

HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 1

Hamilton Arts & Letters

Elizabeth Chitty • Monique Motut-Firth



Photograph: Confluence Field Trip #2. Iron Bridge, St Catharines, Ontario. Elizabeth Chitty.

by Bart Gazzola

***We are both contained / in the geography of this land / which
indicates no depth / beyond erosion 1***

– Matthew Hall

***The tale is the map that is the territory.
You must remember this.2***

– Neil Gaiman

In my dreams of this city I am always lost.3

– **Margaret Atwood**

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

1 Matthew Hall, *remembrance*, from *Hyaline*. Matthew Hall gave me this copy of his poetry (he's a significant art critic, as well) just before we both left Saskatoon.

2 Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*.

3 Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye*. I've enjoyed this book lately for her exploration of a city she lived in, then returns to, and how it seems like a different place entirely. My response to St. Catharines, after a return of nearly 20 years, has been most effective when I interpret it as a new place that just has some familiar locales, like bits of déjà vu... and I've been having odd dreams of Saskatoon lately.

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

samizdat press

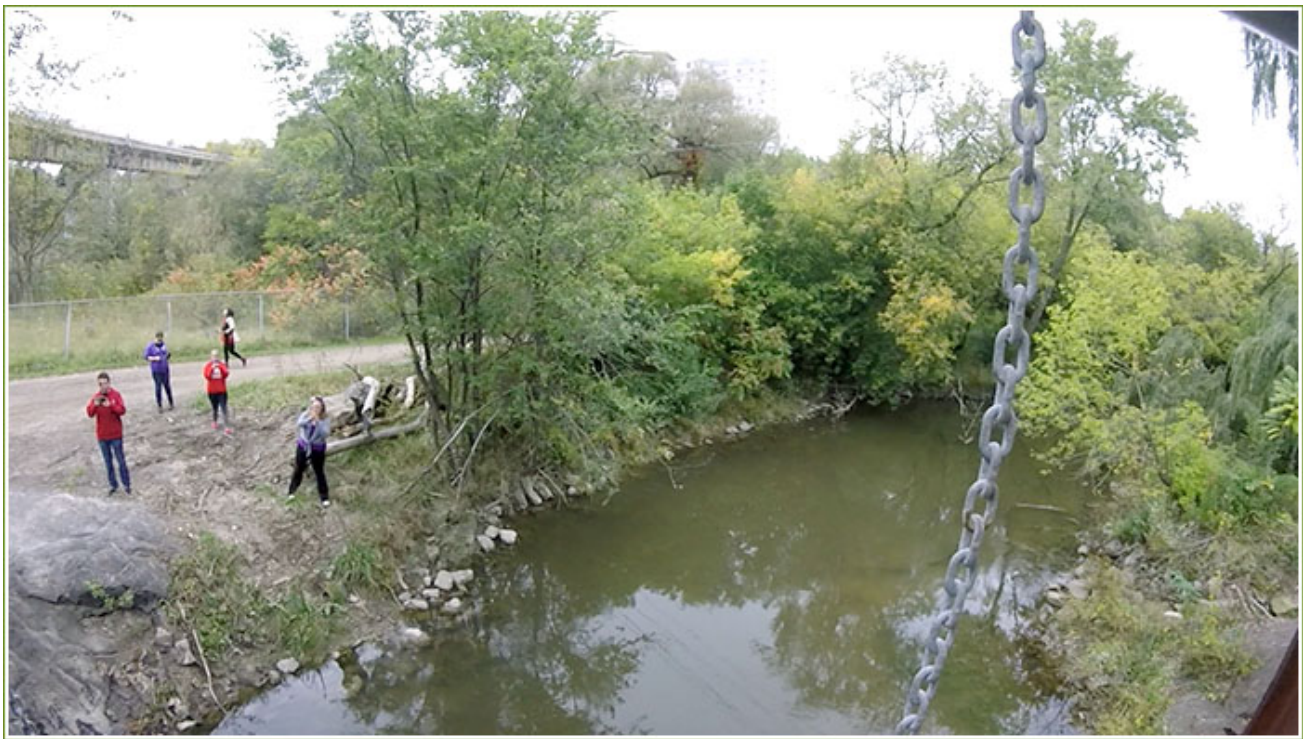
HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 2

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

The two exhibitions that act as landmarks for this article are about departure and arrival: and always and forever about sites of contested narratives, but in a manner more about discovery, (perhaps even excavation), to reveal certain "truths" about the places we inhabit[ed]. Monique Motut-Firth's *Conversation Series*, a result of her residency with *Finding City*, at void gallery, stands at one end; Elizabeth Chitty's *Confluence Field Trips* is at the other.



