Introductory Essay by Dr. Martin Patrick

Throughout her recent works Pat Badani has enacted and exhibited an eclectic history of infiltration, a trait that goes along extremely well with the mode of operations that a mixed-genre or interdisciplinary practice necessarily entails. Badani's complex works most often explore not what already exists, but what might yet occur. This approach has resulted in a substantial group of open-ended works with indeterminate outcomes stemming from highly detailed and orchestrated "set-ups." By using the term infiltration I intend to emphasize the manner in which the artist has relocated her artistic practice into various non-art settings, and equivalently aspects of the outside - non-art-world - that continually make inroads into Badani's context-specific works.

Projects initiated since the late 1990s have been characterized by the integration of digital media and environments. Moreover whether her work is seen in a public setting, virtual site, or more conventional art gallery, Badani seeks to downplay such distinctions in favor of creating, in her words, a "communicational space." Such a space, insofar as it fosters dialogue, then becomes far more evocative and incorporative of the problematic art-life questions of the current moment than a more traditional mode of practice.

This participatory approach has included such interdisciplinary specialists as physicians or architects along with the audience/viewers, but perhaps just as importantly the artist herself, as when Badani worked alongside bakers in one of the most prestigious of Paris bakeries to achieve her works *Tower-Tour*, *Urban Projects* (both 1997), *Cultures and Ferments* (1999), *Home Transfer* (2000), and *Where Life is Better* (2003). She continued to work with the public-at-large in six international cities for her award-winning project *Where are you from?_Stories* (2002-06), and in the case of *Me&U2* (2005), integrated physical computing. The resulting projects were manifested in multiple forms: sculptural installation, large-scale documentary plates, videos and web-oriented works. One testament to Badani's thoroughly interdisciplinary approach is the fact that her work has been recorded in—and thus infiltrated—such radically disparate venues as a glossy book documenting the history of bread-making and the Poilane bakery, as well as the most competitive of international digital art and video festivals.

Badani has moved and traveled widely and makes her home, so to speak, in a rather destabilized methodological notion of artmaking. I recall Christian Boltanski's 1985 comment, "I belong to the young tradition of Central Europe, but my real country is painting."[1] This becomes not a dissimilar predicament from that of many artists who inhabit an increasingly global artworld, yet Badani has been more "nomadic" than most. Originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, Badani currently lives in the United States, and has also spent time as a resident of Mexico, Peru, Canada and France.

At times Badani's practice seems dematerialized and "rootless" while displaying a strong set of convictions regarding urban space. Having infiltrated such a variety of cosmopolitan locales, Badani seeks (and becomes) energized through her relation to these sites, characterized by their multiplicity, changeability, and potential for growth, perhaps in accordance with Situationist International founder Guy Debord who theorized the effect of the city in concert with an active participant in his *Theory of the Dérive* (1958); and more recently critics such as Claire Doherty and Nicolas Bourriaud who have championed the shift of contemporary art "from studio to situation."[2]

However far Badani has traveled in the noise and clutter of her urban trajectories, her works in the current exhibition are noteworthy in that they again encompass the tensions of both leaving and returning home. *[in time time]* presents the viewer with two time-based pieces, *[8-bits]* an intimate, split-screen, looped documentary video; and *[ping-pong-flow]* a context-aware, interactive video installation. In the artist's words: "The pieces are bound together by their related concerns: consciousness and reality, time and memory, and the relationship of sender and receiver in a communication channel; yet differentiated in their embodiment and in their speculative vantage points, specifically in the way that images and human experience converge"[3]

In *[8-bits]* Badani incorporates a relative quietude into the (all too often bombastic or inconsequential) arena of video, contrasting citations from existing films and texts with close-up "home-movie" style renderings of the artist's father depicted while questioned by the artist herself. Badani described the origin of *[8-bits]* in the following statement: "The work began during a trip to Buenos Aires where I traveled to spend a couple of weeks with my ailing 86 year old father. As a means of spending quality time with him I suggested that we play a 'game' whereby we would take turns sharing personal experiences: an exercise in 'memory,' but also in 'imagination' given the fact that details pertaining to past experiences are partial and that imperfect memory invites imagination and creative embellishment through storytelling."[4] Notably the exploration of memory dominates the works of many of the greatest Modern and Contemporary writer/storytellers: Beckett, Kundera, Nabokov, Proust, Sebald, Stein, and Woolf.

What is it to recycle, repeat, and recount "bits" of memories? What kind of infiltration into memory, and what kind of stitching together occurs in the resulting piece? The artist's father likened the "interview" situation to a game of ping pong, and such a metaphor preserves a notion of tension but also a ritualism, flirtation, a somewhat awkward dance, and in addition an intellectual sparring match. An act of moving back and forth, gaming, flickering. It's a curiously captivating choice, that of the artist's, to use shaky, hand-held camera work—from two parallel yet different points of view (from the separate cameras held individually by the artist and her father)—to anchor and ground a video work, made in an era that while characterized increasingly by disembodiment is often represented by forms of pristine clarity.

