a sense hierarchy rely on distance and proximity, those of a haptic epistemology engage the space in-between: those loci of affect and becoming." For Fisher, artworks which engage the haptic make it difficult to reduce art to the status of object, something to be apprehended or consumed with one's eyes. The work of Sandra Rechico, discussed by Fisher and featured in this issue, is a case in point. Rechico's *Distended*, for example, consists of a room of dangling nylon sacks filled with various organic materials which release different aromas when they are jostled by those moving in the room. The significance of the piece, Fisher suggests, comes in large part from one's relationship, both affective and physiological, to the sacks and their aromas. Imagine visiting the room pregnant, filled with desire to touch the pendulous bodies and, at the same time, a desire not to disturb them, intensely aware of their movement, texture, shape and smell.

Fisher's understanding of the haptic and of different senses operating in tandem is helpful in thinking about a number of the artworks presented here. Colette Urban's *Ground Sound* involves taking a device called an "ear horn" for a walk. Aimed at the pavement, the horn allows participants to apprehend the sounds of the city at the level of their feet as well as the sound of their own movement through the city – an unexpected form of bio-feedback. Lisa Deanne Smith's *sweet* offers another instance of Fisher's beholder turned performer. The scene is a white room piled with sugar in which white-clad figures wearing white wigs recline on white furniture and stare blankly at pages of X's and O's. Members of the public are wel-

come to enter the space, drink pina coladas, take in the soundtrack of white noise and, generally, blend in with the scenery. A send-up of colour-coordinated life-styles as well as pristine gallery spaces, *sweet* dissolves audience into artwork and makes the audio-visual so predictable that it heightens other sensory experiences, particularly touch, taste and the feel of bodies inhabiting a space. Melissa Gordon's "Red River" is a combination of radically altered items of apparel suspended on a line from one end of a room to the other and radically altered photographs of transcultured and transgendered bodies wearing that apparel. Gordon's clothes have aural qualities (twigs and other materials rustling in response to movement) and tactile resonances (fabrics and textures which attract or repel touch) which, in conjunction with the photographs, underline the transformative possibilities of the body-clothing relation.

Zarina Bhimji's multi-sensory *She Loved to Breathe–Pure Silence*, the focus of Deborah Cherry's essay, organizes the installation space in ways which emphasize ambivalence, movement and dislocation. Suspended panels are set in motion by viewers moving within the room. In conjunction with the perspex which covers the panels, this movement makes the images and texts (representing the voices of South Asian women) on the panels difficult to read. An enlarged visa stamp on one of the panels and a surgical glove (for gynaecological exams) are testimony to the violent policing of bodies and/at borders. Spices scattered on the floor create a physical border and, at the same time, speak of various kinds of border-crossings including migration, the trade in spices and hybrid culinary practices. The smell of the spices, transitory as it is, conjures memories, including the intimate practice of rubbing spice into the skin of a woman before she marries. Cherry is struck by the difference between the initial installation and the dismantled and photographed remains in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a difference she attributes to a loss of "the positionality in and from which [the installation] was made." However, the decay of the materials in the panels, like the transitory nature of the smell of the spices, leads Cherry to insist that "the sense of smell, like that of sound, taste or touch can be teased, provoked in the imagination as much as in the body."

Performer Helen Paris shares Cherry's attention to the ephemeral quality of performance or installation, and to the difficulty of recording any multi-sensory interaction. Paris is particularly interested in the role of smell in an age of digital technology. Without denying the possibilities for performance opened by virtual reality, she insists upon the value of the

visceral and specifically of smell in inciting the body to perform memories and emotions. The focus of Paris's discussion, a co-performance with Leslie Hill entitled *Random Acts of Memory*, presents audiences with a combination of the immediate (smells in the theatre itself; performers responding to smells on stage) and the mediatized (life-sized clones of the performers projected on stage; audio-visual material variously amplified, repeated and manipulated; pre-recorded and live-feed). Paris is struck by the audience's passionate response to the "low-tech" moments in the performance, for example, to the performers' faces lit only by matches when the power is switched off or to Helen's efforts to breathe in smells and, in the same breath, recount the memories they evoke. Drawing upon Peggy Phelan's notion of an ontology of performance, Paris posits an ontology of the olfactory and likens smell to performance on the basis of their shared intangibility and ephemerality. Another comparison, between synthetic smell and mediated performance (on the grounds that both have a depleted "aura") is left as a question. However, the essay suggests enough interpenetration of the virtual and the visceral to make such a comparison suspect.

Whereas Paris works with actual smells, performance artist Clara Ursitti works with both real smells and chemical simulations. Ursitti's olfactory performances and installations, including *Pheromone Link™ Scent Library* which is featured in this issue, confront audiences with various body odours and with the relationship of those odours to gender identity and desire. As Jim Drobnick points out in his essay, Ursitti's artwork prompts a re-evaluation of bodily odours by presenting them in galleries where they are not welcome, by reducing them to their chemical constituents and by exploring their libidinal potential. Her presentation of vaginal secretions as perfumes, he argues, not only disrupts judgements about good and bad smells but also challenges the discourses and practices by which the female body is made abject. Interested in the role of smell in the construction and regulation of the modern subject, Drobnick shows how Ursitti reimagines the "self-portrait" in terms of an olfactory sketch or signature whose diffuse and fragmentary quality "destabilizes visualist notions of the self as a discrete entity."