Video still, Walk #5, Confluence Field Trip #2, Elizabeth Chitty.

I have become interested, of late, in the “secret” or “buried” histories of places. This is, really, just my latest trope within sites of contested narratives; sometimes it manifests in how I experience an exhibition, and other times it simply means that I might watch a television show to further this fascination. A recent British murder mystery that was built around the “lost rivers of London” and how a place can exist for so long that it can change so radically that something is not so much “hidden” as “lost” was the latter. But

even if the formally mighty *River Fleet* became fouled as Smithfield abattoirs dumped meaty effluvia into it, until it became part of the larger London sewer system, it still defines the city. *The Fleet* defined Farrington Road, and like the *River Effra* or *River Wallbrook* or many others, the 'borders between much of the capital owe much to its buried waterways4.'

These are ideas that Elizabeth Chitty asks us to consider. Her *Confluence Field Trips* straddle spaces both public and personal, with multifacets of production and presentation from *Dick's Creek* to VISA Art Gallery in The Marilyn I. Walker School of Performing and Fine Arts (both in St. Catharines, barely 15 minutes walk apart but across a chasm metaphorically – more on that further on).

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

4 BBC Website

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

 samizdat press

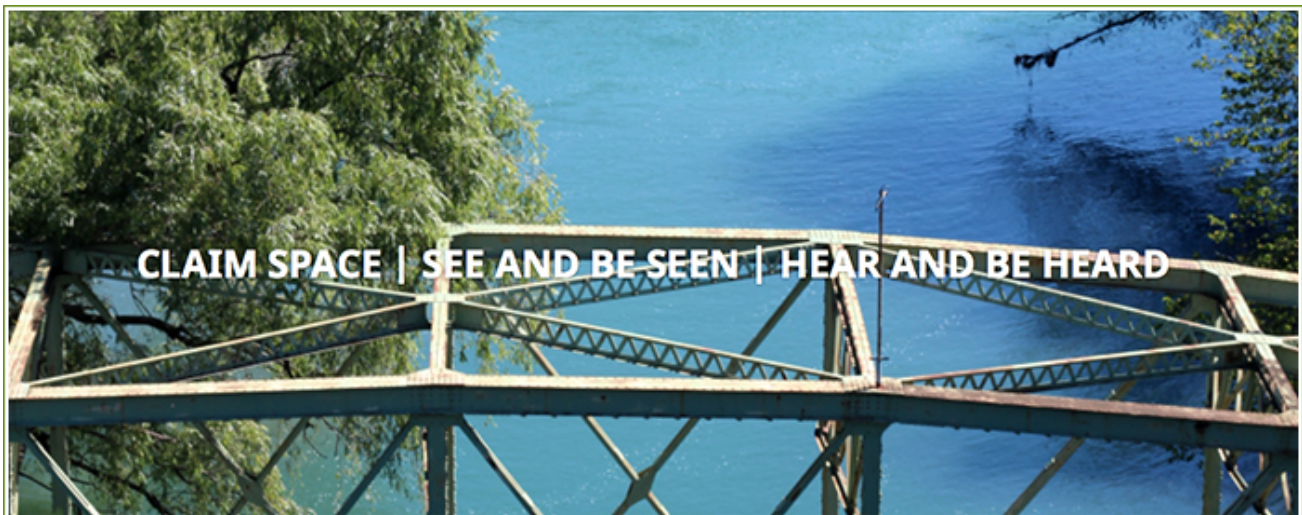
HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 3

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

This gallery manifestation of *Confluence* is part of the artist's project which includes a website (confluencefieldtrips.ca), walking project, and performance. From September to November, the public was invited to CLAIM SPACE | SEE AND BE SEEN | HEAR AND BE HEARD in three field trips in *Canal Valley*, St. Catharines.



