

About the Artist

Cathy Busby makes art that responds to the mediation and representation of emotion in consumer culture. She has looked for their patterns and extracted recurring instances of textual and visual emotional representation in: self-help books (*How...*, Gallery 101, Ottawa, 2001), SUV advertising (*Testdrive*, Eye Level Gallery, Halifax, 2002; *Totalled*, Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa, 2004), public apologies (*Sorry*, Saint Mary's University Art Gallery, Halifax,

2005; McMaster Museum of Art, Hamilton, 2005), and in management language (*24/7 in the Workplace*, Eye Level Gallery, 2004; *24/7 at Work*, Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, 2005).

Busby has a BFA from NSCAD (1984), an MA in Media Studies from Concordia University (1992) and a PhD in Communication from Concordia University (1999). She currently teaches at Mount Saint Vincent University.

Acknowledgements

This publication documents the exhibition *24/7 at Work*, which was presented by MSVU Art Gallery in the University Library over the period 15 October through 11 December 2005. Exhibitions situated in the vitrines are part of a continuing experimental series entitled *Window Box*. *Window Box* exposes a range of practices within visual culture, often with the participation of members of the Mount Saint Vincent campus community, in a heavily frequented public site. We gratefully acknowledge the Canada Council for the Arts for its financial support of MSVU Art Gallery programs.

Ingrid Jenkner
Director
MSVU Art Gallery

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24/7
ACTIONABLE
ALIGNMENT TO PLAN
ALL ON THE SAME PAGE
AT THE END OF THE DAY
BAD OPTICS
BENCHMARKING
BLAME GAME
BLOWBACK
BRAIN DRAIN
BRAIN DUMP
BRANDING
BREAKTHROUGH VALUE
BUY-IN
BUY-OUT
CAREER-LIMITING MOVE
CLEAR THE AIR
CLIENT FOCUS
CLOSURE
CONNECT-THE-DOTS
CONSTRUCTIVE DISMISSAL
CORE COMPETENCIES
CORPORATE SCOREBOARD
DE-HIRING
DE-RISKING
DISCONNECT
DOWN THE ROAD
DOWN-SIZING
EMPOWERMENT
FAST-TRACKING
FLEXIBILITY
FUTURE-BASED
GAME PLAN
GOOD OPTICS
GOOD TO GO
GROW AN IDEA, A BUSINESS
HIT THE GROUND RUNNING
INCENTIVIZED
ISSUES (MEANING PROBLEMS)
KISSING UP AND KICKING DOWN
LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD
MAXED OUT
MOVING FORWARD
NO-BRAINER
NUMBERS SERVED
OPTICS
OUT OF THE LOOP
OUTSOURCING
OWNING THE PLAN
PUSHING THE ENVELOPE
RAISING THE BAR
RAMPING UP
RATIOS OF SUCCESS
RE-PURPOSING
RESULTS-DRIVEN
RIGHT-SIZING
RISK-AVERSE
ROADMAP
ROLL-OUT
STAKEHOLDERS
STEWARDSHIP
STRATEGIC FIT
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS
SWAP-OUT
TALK THE TALK
THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX
SUNSETTING
TRANSITIONING
TURN THE PAGE
UP-SELL
VALUE ADDED
VERSIONING
WALK THE WALK
WE HAVE A SITUATION
WIGGLE-ROOM
WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY
WIN-WIN SITUATION
WORK-AROUND
WOW FACTORY



Cathy Busby **24/7**

24/7 at Work

IN THE SHOWCASES you see arrangements of library books and self-maintenance products such as deodorants, toothpastes, and “energy” drinks labelled, “High Endurance,” “36 Hour Power!” and “Powerful Thirst Relief.” If products are a measure of consumer preoccupations, then the pressure to be increasingly “on” and available is clear.

The word “empowerment,” widely used in feminist and other social justice contexts to speak of ways out of oppression, is modified on a toothpaste box to “empowermint,” describing a mint-flavoured toothpaste. But before landing on the toothpaste tube, “empowerment” was appropriated from its political contexts by managers who declared the new workers “empowered”—to maximize their performance in the workplace.

“Flexible” is noted as the primary feature of the Colgate “Navigator” (also the name of a hefty SUV) toothbrush. The flexible toothbrush can get around the corners of our teeth more easily and serves our dental hygiene as a better “navigator.” “Flexibility” to hire more people on contract is what CBC management repeatedly claimed it wanted during a seven-week lock-out that ended in October 2005. Management spokespersons used the word “flexible,” meaning the option to hire workers on a contract basis, to explain what they needed in “an ever-changing, fast-paced and highly competitive media environment”. The message to CBC workers is that they must conform to the mean and lean media world by providing the Corporation with greater flexibility, but in the process drastically reduce job security.