Elizabeth Walden, like Fisher, argues that one cannot address the hegemony of vision in art and culture simply by substituting touch for vision. In her view, to do so would be to ignore the way any hierarchy of the senses tends to "both idealize and detach the sensory apparatus from the

human/animal body for ideological purposes." It would also be to ignore the fact that vision does not enjoy the distance and detachment so often claimed for it, and that touch, in the sense of "embodied immediacy," is not as ideologically innocent as it might at first appear. The characterisation (albeit positive) of women as expressions of the proximate in the lives of men in Terrence Malick's film *The Thin Red Line* is for Walden a chastening reminder of the gender ideologies which subtend the touch-vision binary. Rather than substituting one sense for another, she advocates a reconsideration of the relationship between the tactile and the visual, a relationship which is in question in a number of the works in this issue.

Writing, a technology which, as Marshall McLuhan suggests in *Understanding Media*, champions the eye at the expense of the ear, might seem an unlikely site for a reconsideration of the relationship between the tactile and the visual. However, as Linda Bonin suggests, the collaborative work of Betty Goodwin and Denise Desautels makes legible the work of the body – the tracings of energy, movement, touch – in the production of writing. Writing, like drawing, is a gesture of touch, a gesture of extending the self in the direction of another. The latter gesture is also key to the correspondence between Catherine Mavrikakis and Martine Delvaux. "Le Goût de la guerre" is in some measure a meditation on the relationship between the proximate and the distant. By what elaborate rituals, these letters ask in the weeks following September 11, 2001, does the West avoid witnessing the suffering in Afghanistan? By what new dispensation does the West suddenly see the struggles of Afghan women? Refusing the anaesthesia and the hypersensitivity of privilege, these letters listen for snatches of sense in the noise of the media machine, hear silence in the speech of the President, smell death in the images presented on television, feel the cold of a child's body in Palestine, bear witness to firemen crying in New York and confront new-found fears of airline travel, border-crossing and anthrax. Delvaux and Mavrikakis alternately question their senses and enlist them in the interest of ethical leaps of imagination and perception.

kim dawn's *blind numb thumbs outstretched* addresses a different kind of anaesthesia. At a glance, these video stills seem to stage a retreat from the visual into the tactile. However, as the title suggests, this woman is feeling her way with numb thumbs. The blindfold figures a turn inside, a search within herself for clues to her anaesthetized state; and the outstretched thumbs, also directed inward, are a sign of how little she knows about

what's ahead of her or behind her. This is not the image of the fully sentient body so pervasive in contemporary culture; this is an image of a woman negotiating with great courage – with blind numb thumbs outstretched – the razor-fine edge between the body as repository of pain and the body as mechanism of recovery, between feelings she's forgotten in order to survive and feelings she wants to remember in order to survive.

Germaine Koh's *Tokens*, bronze objects cast from pebbles and sticks, are meant to be carried around in one's pocket. There, subject to what Koh calls "corporeal friction," they change and accrue emotional value. Exhibiting this project poses an interesting problem in the sense that the objects are intended to be held/carried rather than to be seen. As if to insist upon the difference between carrying and seeing, Koh provides only photographs (often blurred photographs) of the objects. She foregrounds the distance which enters into play when one presents the project visually and, at the same time, makes the exhibit difficult to appropriate for an aesthetic of unmediated clarity or transcendent vision. In *Tokens*, touch retains its "destabilizing potential" (Walden) and vision is shown to be a mode of apprehension which relies upon other senses, in this case, relations of proximity and material contact. If, as Walden argues through Guy Debord, ocularcentric society appropriates "everything that is proximate to our experience and reconstructs it at a distance as a spectacle for us to consume," then Koh's photographs both resist such a gesture and perform it.

In writing about the senses, the auditory is most often paired with the visual and both are contrasted with so-called "proximate" senses of touch, taste, and smell. Yet if the auditory and the visual stand together as the senses of distance, the senses most readily available for reproduction and mediation, they are nevertheless quite different. As Helen Paris's *Random Acts of Memory* suggests when it conjoins sounds, smells and textures from the past, auditory material often works alongside the non-visual senses, evoking other spaces and times and, importantly, emphasizing the mechanisms of passage from one space or time to another. Sound, unlike an object of vision, is something in which one can bathe:

> the singular space of the visual is transformed by the experience of sound to a plural space: one can hear many sounds simultaneously, where it is impossible to see different visual objects at the same time without disposing them in a unified field of vision . . . . The self defined in terms of hearing rather than sight is a self imaged not as a

> point, but as a membrane; not as a picture, but as a channel through which voices, noises and musics travel. (Connor 207)

Marla Hlady's installation *Waltzing Matilda* explores the relationship between the visual and the auditory, specifically, the way a store-front image of three wigs twirling on their stands changes when one enters the store and hears three versions of "Waltzing Matilda" (June Tabor, the Pogues and Tom Waits) playing simultaneously. The movement of each wig seems to have a relationship to one of the overlapping chorus-lines and, indeed, each is connected by simple electronics to respond to the frequencies in a given version. In this sense, hearing the music allows what one sees – wigs moving in a way which is neither entirely machine-like nor entirely life-like – to be understood kinaesthetically as a kind of dance. Although the voices are disembodied and the room (the dance floor) is empty, the body insinuates itself into the scene metonymically in the form of movement as well as in the form of the wigs.