Project website image (facing the confluence) from Confluence Field Trip #1, Elizabeth Chitty.

The “confluence” of the title is that of *Dick’s Creek* and *Twelve Mile Creek*... viewed during *Confluence Field Trip #1* from Brock University’s Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts to Rodman Hall Art Centre. *Dick’s Creek* is presumed named for Richard Pierpoint, escaped slave, soldier and settler griot, but is generally known by the name of *Old Welland Canal* – commerce trumping both nature and black history.

Confluence was predicated by the opening of two major arts buildings in St. Catharines in autumn 2015: the MIW School and the City of St. Catharines’ First Ontario Performing Arts Centre. These buildings overlook *Canal Valley*, and mark a new phase in a site rich with cycles of wilderness, industry, abandonment, and reclamation⁵.”

What you experience in the gallery is indispensably dependent on what the "walkers"

experienced. Chitty's insightful words: "About a hundred people [participated] in seventeen walks conducted mostly in silence except for speaking into an audio recorder, while the artist walked with them wearing a chest-mounted camera. Governance and policy impacts on natural and built space, embodied experience, and marginalized narratives emerge from this work⁶."

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

5 Elizabeth Chitty, from her artist statement at confluencefieldtrips.ca

6 Elizabeth Chitty, from her artist statement at confluencefieldtrips.ca

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

samizdat press

HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 4

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

It's fitting that *Confluence* is within one of the sites that instigated it. This increases its historical and contemporary relevance, and perhaps troubles the more dominant narrative of economic inclusion and prosperity. Or, if you follow some of the links at Chitty's site, and the larger history of St. Catharines' founding, "what has been is what will be, and there is nothing new under the sun"...

The economic driver of the confluence of waterways gives way to the economic engine that was auto manufacturing (a confluence of borders and trade) and that we hope is now succeeded by the "cultural city" as economic revitalization.

In light of that, my description of what you see in the VISA space is but a taste, (a map, if you remember the quote that began this roaming tangent).



Installation view, Confluence Field Trips, Elizabeth Chitty, photo: © Sandy Middleton.

On the wall furthest from the gallery entrance is the largest of the videos in the exhibition. It incorporates aspects of all the walks, so its size is merited. Approximately half an hour in length, it is bracketed on the three other gallery walls by three other "walks" that are represented by numerous monitors. Each small monitor has a set of headphones.

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

samizdat press

HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 5

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

There is audio in the space for the main video on the wall, while another is a 'mix' of various audio that also appears in the 'headphoned' videos.



Installation view, Confluence Field Trips, Elizabeth Chitty, photo: © Sandy Middleton.

There are a number of voices and sites along the various *Confluence* walks, but the stories that dominate Chitty's installation connect back to 'embodied experience' and 'marginalized narratives.' An example of this is from what Chitty calls *Walk # 16*, from the path described as *Confluence Field Trip # 2*. In the audio of this walk, you hear the voice of a participant, who's from Senegal; as was Richard Pierpoint. (Senegal was once known, less politely but accurately, as Africa's "slave coast"). So this aural excerpt starts with this gentleman's voice (in French), wondering what Pierpoint's 'original

[Senegalese] name' was, which blends into Elizabeth's voice talking about Pierpoint and the important role he played in the history of "here". (Chitty suggests the book *A Stolen Life: Looking for Richard Pierpoint*).

Another story of place that infuses VISA is found in the audio program centred around the totem pole erected as part of the Canadian Centenary. This was made by Douglas Cramner of Namgis First Nation in Alert Bay, and seems incongruous here, grafted onto this space in a manner that ignores the different Indigenous nations that comprise this country (it could also exemplify taking a symbol and emptying out its meaning to force hegemonic imperial narratives).

