



group  
SEARCH  
[*art in the library*]

January 2007

ANTONIA HIRSCH

LAIWAN

MARK SOO

Ongoing

JILLIAN PRITCHARD & DAN STARLING

MARINA ROY

KATHY SLADE





# ANTONIA HIRSCH *Anthropometrics*

*November 2006 to February 2007 in the windows on Library Square*

The visual economy of the streets includes official and unofficial modes of public address. In transitional locations, such as hoardings around construction sites, one often sees advertising posters. This 'grey' marketing practice occupies such contingent real estate on a temporary basis, using a strong visual impact and a sense of urgency to convey time sensitive content. Aside from their intended message, they remind us that the streets, the most public of spaces, are contested sites in the negotiation of ownership, free speech and assembly. Cultural institutions such as the library share a similar interest in the principles of democracy and access to all forms of expression and information. It must assess the interests of a multitude of individuals and organizations when regulating its visual environment.

Into this arena, Hirsch has placed *Anthropometrics*, a series of six large posters. Hundreds of copies are postered throughout the city, and twelve line the windows leading to the main entrance of the library. They picture solitary figures posed in mysterious gestures. At first glance, they might be taken for a clever (yet decidedly out of place) advertising campaign. Upon further investigation one learns that *Anthropometrics* is an inventory of colloquial forms of quantification—formulas that have arisen through personal economic interactions such as the spontaneous commerce of street markets where an improvised index of the body's geometry is used for measurement. A scientific mode of notation—the inventory—has been applied to a system in which each body sets its own standard and is imprecise in the scientific sense. Neither purely commercial nor scientific, *Anthropometrics* makes temporary claims on the library and the street, reinforcing and contesting the democratic ideals associated with public spaces.

Antonia Hirsch, *Anthropometrics Series*, 2006, clockwise:  
hand reaching across the head to the opposite ear = ready to attend school;  
tip of the nose to outstretched hand = one metre;  
circumference of the fist = length of the foot;  
distance between the fingertips of outstretched arms = height of the body;  
twice the wrist's circumference = circumference of the neck;  
centre of the chest to outstretched hand = one metre.

ANTONIA HIRSCH's work focuses, in part, upon systems of measurement in contemporary western culture. The French Revolution is widely considered as the inauguration of the 'modern era' and the 'modern nation state'. This is partly due to the French National Assembly's efforts to implement standardization including the development of the metre, the kilo and the litre — measurements free of any imperial connotations, based on purely 'scientific' premises. Once established, these standards allowed trade to flourish within the state's borders and thus increased its economic authority.



Hirsch's research into the development of the Metric System led her to complete *Photographie Métrique*, a series of large-scale colour portraits in which the participants were asked to estimate the length of a metre. All of the images are scaled consistently, preserving the differences each person brings to their gesture as they estimate the size of a metre. Their hand, as it gestures, is revealed as the site where individual imagination and an assumedly shared value, such as the metre, are negotiated.

In the video installation *Tacet*, three orchestral conductors sight-read the national anthem of each of the member states of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The musicians' slight movements and breathing, the sounds of paper shuffling and their rustling clothing, manifest the rhythm and progression of the anthems, a cipher for the nation state in the collective imagination. *Tacet*, a musical term meaning 'it is silent', questions the relevance of the nation state in the economic ensembles fundamental to globalization.



Antonia Hirsch was born in Frankfurt, Germany. She received her BA from Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design in London. Based in Vancouver since 1995, she has exhibited her work at institutions in Europe, North America and Asia, among them the Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, France and the Centro Cultural de Belém, Portugal. In 2004, she was awarded the Canada Council studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. In 2006 her work was exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in Taiwan. In November 2006, she presented a solo exhibition at the Charles H. Scott Gallery in Vancouver. The artist wishes to acknowledge the support of the BC Arts Council.



*Call Numbers: The Library Recordings* allows you to turn your catalogue searches into musical compositions.

1. Using the Vancouver Public Library's on-line catalogue at [www.vpl.ca](http://www.vpl.ca), perform an author or keyword search. Entering the call numbers according to the guidelines on the *Call Numbers: The Library Recordings* website will translate the data into a musical composition and create an audio file. For instance, a subject search of 'tree' + 'mango recipes' + 'Simone de Beauvoir' will result in a list of call numbers of books from the library collection.
2. Choose and paste call numbers from the list into the *Call Numbers: The Library Recordings* music engine at [www.eciad.ca/thelibraryrecordings](http://www.eciad.ca/thelibraryrecordings). Those numbers become compositional choices. You may also specify parameters such as rhythm, tempo, ensemble size, and duration. Then, give your composition a title with words taken from your subject search, or according to your whim, and add your own 'liner notes'. Then, with the click of a mouse, the compositional process begins.
3. Enjoy your search results musically, along with other users, as a downloadable file. These recordings will be archived and reside on *Call Numbers: The Library Recordings* website over the course of the *Group Search* series, resulting in a collection of musical works composed by library users.



