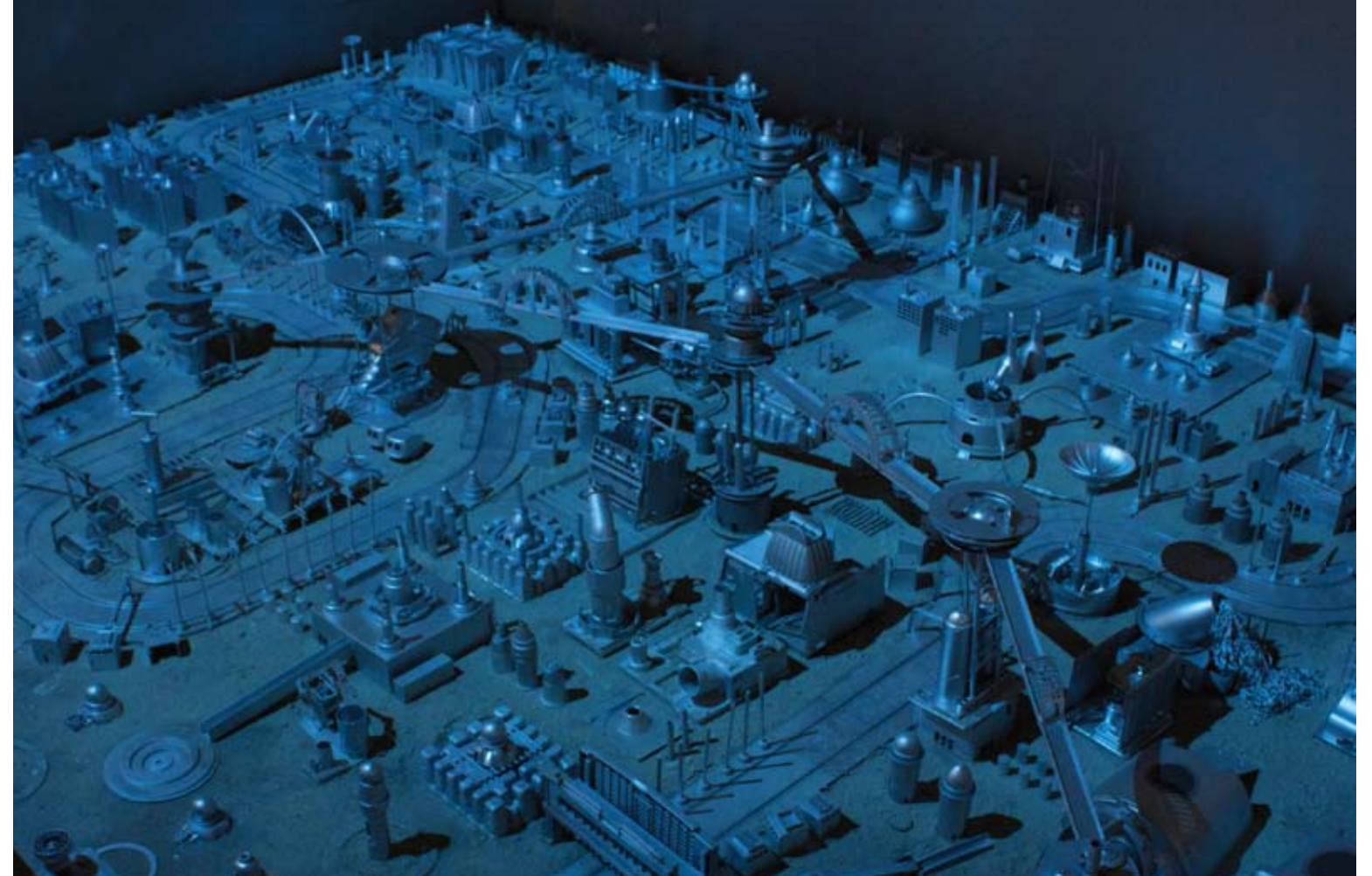


DAVID HAN
SAMINA MANSURI
SARA GRAHAM

David Han, *Margaret Learns to Drive from There to Here*, 2009. Photo: Jennifer Lee. Courtesy of the artist.



Samina Mansuri, *After-Images: Cedibidaee Reconstruction Site 9* (detail), 2009-2010. Photo: Faylaz Chunara/MOCCA.



Sara Graham, *Proposition for a New System (15)*, 2010. Photo: Jennifer Sciarino. Courtesy of the artist and MKG127.

WITH A WORK AT ONCE TOUCHING ON ISSUES OF TECHNOLOGY, URBAN ISOLATION, MULTICULTURALISM AND EMIGRANT EFFECT, CULTURAL ARCHIVES, TEMPORALITY AND DISLOCATION, I WONDER WHAT CAME FIRST FOR YOU AND WHICH ISSUE OF THESE 'DRIVES' THE WORK?

I am interested in setting up situations that explore how our phenomenological experiences are mediated through technology and the role that mediation plays in the ways we inhabit and imagine the world. *Margaret Learns to Drive From There to Here* is an installation that uses these ideas as a basis for examining the postwar suburbs of Toronto.

This piece was originally commissioned for the *Leona Drive Project*, a site-specific exhibition that brought together work engaging the spaces of North York. The personal automobile played a vital role in the development and growth of many of these suburbs. As a result, cars serve as the primary means of not only traversing these places, but mediating the experience of them as well.