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

samizdat press

HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 6

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

This city, this territory, has alternately been claimed by the Haudenosaunee (of the Iroquois Confederacy of Six Nations) or the Anishinaabe. There's a greater consideration of the specifics of history these days: Chitty illustrates this on her page about territory, and in highlighting what we know - or what we don't - about the treaties that (like Pierpoint) formed this place (Nanfan or Treaty of Niagara or Wampum Belts Associated With the War of 1812).

And now Isaac Brock University has a Chancellor who told me that she intends her legacy to be that Indigenous history is accorded the respect deserved in a Nation to Nation educational discourse.

But perhaps this all simply comes back to awareness and openness, and an exploration of spaces that we move through, with new or more aware eyes. I've always been a walker (a notable interaction / argument with Karen Spencer, someone who works in public spaces in a way that challenges and kicks, came from our respective needs to "walk" our cities).

In late October, when confronted with the impossibility of my usual path to Rodman Hall, I found myself along the lower mud and leaves of *Dick's Creek*, the sun shining on the river, the site beautiful and somehow new to me, despite having lived here for nearly two decades, nearly twenty years ago. This was a gift, so that my return to this place was not just a redux, but something new, something undiscovered. The bridge and the water, that this space was mere minutes from St. Paul and had always been here and that I'd never know this seemed impossible.

In light of that, when you visit Chitty's work at the VISA, it isn't the end of a project anymore than how history "ends", but is a place we inhabit and name, and rename, remake and see through new eyes.

This reshaping of place, through how we choose to interpret it, is also present in the works and research of Monique Motut-Firth, who was an artist in residence through

Finding City in Saskatoon (one of the last shows I saw 'there', as the walking of *Confluence* was nearly the first I experienced 'here'). Motut-Firth's practice is intense: whether her “gathering” of found images or her reworking / re-configuring / reconstructing of the sourced print matter into images that obscure and reveal, in her intimately dishevelled and contrastingly exact and concise exhibition at void gallery in Saskatoon in the Summer of 2015.

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

samizdat press

HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 7

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

Both artists are defining a city: both artists are “finding city.” And by finding, they both reveal – and foster – stories both obvious (to some) and hiding in plain sight from others...



Saskatoon river section D co-op solutions, 2015. Inkjet print. 239 x 91.44 cm. Monique Motut-Firth.

To bring *Finding City* into this discourse is only natural: not just because they are “a public art organization that builds relationships between artists and the larger Saskatoon community through collaborative projects focused on the idea of city and the experience of contemporary urban living.” But one of the last events I participated in, in Saskatoon, before ending a nearly two decade relationship with the city's visual and cultural communities, was to be a panellist for their *Conversation Series (June to September 2015)*. This was “a program of collaborative projects and discussions with visiting artists and writers... By allowing us to see through the eyes of those unfamiliar with our city, the project looks to unsettle our existing perceptions of Saskatoon, creating opportunities for new discussions on how we interact with the city and each other while providing an inclusive space through participatory art projects and round-table discussions7.”



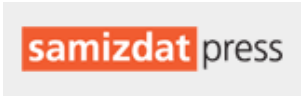
Detail: *Saskatoon river section D co-op solutions*, Monique Motut-Firth.

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

7 Finding City PSA, Summer 2015. Available at findingcity.ca

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

- [About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!]
- [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue]
- [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you]
- [Sponsors & Members](#) [enlightened]



HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 8

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

Appropriately, we were talking about Saskatoon's representation / misrepresentation through “printed matter” (a pleasingly vague and populist place to begin). Motut-Firth's residency and work was the starting point of the discussion. The panel included Crystal Bueckert, a local designer / architect who is a loud voice for a “better” Saskatoon, and Michael Peterson, whom along with Gary Young, is a significant cultural worker and activist in Saskatoon (and elsewhere, now, in Gary's case: though his last “institutional” role in Saskatoon was with the Gordon Snelgrove Gallery, before it became a travesty...8). Gary and Michael are the core of *Finding City*, but the former is synonymous with the aforementioned void, the space that literally hosted Motut-Firth's practice during her visit. But the nature of the collective is that if they're the core, maverick “satellites” like myself, or the artist Jay White (whose residency challenged ideas of “wilderness” and “urbanity” in Saskatoon, adding another nuance to interpretations of place) push and pull the group in various ways.