# LAIWAN Call Numbers: The Library Recordings

January 2007 to March 2008 in the on-line catalogue

Laiwan is interested in improvisation, translation, and the effects of technological culture. *Call Numbers: The Library Recordings* explores what the Library collection 'sounds' like, as it is translated from words to letters and numbers, to musical notes, tempo and style. Her project summons up the image of a fluid mass of data, routed and re-routed through a sequence of organizing systems — our languages, the physical books themselves, the catalogue index, the digits of the call numbers, music notation and sounds. Along the way, each system bears a set of meanings that we de-code and re-code to make new meanings in new forms.

The on-line catalogue is one of many ways we enter the space of the Library, and this portal to its collection reflects our changing concept of access to information in a technological society. As in her previous work, Laiwan suggests the curious contradictions of our embrace with the digital world. *Call Numbers: The Library Recordings* creates a space for collaborating with other users in building a collection of music, a forum for connection, improvisation and exchange. At the same time, it highlights the distance between the players: the shared aural space of a musical performance is delayed through time and space. As *Call Numbers: The Library Recordings* grows in unpredictable ways, this call and response between the artist and the audience echoes the seemingly endless volume of information and our drive to contain it.

LAIWAN is an artist and writer recognized for her interdisciplinary practice based in poetics and philosophy. In recent years, her diverse practice has focused on concepts of time — as an investigation of the time-based media she employs and as a framework for knowledge.

Recently, Laiwan produced *Duet: Étude for Solitudes*, a large-scale project developed at the Sound & Vision Residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts. *Duet* incorporates both an interactive gallery installation and a live music performance based on the improvisational practices of jazz. The installation contains two double-sided projection screens, connected to



computerized music keyboards. *Duet* permits viewers to interact with video of improvised performances by renowned avant-garde musicians Lori Freedman and Susie Ibarra. Through midi

keyboards and VJ software, viewers can 'play', and 'compose' their own music. In doing so, they explore a cacophony of experiences including solitude, loneliness, beauty, chaos, predetermination, unpredictability and the meaning of improvisation in contemporary technological culture.

In *Quartet: Improvisation for the year 4698 or 5760*, Laiwan collaborated with virtuoso bass clarinetist Lori Freedman. Playing on the idea of millennial year (4698 and 5760 are the Chinese and Jewish years respectively for 2000) *Quartet* uses 16mm film, music improvisation, live performance, sculptural installation, computer media and the internet. It celebrates the improvisational musical body in spontaneous time and space, and reveals the presences and absences of cultural histories within a critique of the limitations of machines. (Visit [www.belkin-gallery.ubc.ca/laiwan](http://www.belkin-gallery.ubc.ca/laiwan))

*Machinate* integrates film, installation and the internet to ponder connections across time, technology and the material world. In the film installation component, people in profile



lean forward in kissing gestures — they have been filmed alone and at different times, and their kiss is only completed 'on-screen'. Drawing on sources such as chat rooms and commercial web-