The interaction among the senses – theorized by Fisher, Cherry and Walden, and performed by so many art works here, including Rachel Ashe's composite of superimposed sense organs – is also evident in the poetry included in the issue. In Lea Littlewolfe's "highway," for example, an absence of punctuation generates a sense of speed, of not knowing what will appear next – precisely the experience of driving a two-lane highway at night. Breaks in rhythm and difficult combinations of sound interrupt passages of breathless movement, reinforcing the tension between speaker and passenger, between the desire to drive and the desire to pull over. Malca Litovitz's "For Charlotte Salomon" evokes her experience of an exhibit of *Life? or Theatre?*, a kind of opera in poetry and painting produced by German-Jewish artist Salomon (1917-1943). Throughout the poem, eye-stopping paintings are contrasted with the energy of a woman artist who refuses to stand still. Where Salomon uses paint, Litovitz uses words to collage identities, angles of vision and moments of spectatorship. Playing with address, with the identities of "I" and "you," her poem celebrates the passion and movement she finds in Salomon's work. Litovitz's "I hear" takes up a different challenge: the moment by moment recording of sensory input, including input from Virginia and Leonard Woolf, her companions in reading/writing.

Martine Audet's "les qualités secondes" operates at the limits of sense-making. Juxtaposing elements which one would not expect to find togeth-

er and mixing sensory realms, these poems produce vaguely synaesthetic effects. Moisture, for example, perfumes a knife; the builder's plumb acts upon the ear; and a mirror gathers oranges. This unconventional interaction between subjects, objects and phenomena enables new forms of bodily knowledge and awareness, what Jennifer Fisher calls new "corporeal epistemologies." The use of one realm of sensory experience as the analogue of another is also key to the poetic practice of Julie Schroeder. In "Firecrackers Fireworks," the visual metaphor of fireworks seen in the mind's eye (and not heard) translates a moment of extraordinary pleasure; in "The spirit is willing," swimming underwater speaks of too much drink, of language thick with images which seem strangely out of place; and in "All the room," the physicality and sensuality of the kitchen, its textures, tastes and smells, furnish the language needed to render a couple stealing a moment from kids, breakfast and a mother. These poems foreground the material, corporeal and sensory elements which enable the displacements and substitutions so crucial to poetic language. What is more, with their emphasis on the interaction between bodies, on the bodies' movement, disposition in space, smell, weight, balance, temperature and so forth, Schroeder's poems offer literary examples of Fisher's understanding of the haptic, particularly its proprioceptive and kinaesthetic dimensions.

The play of figuration in Schroeder's writing also subtends Diane Borsato's performances. Like the poem "All the room," Borsato's pieces make connections between the affective and the culinary, again in ways which draw attention to the sensory registers which facilitate the connection. Sleeping with cakes, holding bread in her lap, squeezing pastries – generally spending time with food – are acts of passion, acts which give food the place of a friend or lover, acts which explore the sensuality of food. Appropriating the rituals and practices of the kitchen, she finds unexpected ways of experiencing the comfort or goodness of food without ingesting it, and she uses techniques such as boiling to extract what she values in favourite objects such as books and boots. The layering of corporeal, culinary and amatory resonances is also crucial to Millie Chen's installation *crave*. Dramatizing the tension – and the continuities – between the practical and the ornamental, between hunger and the aesthetic, the spoons set in motion a series of substititions and displacements reminiscent of the process through which the mouth is territorialized and reterritorialized by different sensualities, by different modes of taking in

food and making sound. Spoons stand in for tongues; tongues stand in for mouths, for taste, for language; mouths speak of desire. Spoons, arranged in Islamic designs, hold spices which speak of food but also of trade/power relations between groups, trade/power relations which map and re-map the globe.

Elizabeth Walden argues through Walter Benjamin that "art . . . is where 'the human sensorium' can still be engaged." Of course, the category of "the human sensorium," like that of "art," is riddled with questions of ideology, difference, ethics, subjectivity, translation, simulation and mediation. The performances, installations, photographs, poems, conversations, essays, films and videos presented here are sites for engaging these questions. Their value lies not so much in any claim for them as "art" but rather in the way they help us to *read* the appeal of (and to) the senses in contemporary culture: they make legible – indeed, palpable – the strange logic by which we understand ourselves as variously deprived of stimulation and overwhelmed by stimulation, in need of immediate access to the "real" thing and in need of enhanced technologies for mediating and simulating sensory experience.

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