That conversation occurred midst a flurry of activity that included the third incarnation of *Street Meet: Saskatoon's Festival about Performance, Public and Graffiti Art* (they describe themselves as “a response to Saskatoon’s prevalence of permanent public art sculpture and looks not only to provide a more immediate or ephemeral alternative to such artworks but also to discuss the meaning of public art as a whole in a city with a strong history of public, street and graffiti art but very little public dialogue on these practices”).

The 2015 staging of *Street Meet* included the work of Justin A. Langlois who facilitated what may be one of the finest pieces of conceptual, participatory public art I've ever experienced. A public wall had a number of large poster sized declarations, and Langlois distributed coloured dots to all present, and we were to post our dots on the posters if we agreed / disagreed / or were neutral, all defined by the colour of the dot. I swapped my neutral dots for more “opinionated” ones, and will, in full disclosure, admit that this was so I might excessively support the slogan (speaking directly to me, surely) EXIT NOW, THE TIMING IS RIGHT, GET OUT WHILE THE GETTING'S GOOD. Some were polite and waited, considered and calm, as though in a polite

queuing. Some (yes, myself among them) trusted their intuition and may have elbowed and pushed, a bit. Apathy is counter revolutionary, to quote the Situationists.

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

-
- 8 It's difficult not to have contempt for institutional racism, hypocrisy, and those suckled at the teat of Josef Goebbels.
 - 9 Street Meet PSA, Summer 2015, www.streetmeetsaskatoon.com. Available at their FB page.

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

The logo for samizdat press, featuring the word "samizdat" in white lowercase letters on a red rectangular background, followed by the word "press" in a smaller, black, lowercase sans-serif font.

HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 9

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

Street Meet was a partner with *Finding City*, and the aforementioned Langlois, along with keynote speaker Dr. Cameron Cartiere, were vocal contributors to the panel. Myself and other *Finding City* people returned the favour at their round-table the following day. Informed and intelligent arguments made it one of my most enjoyable times ever in that community that has so often disappointed me, especially in the debate around “art in the public sphere.” I sometimes look back on #YXEArts with the affection of a lover that you hoped would improve themselves and be worthy of your affections and attentions: but like karaoke modernism, it was never as good as “you” thought... forgive me. Nostalgia makes my hyperbole self indulgent, and we forget our place when we leave it behind.

Motut-Firth's work is both immediate and subversive, like the advertising it appropriates. The conversations about the questions raised by her work occurred in a space on 20th Street in Riversdale, Saskatoon (a site of further contested narratives, as either a shining example of positive gentrification or a horrid example of economic displacement and class warfare). Her piece *Saskatoon river section D co-op solutions* which she'd newly created dominated the room, being 3 feet high by nearly 8 long). It acted as a very real touchstone for the discussion in the space, of how we see / ignore our reality, and how it is represented in the ubiquitous and thus very powerfully common, forms of print. Almost like a growing form, incorporating signs or slogans that might still be “readable”, and others that became a bit more exotic when “modified”, or others that, out of context, transmogrified beyond recognition. Her bio: she works “primarily in paper, paint and textiles...[she] investigates the use of collage and photomontage as critical strategies for exploring the role of technical images in knowledge production and cultural representation. The resulting *scrap-systems* link, layer and weave together disparate image cultures, eras and visual signifiers.” Even better, for an artist bringing an “external” eye to such an unusual place, Motut-Firth has “developed a critical curiosity surrounding pop-culture's influence on cultural identity.¹⁰”

A brief tangent that illustrates the further elasticity of contested narratives to multiple

sites: this “co-working” space is one cited (or damned, edit as you will) as a point of gentrification for the Riversdale area in Saskatoon. To quote graffiti artist Indigo, from *Street Meet 2014*, your neighbourhood is suddenly rife with public art acting as disarming harbingers of how you'll soon be unable to afford your rent. Riversdale - 20th Street – was literally once considered the “bad side of the river”, and was illustrative of a division as much of race and class as geography. Amusingly, unwittingly demonstrative of this ignorance, a “public” forum organized by aka “artist run” about negative feedback to public art took place in this same “commons” space and included no one from the immediate neighbourhood, the neighbourhood the criticized (and vandalized) artwork was installed within, and had a “moderator” whose own employer (the U of S) had responded poorly to acts of art vandalism that very year, of works by an Indigenous artist.