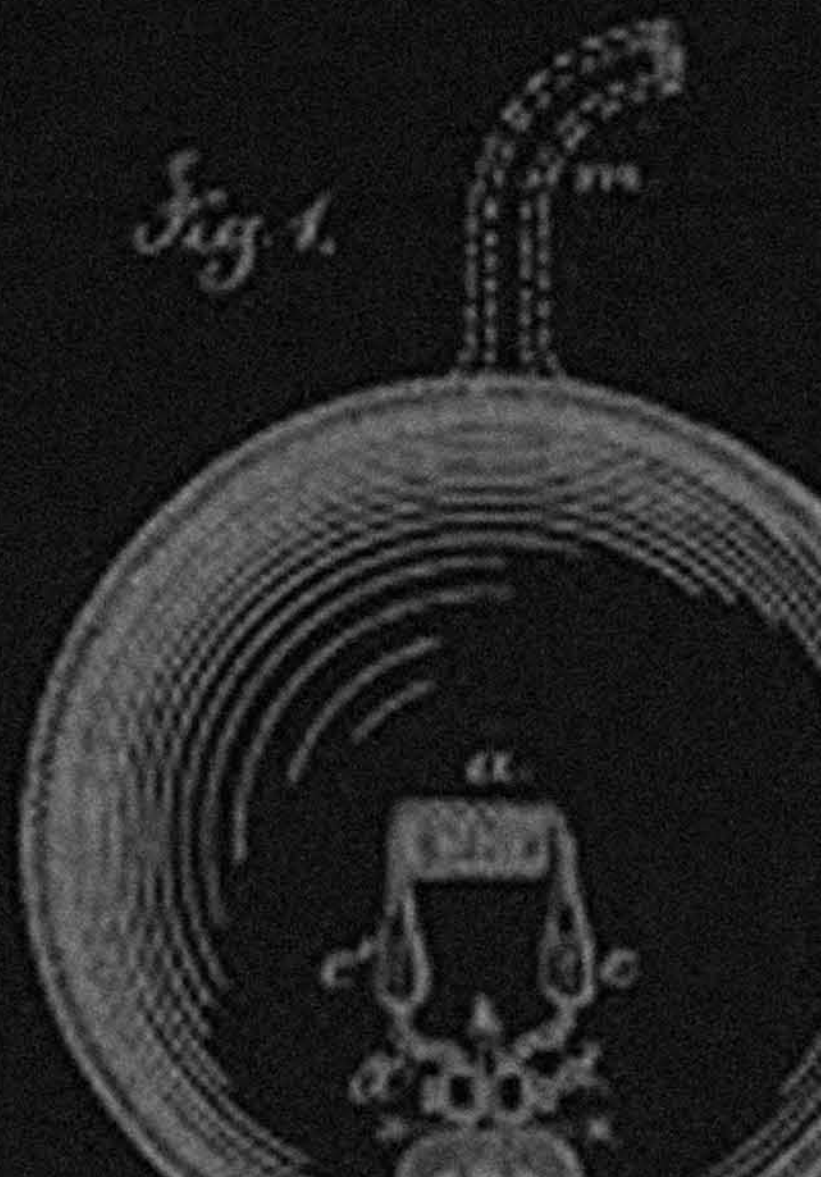
sites, Descartes and contemporary philosophers, *Machinate* reflects on the need to define the self in relation to another, and how that desire plays out within global capitalism. (Visit [www.theendofpop.com/machinate](http://www.theendofpop.com/machinate))

Born in what is now Zimbabwe to Chinese parents, Laiwan immigrated to Canada in 1977 to leave the war in Rhodesia. A graduate of Emily Carr College of Art and Design, she started the OR Gallery in Vancouver in 1983 and has since initiated various curatorial projects in Canada and Zimbabwe. Laiwan has participated in a variety of exhibitions in Canada, the US, Japan and Europe as well as being involved in gay, lesbian, feminist and 'of colour' community-based organizing. She also engages in public discourse through panel discussions, conferences and symposiums and gives solo lectures at a variety of venues including galleries, universities and art programs.

T. A. EDISON.  
Electric-Lamp.

No. 223,898.

Patented Jan



# MARK SOO *Lamp, After UNDP Human Development Index*

*January to July 2007 on level 3*

In the West, light bulbs are iconic symbols of illumination. They also symbolize ideas, knowledge, enlightenment, modern progress, and the *eureka!* moment. They evoke our desire for innovative thought in constructively re-imagining contemporary life. Edison's invention may have different connotations in parts of the world that face minimal skills of reading and writing and lack of access to public systems of knowledge.

The 2005 United Nations Development Programme Report on global literacy rates the nations of the world in a list of 'most' to 'least' literate. Using this list, Mark Soo began the development of his *Lamp* with the impracticable task of contacting the nations at the bottom, in an attempt to source, ship and display a light bulb originating there. Fashioned into a reading light, the process of its acquisition reflects the many complex political, economic and social forces played out over both local and global spheres. As the library user pulls up a chair to study within the circle of light, we are made aware of those that cannot, (or those who read by candlelight, lacking access to electricity) and ponder a global economy that can distribute a standard product around the world but fails to achieve similar access to written knowledge.

The Library's commitment to free access to information and knowledge is a testament to the many freedoms and civil liberties which we have come to accept as cornerstones of our social fabric. By inverting the logic of the 'most-to-least' index of the UNDP report, Soo's work both honours the civic achievements of the library itself, and draws attention to the histories of colonization, empire and industry that have made these very achievements possible. Faced with the familiar, fragile light bulb, and an understanding of its origins, to sit within its glow is no longer a simple act, and its symbolic function becomes complicated by the contingent circumstances of its use around the world.

