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Christos Dikeakos has cited Charlotte Townsend’s *artscanada* review of the December 1969-January 1970 Photo Show—SUB Art Gallery at UBC—on several occasions. Although a modest exhibition and shown off-the-beaten track, it has taken on near-mythic proportions as a formative and seminal moment for the Vancouver photo-conceptual scene in-the-making. The exhibition included Iain Baxter (NETCO), Dan Graham, Douglas Huebler, Ed Ruscha, Robert Smithson, Ian Wallace, Jeff Wall, Bill Vazan, and Dikeakos himself.

Townsend wrote (extracted phrases): “the camera as a ‘dumb copying device’”—“inexpressive, careless shots taken, not made.” Her commentary was not outrage or dismissive, but directed to the state or condition of “real information” and the role of camerawork:

To call theirs “bad” photography misses the point...every snap is one possible realization of the infinitely available potential material for the camera.¹

Townsend’s overview echoes Marshall McLuhan’s proposition in 1967; “We have now become aware of the possibility of arranging the entire human environment as a work of art.”²

Photography has had a careless (accidental) potential ever since Kodak introduced the everyday camera in 1898. All the user needed to do was press and shoot, and they could organize their environment in a way that was not possible before. In doing so, the vernacular—the everyday—becomes an organizing principle. The idea of everydayness was intensified by motion pictures—why not shoot in real time to approximate lived experience? Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope* (1948), was composed of 10-minute real-time, continuous action segments (the maximum amount of film that could be loaded into the camera. The opening of Orson Welles’ *Touch of Evil* (1958), is a carefully orchestrated, continuous tracking shot that established atmosphere and the intrigue to come. The list, however, is limited because real time movies are not commercially viable, yet every generation of filmmaker rediscovers real time.

Video time—as with Dikeakos’ *car rides / street scans, 1970/71*—is different from photo and film time, a distinction that is inherent in the medium. Video is a continuous analogue

¹ Charlotte Townsend (now Townsend-Gault), *artscanada* February 1970. p. Dikeakos was also co-curator for Photo Show.
electrical signal, whereas photo and film stock is chemical and light gathering. Film sound is recorded on a separate machine and married to the image via an optical sound track, but video records image and sound simultaneously on the same tape medium. How then to build a vocabulary for this hybrid technological process? The most direct way was to forgo the script, turn the camera on and keep shooting, although not as easy or casual as it sounds.

In THE OPENING SEQUENCE of *car rides / street scans*, Dikeakos addresses the camera, and invites us along:

Going for a car ride? Shall we go?

He’s in—we’re off.

The video shows us the Vancouver streetscape of False Creek, along Terminal Avenue, 6th Avenue and to the western suburbs, as it was at that time, an amalgam of history as built, up to and including that moment. Therefore, it is a *de facto* Now Time and Real Time. Photographs may capture a moment in time, but time can also be relative and elusive in a photograph.  

THE CONFIRMATION OF PAST TIME AND TIME PASSED are the obvious signs: the quality of the Dikeakos video is now washed out and distressed, and if we compare Dikeakos then and now, he’s stopped smoking, and is a better dresser. There is the absence of familiar buildings in our Now Time, and clues within the auralscape of the car. A captured radio commercial that tells us chuck steak is on special for 69 cents a pound. The radio songs of the time take on prominence because they are now golden (wouldn’t we all "rather be a hammer than a nail"?). Perhaps the songs were instant goldies: Santana’s *Oye Como Va* is still great driving music, as is Eric Clapton’s *After Midnight*. Other radio songs captured on videotape were Blood Sweat and Tears’ horn-soaked, "jazz-rock" *Lucretia MacEvil*, Simon and Garfunkel’s plaintive, proto-world music *El Condor Pasa*; Creedence Clearwater Revival’s Bayou-rocking *Suzie Q*; and The Righteous Brothers’ blue-eye soul, *You’ve Lost That Loving Feeling*. The latter two, from 1968 and 1964 respectively, may have been the

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1 Digital video technology provides better resolution and ease of post-production. A difference between still and film is the speed at which the frames can be shot: the zoetrope and photo flipbooks are rudimentary forms of "moving pictures."