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

10 Both quotes here are from Motut-Firth's website, moniquemotutfirth.com/about

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

samizdat press

HA&L magazine issue eight.2

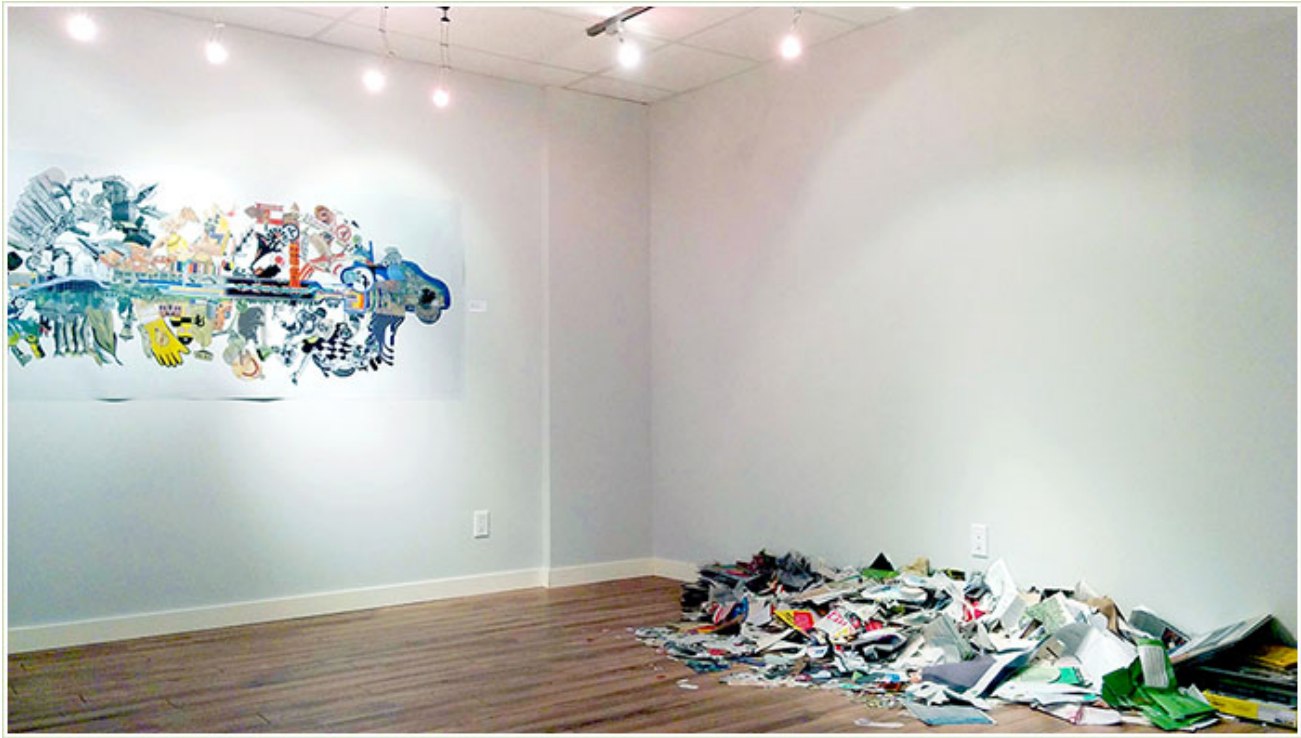
A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 10

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

If I may engage in further rude amusement, the local bastardization of Nuite Blanche in Saskatoon, which took place last fall, was even “better”. The tone deafness of organizations like aka (among others, but they are first among fools, here) having a festival that translates as “white night” with no Indigenous artists included in a space that, to paraphrase activist / filmmaker / educator Marcel Petit, has cleared out all the “wrong coloured poor people” would be amusing if it wasn't so... predictable.

