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Ours, and the hands that hold us: Review of 'Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking / Alternative Spaces'

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ture and depth. He renders the figures' faces with stoic and stern expressions, paying particular attention to detail in architecture and clothing — most evident in his depiction of the Mexican Eagle Warrior. To underscore extreme injustices the illustrations portray graphic and brutal aspects of violent clashes between European and Indigenous people.

The warrior resistance represented in this graphic novel includes more than 20 battles, including the 1553 attack on a Spanish fort in southern Chile by the Mapuche led by Lautaro, and the 1850s battles between the U.S. Cavalry, led by Custer, against Crazy Horse and thousands of Lakota warriors. While Hill's project focuses on a particular version of resistance, it overlooks the multiplicity of stories that depart from the warrior persona. Acts of resistance like the retention of Indigenous languages in the face of punishment and trauma, or Anishinaabe women peacefully protesting against a dump site to prevent the pollution of ground water, all have a "fighting spirit" and take courage and sometimes kindness to achieve the desired outcome.

Hill's choice of the comic book medium is itself a form of resistance, as the origins of political and social realism in graphic novels can be traced back to the underground comic books that emerged from the counterculture of the 1960s. The comic book as an artistic medium gave political and adult subject matter a covert form from which to disseminate ideas and information. *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* is an important contribution to the growing genre of historical graphic novels like *Louis Riel*, *Maus* and *Persepolis*, which give perspectives on history that are largely underrepresented. Hill's *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* underlines the significance of creating connections between the histories of Indigenous people in resisting colonialism.

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OURS, AND THE HANDS THAT HOLD US: *Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/ Alternative Spaces*

apexart, 2010

REVIEW BY Suzanne Morrisette



Steven Rand (ed). *Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/Alternative Spaces*. apexart, 2010.

Discussing alternative ideas and spaces seems just as much an exercise in locating the norm, as it is a matter of articulating possible alternatives. Ranging from articles that consider contemporary alternative spaces in art, to the normalization of alternative thinking, *Playing by the Rules* questions whether spaces can remain "alternative" over the long term. The collection contains 13 essays from artists, historians, curators, writers, poets, critics, philosophers, theoreticians, and professors, including a preface by Stephen Rand, an introduction by Heather Kouris, and essays by Pablo Helguera, Robert Atkins, Biljana Ciric, René Block, Irene Tsatsos, Raphael Rubenstein, Marina Grzinic, Julie Ault, Renaud Ego, Boris Groys, Naeem Mohaiemen, Winslow Burleson, and Sofija Grandakovska. Together the essays develop a theoretical and practical space for rethinking and assessing the continued relevance of alternative spaces.

Contributor Pablo Helguera calls contemporary alternative space into question in his article "Alternative Time and Instant Audience (The Public Program as an Alternative Space)." Helguera considers the significance of temporal and social contexts, arguing that it is the responsibility of the alternative space to respond appropriately to a changing world. Other contributors reconsider the limitations of having physical spaces. Julie Ault reflects on this in her essay "Of Several Minds Over Time." Most alternative spaces are found housed within a fixed structure, and as Ault points out, "financial stability takes centre stage when salaries and rent are past due. Under these conditions it is difficult to be spontaneous or debate essential questions about philosophy or purpose." Internet based projects have in recent years become one alternative to this condition. Satellite locations offer another. Along these lines, temporary or nomadic exhibitions, according to contributor Raphael Rubenstein, can also provide a model for an alternative to the alternative space that can be more reflexive and better manage its own lifespan and project goals.

There are other elements to consider as well, like how structural, moral and monetary relationships impact on the ways in which alternative spaces operate. Various alliances and interdependencies can be useful sites for exchange, but they can also create conflict. Curator Biljana Ciric reminds her reader, "Don't bite the hand that feeds you." Alternatively, sticking to your guns, setting new priorities, modifying them, or changing them altogether, can be the kind of matching of mandate to practice that is achieved through a heightened awareness of social context, never allowing oneself to get too comfortable in one spot.

On the ground, it is apparent that things are changing, and that hybrid spaces are blurring boundaries where perhaps they had previously been more articulated. Spaces are not necessarily so separate. Partnerships, experimental projects, and the critical texts that many artist-run centres here in Canada now



deliver, either as integral or supplementary components of their programming, can attest to this idea. Reflexivity is the mechanism that drives alternative spaces. If these spaces are correspondingly affected by their social environment, they can express those changes effectively through their programming.

These actions are not as homogenous as their shared terminologies might suggest on the surface. They are informed by what is permissible on a local, national and global scale, just as the reception of this book will hold different applications depending on where or how it is accessed. As this text proves, the task is to consider many alternatives at once, entangling them in order to reinvent possibilities for exchange. Discussions about alternative practices provide a shared space for each contributor, ensuring a continuum (however tessellated) of viable critical dialogue that consciously returns to the site of unstable critical exchange as the surrounding social conditions change, endlessly.

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MODERN METAPHORS: Frank Shebageget's *Light Industry* Carleton University Art Gallery 10 May – 1 August, 2010

REVIEW BY Deborah Kirk

In *Light Industry*, Frank Shebageget's collection of work operates across cultural categories. Applying both narrative devices and perceptual strategies, Native handcraft traditions and Modernist practices, his work defies easy classification, and in the process articulates certain sympathies between two divergent modes of representation.

Despite a range of media that includes drawing, installation and video pieces, the exhibition is characterized by formal restraint. *Lodge* (2008), is an adaptation of an early work in which the artist faithfully reproduced in miniature the entire fleet of de Havilland's Beaver floatplanes (1,692 models in all) from basswood, steel nails and glue. The replicas' humble but meticulously handcrafted fabrication contrast with the original's industrial production — now an icon of Canadian engineering and design. Ubiquitous in travel to remote northern

communities, the Beaver has become synonymous with modern innovation, resource speculation and, by association, the exploitation of Native Peoples and lands in the pursuit of commercial interests. Piled high, this "beaver dam" points to the practice of hydro electric power generation, the displacement of communities and the devastation of vast wilderness areas. In this sense, the work is a metaphor for the place of the artist's youth in rural Northern Ontario and more broadly, of that (and every) legacy of imperialism.

But in spite of those discursive references, the piece maintains a strong formal cohesion. In the repetition of identical forms, the unique objects combine to create an integrated whole. Similarly, his 2008 drawings *Flight Patterns* trace the component parts of each replica to become part industrial schematic, part abstract design. Beyond simple motif, geometry acts as the central organizing principle — the critical link between narrative elements and the expression of formal concerns. From the most basic structures at work in nature to those reflected in creative production from beadwork to architecture — each is reducible to a single note, an essential and autonomous expression of being. With this conflation of representational modes and productive methods, the works embody those complicated