MARK SOO works across the disciplines of music and visual art to address the utopian impulses of modern culture, cross-cultural migration and states of transcendence.



In the installation *Monochrome Sunset (English Bay—Oppenheimer Park)* the artist focuses upon the temperature of light, visual perception, and states of transcendence. He uses the yellow-orange sodium streetlights found in the inner city's Oppenheimer Park, distinguished by their ability to disrupt colour perception and discourage intravenous drug use. These lights illuminate a freestanding, translucent photographic sculpture picturing the setting sun over English Bay. The sunset, photographed at the same light temperature as the streetlights, is stripped of its picturesque qualities by the intense backlit glare—the exalted view is flattened to gray. This work complicates the sublime image of Vancouver's scenic waterfront with an artifact of its most notorious neighbourhood. Pressed together within a Gastown gallery, these elements point to the uneasy co-existence of the two parts of the city, in a consideration of the regulation of desire, and the production and management of ecstatic states.

*New Way Forward* is a set of wind chimes fabricated and tuned in accordance with Arnold Schoenberg's atonal 12-tone musical scale. Both the random tinklings of the New Age wind chime and the rigidly mathematical system of Schoenberg's music were originally envisioned as radical ways to open up new spaces of creative and personal freedom. However, Schoenberg's rigid compositional structure diverges from the random chance method of the wind chime, which is associated with states of spiritual reflection, harmony, and personal development that characterize the New Age utopian impulse. Soo's wind chime is tuned to Schoenberg's Op. 36, the first composition Schoenberg wrote after fleeing Austria to California, USA in the 1930's, to escape the spread of Nazi Germany. *New Way Forward's* discordant ringing pays homage to Schoenberg's exodus to intellectual, political and individual freedom—a path that the mythology of the West has always promised to those seeking the meaning of liberty and independence.

Mark Soo was born in Singapore, and is based in Vancouver. His work has been exhibited in New York, Manchester, Melbourne, Toronto, and most recently at Artspeak in Vancouver. His curatorial projects include *One Brief Moment*, at Apexart in New York City in 2006.



# group SEARCH

[ *art in the library* ]



Vancouver Public Library

Central Branch, 350 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, BC



CITY OF VANCOUVER

Public Art Program

## ***Other Sights for Artists' Projects Association***

*Group Search* is a collaboration between the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch, the City of Vancouver Public Art Program, and Other Sights for Artists' Projects Association. We wish to thank the following supporters for their invaluable contribution to the production and presentation of the series:



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*Group Search* invites your comments:  
[groupsearch@othersights.ca](mailto:groupsearch@othersights.ca)

This publication marks the introduction of the final three site-specific artworks of the *Group Search: art in the library* project. As the inaugural exhibition of *Inside the Library Curatorial Initiatives*, *Group Search* contributes to a continuous series of temporary public artworks at the Library from 2005 to 2010. Designed to complement our first publication in September that focused on projects by Jillian Pritchard & Dan Starling, Marina Roy and Kathy Slade, this brochure concentrates on new work by Antonia Hirsch, Laiwan and Mark Soo. I would like to extend my gratitude to all the artists for their work, and for the flexible imaginations, good humour and dedication that inform their projects.

*Group Search* is an opportunity for the artists, and for myself, to explore and investigate the Library's systems, processes and procedures as well as the collections it holds. In the sense that the Library is a living experiment in democracy, our efforts can be seen as a negotiation of the terms of such freedom. While the gallery or museum places its structure at the service of the artwork, the privilege of the artist has, in the *Group Search* series, been the same privilege that all library users share. Our access to the visual and conceptual space of this institution parallels that of the public at large, balancing the interests of free inquiry and expression with the rights and needs of others in a shared environment. On behalf of the artists in *Group Search*, I would like to extend my appreciation to Paul Whitney, Shelagh Flaherty, the management team and staff of the VPL for their generous support of our curiosity, unorthodox requests and inconvenient needs. Art in public space presents challenges to both the artist and the viewer. I would like to thank Barbara Cole of Other Sights, and Karen Henry and Bryan Newson of the City of Vancouver Public Art Program for seeing, within these challenges, the potential for uncompromising works of art in such an important civic institution.

*Group Search* was made possible through the invaluable contributions of The Canada Council for the Arts, the BC Arts Council, the Spirit of BC Arts Fund, the Vancouver Foundation, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design and Generation Printing.

In the months ahead, watch for a new series of artists' projects, curated by Karen Love as part of *Inside the Library Curatorial Initiatives*.

— Lorna Brown, *Group Search* Curator