This need not be the rule: if I translate site again, I could speak of how amid the new art school, the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre, the restaurants and other revitalized / gentrified spaces in downtown St. Catharines (a recent article in the local paper I act as art critic for made some ideologically firm, yet factually questionable, assertions about this debate) you'll find places like the Mahtay Cafe. In conversation with the owner, he indicated that in deference and respect to its placement in an area that many “own” – by investment that is not exclusively monetary in nature – all are welcome. I've seen this to be true, whether in genuine diversity (one Saturday, as I worked on this article, the community room went from a polka band rehearsing, to the Brock University Asian Students Association staging their karaoke version of “Canadian / Chinese Idol”, to the Dramatic Arts students staging rehearsals of “American Idiot.” All had the space for free. All were welcome to enjoy it, for no charge. I might add, amusingly, that the space is as much a ‘welcome drop-in’ site (to the chagrin of the staff at times), as a public meeting place, with an emphasis on *public*. Poverty is not a barrier. Nor is genuine difference.



Installation view, Void gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, July 2015. Monique Motut-Firth.

But to return to Saskatoon: Motut-Firth's practice was to cull printed matter, and then sample and reform it.

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]



HA&L magazine issue eight.2


A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 11

A Confluence of Geographies

by [Bart Gazzola](#)

In some cases these belied their origins, and in others gleefully played upon it, like bastard children of the advertising and design classes that flout their pedigree. But in the void gallery space, amid the delicately framed, tiny works (all under the aegis of *The Conversation* series, in a nod to *Finding City*, I'm sure, but also fitting for Motut-Firth's elaborate practice) that hung on the walls were large piles of discarded paper, newsprint, other shreds and strips and scraps that didn't make the “cut” but that served to trouble the “art” on the walls.

It was a testament to the excess of the source material, the labour and work that went into the art, though also acting as indexical detritus of a plethora of activity. Or perhaps the essential waste of capitalist detritus and overkill.

 Designed for Professionals, 2015. Handcut inkjet print. 22.9 x 22.9 cm.
Monique Motut-Firth.

Designed for Professionals, 2015. Handcut inkjet print. 22.9 x 22.9 cm. Monique Motut-Firth.

The individual titles of the uniform 9” by 9” works, framed in white, reveal their origins: *170 degrees fast*, or *New improved website*, *Ordinary pump handle* or *Choice quality angle* (the last two may be my favourite names, though the large work having “river” and “co op” in the title is the most specific to Saskatoon...).

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 12

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

One can't help but feel that several days frenzy about “public” and “art” in Saskatoon is akin to the freneticism of activity in St. Catharines this past Fall, with the Marilyn I. Walker School and the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre (the admitted kernel for Chitty's literal exploration of site as history along the creek).

Elizabeth Chitty describes herself as a "place based artist." The beautifully simple veracity of that may be the defining thesis of this trope. We are all "place based." García-Márquez's somnabulistic Bolivar, in *The General in his Labyrinth*, caustically responds to someone he rouses himself from his torpor to actually argue with – an amazing event in that novel, that he "...made the only lucid statement in that polemic when he pointed out that policy depends on where and when it is formulated¹¹."

Motut-Firth's process is as dependent on place as Chitty's: her source materials suffuse – and define – public spheres. These were sampled, excised out and re assembled into images of beauty that seemed to belie their low populist origins. All delicate and inviting, on clean white backgrounds. And then a single, recognized – now coarse – element reveals itself, and reminds us where we are, and what we're seeing.

I recently wrote a piece about an artist exhibiting 'here', whom I knew 'there': and this was a fruitful meditation on [M]modernism, whether karaoke or post, but it was also useful to foster further ideas about synchronicity and locale. The idea that *Finding City* is now moving towards national discourses of contested narratives (whether this is due to some of us exiting the partisan and hypocritical dysfunction of the Saskatoon visual arts “community”, or other external narratives) may demonstrate that many stories are universally applicable. This, perhaps, is why I may mention colonialism, but Empire is the more insidious oppression we still experience. Elizabeth's words: it is “the arrogance of the colonizer” and “what is usable is [what is] saleable.” Motut-Firth turns that last phrase upside down, but the reference is still present.