2 Why should a vintage photograph of a 1930 building be any different from a 1960 or 2000 photo of the same, assuming no significant alterations have been made to the facade. And in art photography practice, a retrieved photograph—i.e. printed after the "negative" fact—is often double-dated, in Ed Ruscha’s photographs taken in the mid 1960s and printed for exhibition presentation 30 years later.
only true goldies; a key characteristic of radio is to compress time as it enters our ear without
the consent of the listener.\(^5\)

THE NEWS IS DELIVERED in typical "top of the hour," quick bite digests. The most shocking
item (still) is the report that "authorities" had received a photograph of kidnapped British
diplomat James Cross, presumably from the FLQ. The police would "not officially confirm or
deny" that it was from the FLQ, or that the inscription on the back was in Cross’ handwriting,
or anything else about this (instant) photo.

In another War Measures Act report, demonstrators had gathered in protest outside of
Canada House in London.

Elsewhere, UAW contract-strike talks continued in Detroit, and a 5 year-old boy died after
eating heroin-laced Halloween candy. Another report told us that $6.5 million is spent
annually on biological warfare research in Canada. Nova Scotia Premier G.I. Smith had
suffered a heart attack while vacationing in Bermuda, and a local news item made note of
ongoing business extortion in Vancouver.

A TEMPORAL DISTORTION appears in another form, the interval between the making and
the recent editing, more than 30 years in-the-making. This was not by intention, but
circumstances—a suspended time rather than disinterest. The delay pre-empted a key
characteristic of videotape, to provide us with the possibility of an instant replay, and changes
how we see, even for the artist. But car rides / street scans is more than a then-and-now
because the process and method is paramount. The street can always be scanned, and will
always be different in some way, moment-to-moment, day-to-day, week to week, until the
interval of time becomes irrelevant. Yet Dikeakos has kept the ideas alive, current and vital,
and continued to think and make notes on the subject and topic. Thirty years later he wrote
that the radio news of-the-day was proof that events happened elsewhere, not in Vancouver.
There is a truth to this observation, but it is also the condition of daily news, especially
television news from any locale, often prefaced by the segue, "and in the world...". News
amplifies worlds of topical, subject interest within all the possibilities of “news of the world.”

\(^5\) Santana’s Oye Como Va was released in January, 1970 (prior to this, it was a “Latin” hit for Tito Puente). Eric
Clapton’s After Midnight was released in August 1970: it peaked at #18 on 14 November 1970. Blood Sweat and
Tears’ Lucretia MacEvil was released in June 1970, and peaked at #29 on 7 November 1970. Simon &
Garfunkel’s Bridge over Troubled Water was their 5th and final LP as a duo, released in January 1970. The El
Condor Pasa single was released in October. Creedence Clearwater’s Suzie Q was a cover of the 1957 Dale
Hawkins composition, but has become synonymous with the Vietnam War through film soundtrack use. The
Righteous Brothers’ You’ve Lost That Loving Feeling had initial radio play in late 1964 through 1965. Produced by
Phil Spector, it is the most-played song in the history of American radio.
Only a few events make it through the media filter. In *car rides / street scans* the distant-dislocated audio information-news, connects the localized images on screen, to the world.\(^6\)

FOR THE MOMENT, captured on videotape, the vehicle is CLOSED SPACE: it moves along the street, LINEAR SPACE; we follow the camera eye, ROAMING SPACE; and experience the radio, AURAL SPACE.

Dikeakos used the term DRIFTING in 2002 notes. For a February 2003 Presentation House address in absentia, he invoked the 19th century flaneur, "the pedestrian who gazed upon a populated place where the discourse of street signs and symbols bounce and ricochet meaning within a busy human universe."

THE DRIFTER IS DIFFERENT FROM THE FLANEUR—he /she has a survival instinct but is a social outcast by choice. Unlike the flaneur, the drifter cannot claim a place as home. The drifter is everywhere and anywhere, though not necessarily travelling with a one-way ticket to Palookaville (Marlon Brando’s line from *On The Waterfront*), and without the tinge of flaneur, civic boosterism. In other words, how do we read and receive the forest of signs within the immediate, experiential moment?\(^7\) How does the recording device function as surrogate? The drifter with a video camera is the roving eye, before that term became a street news catch phrase. The roving eye may also have a nose for news, and inflected by the hand that holds the camera. We can feel every hand-held shake in Dikeakos’ video.