The way in which the automobile mediates experience is a well-documented topic in cultural theory. Referencing Roland Barthes in “The Ecstasy of Communication,” Jean Baudrillard argues that driving has shifted from an act imbued with a sense of speed and power over machinery and physical space to an experience akin to television, where “the surrounding landscape unfold[s] like a televised screen.” Paul Virilio extends Baudrillard’s argument, equating the automobile with representational practice, stating, “what goes on in the windshield is cinema in the strictest sense.”

Binding these concepts is the way in which the car mobilizes the gaze, presenting to an immobile viewer scenes which move and change within a framed view. I am interested in this concept of the car as a vision machine and the processes through which these machines of mobility have altered our physical relationship with place.

Beyond the car’s televisual presentation of landscape, I am also interested in how the suburbs are imagined. These are places that were built for veterans returning from WWII, filled with utopian promises of quiet, clean communities

populated by large, spacious homes surrounded by white picket fences. These ideals were reflected and represented not only through land development marketing, but through popular culture as well.

THIS PIECE SEEMS TO BE ONE OF CREATED DISTANCE, THOUGH A DISTANCE FORMED IN THE MATERIALITY AND IMMEDIACY OF YOUR ENVIRONMENT. (WALTER BENJAMIN DEFINED ‘AURA’ AS “A STRANGE WEAVE OF SPACE AND TIME: THE UNIQUE APPEARANCE OR SEMBLANCE OF DISTANCE, NO MATTER HOW CLOSE THE OBJECT MAY BE.”) DO YOU INTEND A DISTANCING, EVEN AN ISOLATION, TO BE FELT THROUGH THE WORK? OR SHOULD THE CROWDING THAT YOUR MEDIATED ENVIRONMENT PERPETUATES SOMEHOW PREVENT THIS SENSE OF ISOLATION FROM OCCURRING?

I don’t believe the sense of distance felt in the piece is intentional. Perhaps it is a byproduct of the established scenario. I intended to create an experience which flows between two poles, neither fully simulation or representation. I wanted to work within this liminal state, exploring the

gaps and overlaps in both the re-presentation of driving and the re-performance of an early televisual representation of the suburbs. In some ways this speaks to the condition of ‘being on the move’ – neither leaving nor arriving – both in terms of driving and the immigrant experience.

THE “WINDOW MIRROR” WAS A CHARACTERISTIC FURNISHING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY APARTMENT, PROJECTING THE STREET INTO THE INTERIOR OF THE ROOM. HOWEVER THERE WAS A PARADOX IN ITS EFFECT, WITH THE APARTMENT BOTH AGGRANDIZED AND ANNULLED BY THE PROJECTED IMAGE. DOES “MARGARET LEARNS TO DRIVE FROM THERE TO HERE” SHARE ANY SIMILARITIES WITH THIS KIND OF CONSTRUCT? SHOULD THE INTERIOR SPACE IN WHICH THESE MEDIA ARE COLLIDING EFFECTIVELY BE FORGOTTEN, OR ECLIPSED?

There are definitely similarities here. The “window mirror,” the television and the car collapse the boundaries of public (exterior) and private (interior) space, and with this collapse comes the conceptual alteration of domesticity and production.

Perhaps it is exterior, public space rather than interior space that has been eclipsed, or rather, replaced. The logic of driving necessitates the exclusion of the city centre or town square in the suburbs. Scott McQuire has argued that “the culture of auto-mobility has laid the grounds for the contemporary victory of the electronic data screen, whose ubiquity situates it as the new *polis* at the crossroads of public and private.” It’s possible that these transformations began in the 19th century and have continued with the development of mediation technologies since.

CAN THE MEDIATED ENVIRONMENT OF “MARGARET LEARNS TO DRIVE FROM THERE TO HERE” (WHICH IMAGES THE ‘EXTERIOR’ THROUGH THE IMMOVABLE OBJECT) BE PERCEIVED TO PRODUCE A VARIATION ON LANDSCAPE ART?

Indirectly, yes, in the sense that televisual images can produce a variation on landscape art. But, unlike landscape art, which is centered on the spatial and temporal position of the eye of the beholder, the televisual image is centered on the mobile, durational, mechanical eye of the camera.

as a reference to space, to the road as a place through which one travels.

But I’m also interested in the interchangeability between these two terms in a world where experience is increasingly mediated through electronic screens. The ubiquity of these screens leads to an elision between the spatial and temporal differentiation between ‘there’ and ‘here’. Returning to Virilio, he writes: “With the interfacing of computer terminals and video monitors, distinctions between *here* and *there* no longer mean anything.”

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT? IN WHAT WAYS DID THIS WORK STEM FROM YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE CITY?

While I currently live and work in the city, I grew up in the suburbs of Toronto. As a result, much of my childhood nostalgia is linked to the car, or more precisely, a station wagon much like the one I used for this work. I’ve always felt driving (or being driven around) to be a cinematic, or televisual, experience. When compared to walking or cycling, which are much more urban activities, the experience of traveling by car provides a

different visual experience. Unlike walking or cycling, car travel presents mobile, framed images to an immobile spectator.

However, beyond the cinematic experience of car travel, this work is also a product of the evolving demographics of my childhood suburb. As a first-generation child of immigrant parents who moved to Canada in the early 70s, I went from being one of a handful of visible minorities in the early 80s, to representing a large portion of the population by the late 90s.

As such, I am interested in the ways in which these diverse communities populating the suburbs negotiate their identities through representations of the suburbs, and how these representations inform the popular imaginary for both current and prospective suburbanites.