Less academically, I've had moments of (perhaps inebriated) confusion, where the S - curved river inspired logo of both the cities of Saskatoon and St. Catharines have left

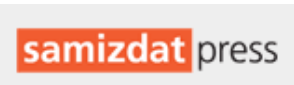
me wondering just where exactly I stand, right now. Amusingly, or perhaps an omen I was deaf to at the time, this river symbol was a point of debate at the *Finding City* panel (many Saskatonians present had never “seen” the river symbol, just the literal letter). Looking at something everyday is not the same as seeing it.

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

11 Gabriel Garcia-Marquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*.

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]



HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 13

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

What's engaging about Motut-Firth's works is that although taken from the banality of readily available printed matter, she restructures them into images that seem almost like mechanical schematics, vibrant colours on a white background, and with components combined in such a manner that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. The idea of capitalism as a voracious monstrosity that consumes all is realized in the forms she creates that seem bustling and active, all about movement, incorporating our immediate worlds (she mentioned that many of the source materials were gathered while walking several of the "main" areas of Saskatoon, by which was implicitly understood to be the more commercially oriented avenues).

There's an odd echo of this elevation of the boringly immediate to historically significant in the work of another artist whose work I experienced 'here.' Anna Sflarzaski's *A Man's Job*, a dark textual meditation on the ongoing end of the industrial life of St. Catharines is constructed from headlines from the local paper. Some are hopeful, most are not, and many resonate with a quiet desperation.

I'll further the implicit synchronicity that obsesses me: *Confluence* is a piece that takes its origin from Chitty returning to this place after an absence nearly as long as my own, from this city: and like Motut-Firth, like many of us whom come to explore space, it is a body of work where audiences walk. It's "diaristic and intuitive", "walking as a way of exploring landscape," and "audience in [a] landscape to change the spectatorship of the audience to landscape¹²."

Perhaps I'll end this self indulgent exploration of Elizabeth Chitty's ongoing multi disciplinary works about this place (dating back a dozen years); contrasted thoughts and observations about Monique Motut-Firth, and how her *Conversation Series* fit within the tumult of dialogue about contested stories and disagreeing tropes, with an apology.

I have become unforgivably introspective since departing the Prairies. This lends itself to a consideration and questioning of place, and an unwillingness to accept the

immediate as the most important – or even a genuine – factor. Doris Lessing, far wiser than I, readily admitted “I do not know why I still find it so hard to accept that words are faulty and by their very nature inaccurate¹³.” My stance is not dissimilar: words are a way to “name” but I acknowledge their fluidity and betrayal, and perhaps I see that as an asset, more so than a pitfall.

[>>>> [FORWARD](#)]

¹² I acknowledge that I freely pilfered these succinct words from Elizabeth's talk at the panel Re Inventing the Downtown Through the Arts, Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts (MIWSFPA), Brock University, January 29th, 2016.

¹³ Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*.

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

samizdat press

HA&L magazine issue eight.2

A Confluence of Geographies by Bart Gazzola 14

A Confluence of Geographies

by Bart Gazzola

When one leaves a place, especially a place one has tried to define, and in turn be partly defined by, it requires an acknowledgement that “what was a major part of your identity [is] vanishing and becoming meaningless. An unpleasant translation.” And perhaps that is what I've “diarized” here, though that sounds far too factual and literal. Although Chitty and Motut-Firth's works are both firmly grounded (literally, in the case of the former, but the metaphors of consumption bind us just as strongly, with the latter), they are, in the end, about perception.

Additionally, an object is often not scaled evenly: a circle often appears as an ellipse and a square can appear as a trapezoid.

And what is lost in translation is immense, and that loss is unpleasant. This makes it no less true, and no less relevant, to how we “know” – or remember – *place*. Perhaps we simply carry our “contested narratives” with us, and within us.



[>>>> [BIOS](#) | [COVER](#)]

[Distillate © HA&L + [Bart Gazzola](#) | {from the Greek bios} -- the course of a life.]

[About HA&L magazine](#) [Subscribe!] [issue 8.2](#) [Latest Issue] [Back issues](#) [VIK-BIB will assist you] [Sponsors & Members](#)
[enlightened]

samizdat press