THE FIRST TIME I watched *car rides / street scans* in July 2003, my host—an artist of the same generation—made an offhand comment: "hell, we all did that...then." I can’t argue with that, so did I, close to that time. But not all roving eyes have an equal purpose. My Super 8 car-ride footage was crap, having no value beyond the act of having done it: a notion without a clear intention. Dikeakos’ intention is highly refined as are his critical-perceptual skills. In hindsight, he stated that the work was an "opening up to the possibilities and experience of the socio-economic and physical geographic space of a soft industrial area attached to a young metropolis," and reminded us that "30 or more years ago, you had to go downtown to get crowd shots in Vancouver."

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\(^6\) I watched a Euro News television segment in Barcelona in December 2003. Titled *No Comment*, it presented daily news footage without editorial or voice-over commentary. But in the immediate wake of Saddam Hussein’s capture by American/Coalition troops, what were we looking at, a pro or anti-Hussein street demonstration? The outcome appears to be the same, street violence. Is this meant to be "raw, instant information" as a form of objectivity, or is it simply walking away from the problem of news analysis?

\(^7\) See Ann Goldstein, Mary Jane Jacobs, et. al., *The Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation* (MIT Press, 1989)
DIKEAKOS’ ROVING EYE may be inside the protective comfort of the car—away from the maddening crowds, using the windshield, side and back window as framing devices—but it is not voyeuristic. Rather, the camera-eye scans the view, lingering when need be, or swinging to the next view and orientation. There is no pause for value judgments. Speed is also an important aspect as it disrupts the depth of field in the mid-ground—passing cars in particular, as they form an intermediary “landscape,” and sometimes block the vista. Watching this way is much more difficult than being told what to look at.

You are there—a visual experience underscored by the rhythm of the windshield wipers, and the radio and news of the day.

The auteur-cinematic quality should not be overlooked. In conversation, Dikeakos spoke of the exhilaration in using the portapack at that time. It liberated the artist to be the director, cinematographer, editor and distributor, and also be part of the world—as in the “instant capture” of the FLQ news item—even if there was nothing that an artist, as citizen, could do about it. And DRIFTING THROUGH Dikeakos’ ongoing notes, there is a type of objectified optimism, the beginning of his sustained engagement with the urban condition—the “soft underbelly” of the city—that has taken many different routes. His Instant Photo Information publication bookwork (1970) for example, is an open-to-read and see book without editorializing. Dikeakos wrote “the book is of more significance if it is viewed as an experiment...where consciousness is directly absorbed and experienced,” and also suggested that the book is a script of a video experiment. Included was a vintage diagram of the Electric Highway of the future, a portent of what was to come, scanning and being scanned.

Some of that future has come to pass, as we live in a society of surveillance and scanning technology. Whenever you use an ATM card, you have “been scanned.”

In other notes from February 1970, Dikeakos ruminated on the state of art, culture and knowing, with respect to the planning of car rides / street scans, and the nature of photo

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8 A comparison can be made with your-are-there absurdity of Aki Kaurismaki’s Leningrad Cowboys Go America, 1989. The band out-of-place didn’t go “to America,” they simply “go America,” as in “Go America Go”—and keep going down the road. Jim Jarmusch’s Stranger Than Paradise, 1984, is in part a road film. Film critic Pauline Kael described it as “a comedy of sensory depravation” (Halliwell’s Film Guide 1995, p.1028), as one may also say of car rides / street scans.

9 The book was published under the auspices of an NFB initiative. Dikeakos’ c.1970 notes were titled About Instant Photo Information. In his text on Robert Smithson’s 1970 Glue Pour project for Vancouver—a personal role and observations—Dikeakos described the moment when the glue picked up debris as it crept down the hillside: a fluvial action that did not discriminate, but devoured in a sci-fi Blob-like way. We must add the “devouring quality” to car rides / street scans. See Robert Smithson in Vancouver: A Fragment of a Greater Fragmentation (Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003)

10 It is the same future that can be seen in the 1960 promotional film by the Ford Motor Company, titled A Wonderful New World of Fords: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2kLTj3aHFA
information. He drew a diagram as visualization, and asked/wrote—what role does the artist have in a hierarchical art system?