Recently I was picking up a rental car, and after the woman behind the counter asked how I was, she began explaining that she had broken out in a rash, which she showed me on her hands. She said she could feel it spreading to her face and that she felt horrible and in need of medical attention. But she was the assistant manager, one of two people working on the floor, and she felt she just couldn’t leave. By volunteering to sacrifice her health for her job, she was putting into practice the inordinate flexibility that has come to be associated with retail workers.

If the self-maintenance products on display in *24/7 at Work* are selling, then as consumers we must be eager to buy back a little time, strength and endurance with their promises of security, invincibility, and protection. Whereas the products are

the immediate result of this discourse of high performance, the books included in this installation point to some of the ideas that have enabled the products to be imagined and produced. The book titles point to management and marketing strategies and ways that ideas about product identities are developed: *Brand Power* (Paul Stobart, ed) and *Reputation: Realizing the Value of Corporate Image* (Charles J. Fombrun) are two examples. While many of the titles selected here indicate an uncritical embrace of management and marketing strategies, titles such as *No Logo* (Naomi Klein) or *Downsizing Democracy: How America Sidelined*

its Citizens and Privatized its Public (Matthew A. Crenson & Benjamin Ginsberg) indicate a resistance to this discourse.

24/7 at Work is the result of my observations of language used in consumer and workplace contexts. This work could only have taken this shape in the university library, where books are so abundant, and in the university, where social re-thinking and criticism find their home. I am grateful to the Gallery for providing me with the opportunity to develop this visual and textual analysis.

Cathy Busby
October 2005

The Balanced Scorecard

WALK INTO ANY drugstore and you become marketing’s target. “Empowermint” toothpaste, “High Endurance” body wash, “24/7” deodorant—the packaging language “shops” a set of ideals that the act of buying confirms: I am energized, powerful, effective in the world. The powerful, energetic athleticism advocated by this marketing psychology is but a purchase away.

The message implied in such branding language is that social

self-regulation requires control of the body, with all its appearances, smells and secretions. Words such as “power,” “ultimate” and “extreme” link consumer self-maintenance standards with those of elite athletes who subjugate the wants and needs of the body to a competitive discipline.

Using language to manipulate the consumer is as old as advertising itself and advertising has long been considered an index of a society’s mindset. With *24/7 at Work*, Cathy



Competitive Edge (Janelle Barlow), a form of extreme selfhood seems to be emerging as the managerial ideal.

When both personal hygiene standards and productivity at work are expressed through a vocabulary formerly reserved for professional sports—itsself a fusion of recreation and paid performance—we see a blurring of the boundaries between work and non-work that serves the interests of businesses seeking cheap labour. A list of phrases such as “hit the ground running,” “level the playing field,” and “raising the bar,” imply a jock mentality. Employees internalize such attitudes towards productivity and incorporate the phrases into their own vocabulary. By

assuming a subservient place in the workplace pecking order—always a team player, never an owner—workers unwittingly submit to their status as members of the employee herd. Considered in this context, the term, “branding,” becomes unfortunately appropriate.

By positioning the consumer in a market similar to that of a professional athlete, branding language blurs the distinction between private and public spheres. The message: what we shave with, brush with, shampoo with, in private, directly affects our public image and reception. Like an athlete’s, our performance is rated like a consumer item. The body—the physical manifestation of self that acts in the world—becomes an object expected to perform, to

respond to consumer demand. So when jock talk infiltrates the workplace without question or an ironic smile, is it an indicator of a discourse insidiously infiltrating our lives? When did the office, or the burger joint, or the call centre, become an arena? When we buy into a team mentality, do we become players who can be traded, downsized, commodified, at the owner’s whim? If language is our barometer, work is now a playing field, where we are expected to perform, 24/7, at home and on the job. Stress is the new leisure. Don’t forget your helmet.

Peggy MacKinnon
Exhibition Curator

Busby draws parallels between the language used in contemporary marketing and current trends in corporate “manager-speak” as reflected in the MSVU Library collection. Flexibility, stamina, and being a “team player” characterize today’s corporate athlete, and this trend is reflected in the language of consumer culture. With this shift, as evidenced by books titled *Competing Against Time* (George Stalk), *The Balanced Scorecard* (Robert S. Kaplan), and *Branded Customer Service: the New*