Dikeakos jotted down a checklist of what video and instant photographic work can do differently. One distinction was to take aesthetic judgment out of the equation, and placing the production of meaning (back) into the determined hands of the maker (or, the drifter). He also pondered the physicality of the video work in preproduction, how to generate a view that approximated the complexities of how the eye drifts and scans, and how the mind wanders. In c.1969-70 notes titled Dead Fingers Talk—a reference to the William Burroughs book of the same title—he sketched out a two-camera view, to be shot from the front and the back window of the car. From the front view would come the car sound and radio, and from the back, a recording of passages being read from the Burroughs book, what Dikeakos described as a "Video Audio Noveletta" (the relationship of image and text is a hallmark of the formative years of “Vancouver school” of photography). He also sketched a picture-in-picture, wherein the front window image was inserted the back window image. The availability of one camera at the time, made this impossible, and the technology required to accomplish picture-within-picture was too daunting. But that is only the most moot of points: Dikeakos adapted to the equipment that was at hand.

Without impressing an historical inevitability, Dikeakos' work can be seen in the context of the "democratic-social" tradition of American documentary photography of the 1930s, and even in the ways of making/taking photographs. From 1938 to 1941 Walker Evans photographed people in the New York subways using a camera hidden inside his jacket, in essence, scanning by “shooting blind,” and also shot photographs from a moving train in 1950. His approach to documentary photography was more than the poignant picturesque: Evans understood the necessity of an objective disinterest in order to see, and then to know the subject.

This approach can be also seen in the taxonomy of Ed Ruscha’s book of photographs Twentysix Gasolin Stations, 1962 (published 1963), and later photographic work such as his aerial parking lot series (1967), the organization of space within urban space as a staging area.

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11 Evans published this series in 1966 as Many are Called.
12 This aspect of Evan’s work is explored by Landon Nordeman, Walker Evans Revolutionizes Documentary Photography, 1997 at http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/fsa/welcome.html: “Evans expressed his admiration for Gustave Flaubert: ‘...the non-appearance of author, the non-subjectivity. That is literally applicable to the way I want to use the camera and do’.”
In Dikeakos’ video production notes that emphasized the need for "a non-documentary approach [i.e. the non-picturesque document]...to critique and aestheticize this experience." *car rides / street scans* is much more than a brief and truncated flirtation with a new technology. These early street scans became location scouting for current photowork, now utilizing Photoshop for composed photowork. The objective is to amplify elements in the view and mind’s eye, rather than for the invention of a photo-fiction. For the sake of simplicity, rather than argument, the journey has (always) been towards an aesthetic of a different order.

*car rides / street scans* can only be what they were and how they were shot, in order to remain truthful to the conceptual premise, and in its completeness, however discursive, resists deconstruction. If the radicality seems blunted 30 years later, it is only because of the speed at which (radical) ideas are co-opted into a vocabulary of technique, and part of the bag of tricks that can sell anything from designer jeans to news as info-entertainment.

Dikeakos held to the truth of the idea in the eventual editing and production, with one change: he added French subtitles for the news. It is in the obvious sense, a sign that Canada is a bilingual country, *deux solitudes*, but also the accident of the moment in recording the FLQ radio news, already—most likely—translated from its French source to English, and returned again. Dikeakos’ said that the subtitles gave it the feel of a Godard film. He’s right. Lemmy Caution in Godard’s 1965 *Alphaville* is a drifter, an agent from "outland" – a somewhere else – a scanner in a future "now" world that is alien to him.

AT THE END of the *car rides* segment, Dikeakos gets out of the car and approaches a house. A woman opens the door and blurts out “where the hell have you been?” The segment ends on this freeze frame. If it has the feel of a staged denouement, it doesn’t matter. Dikeakos’ drifting ends with a wry wink of the eye.

Ihor Holubizky

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13 The woman is Sophie, Dikeakos’ wife.