To subject a member of one's immediate family to interrogation is a tricky business. Interestingly there exists a rich history of artists engaging with their elderly parents, but often it's male artists who come to mind: Art Spiegelman in his magisterial graphic novel *Maus*, Richard Avedon photographing his father's deteriorating health, Bill Viola depicting his mother on her deathbed. Video as a medium itself intimates mortality, as it is ephemeral, luminescent, bespeaking a life-like quality, while being simultaneously spectral, ghostlike, secondary.

In *[8-bits]*, a split-screen world, we as viewers are offered a riveting set of short monologue/remembrances by Sr. Rosato (the artist's father), interlaced with the facing reality: texts, drawings, and alternate views of the "narrator." Sometimes left coincides almost exactly with right, as when the spoken phrase "I see his face now" synchs up with the text "I remember clearly his voice." Eight bits of information correspond to the eight decades of Sr. Rosato's life. Despite the inevitable anxiety that might occur with the difficulty of summoning certain memories, according to Badani's rules for the Ping Pong game, "bad memories were not allowed."

As he draws his childhood toys, an entrance to his school, the outline of the Americas, Sr. Rosato maps his words and thoughts, offering (albeit with a slightly tremulous hand) a cartography of his consciousness. This act of both reiterating and reorienting clashes significantly with the repeated statement: "I can't recall it very well. It's become very, very blurry."

Badani uses many appropriated texts, including those of author Jorge Luis Borges, and filmmakers David Lynch and Ridley Scott, but that said, one of the most important points to make in relation to the use of borrowed words is that such textual information then becomes transformed into the artist's own words, via their recontextualization, creating a third/new quantity. And, as the viewer's attention is competed for by each side of the screen, he/she is forced to make choices akin to editing and "recreating" the work anew each time. As artist Victor Burgin recently pointed out: "The arrival of the domestic video cassette recorder, and the distribution of industrially produced films on videotape, put the material substrate of the narrative in the hands of the audience. The *order* of narrative could now be routinely countermanded."[5]

Sr. Rosato is also playing an unusual role, by the very fact of speaking by choice in English, his second language, somewhat ironically to detail incidents from his earliest memory and his childhood. Of course in the 21st C English is the new Lingua Franca, but furthermore the venue for the premiere of this video installation is situated in the heartland of the United States. Interestingly, the last recollection of Sr. Rosato involves his trip to Los Angeles in 1945: "I always wanted to go to the United States … to be on the other side of the screen. Not looking at motion pictures but entering…" The indistinct qualities of actual memory here act in confrontation with cinematic reality. A wide variety of artists have been taken with this notion of "entering", from Buster Keaton's portrayal of a projectionist in his film *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) to Woody Allen's fantasy *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1984), in which actor Jeff Daniels steps "out" of the screen to spend time with Mia Farrow, and then yearningly invites her to join him within his "real world."

But for all today's talk of near-complete immersion in contemporary virtual worlds, and the corresponding increase in fluidity and clarity of images, they remain fragments nonetheless. Rather than delivering reality whole, artists must still exactly manipulate specific portions of image, text, and sound. However closely *[8-bits]* resembles and incorporates aspects of the document, archive, and oral history, it escapes those inflexible categorizations via its transformation into art, rather than simply artifact. Pat Badani's accomplishment here (with the quite singular cooperation of Sr. Rosato) is to broaden our awareness of elusive aspects of memory and mortality when examined in the light of the new emergent media.

In the second work, *[ping-pong-flow],* a 3-D engine, more widely used in the contextual setting of the contemporary video game rather than art gallery, electronically configures direct interaction between gallery visitor and work. This process/experience/event consists of a floor projection featuring an "avatar" depicted within a darkened, circular vignette, set and thus contained within a low barrier creating the illusion of a receding pit.

The avatar (performed by Badani herself) subsequently reacts via a number of gestures to the movements of viewers around the simulated pit. The gestures are enumerated by the artist in the following list: "reaching out to touch them (touch), disapproving (no-no-no), being scared (scare), hiding (peekaboo), bending down to take a careful look at them (bend-down), laughing at them/with them (chuckle), avoiding their gaze by pretending not to see (see-not-see), falling down if the pit zone is invaded – like a hand or a foot waved within the pit area, in the projection zone (fall), etc."[6] In direct contrast to *[8 bits]* which refers to past experience, this work continually unfolds in the present, activated by the real time experience of the participants.

One common received notion of digital art is that via its use of technological mediation, the viewer becomes more removed and distanced from direct experience, however Badani's intention is to seek the converse: "an emotional space; felt, expressed and communicated through the body and between bodies (the virtual avatar, and the real physical bodies of those interacting with the piece)."[7] Badani's manner of using technology seems as evocative of Magical Realist fiction as computer-driven (neo-) Conceptualism. Her often whimsical and persistent use of intentional discontinuities, shifting perspectives, and dreamlike atmospherics owe much to an approach indissociably linked with the Latin American creative context. Particularly Badani's hybrid art, transported as it has been in her suitcase, or laptop if you will, is rooted in a post-Colonial mode of critical practice, where the fantastical and the political collide.

The very fact that the avatar/personage on view is the artist herself brings to light a significant link from one piece in the exhibition to the other, that is to say, the use of both the artist and her father instead of actors from the "outside." However Badani is equally interested in exploring the differences as well as the similarities between the works. In her words: "If in [8-bits] the viewers are enlisted as perceptual editors, in [ping-pong-flow] they are enlisted as activators". Thereby the movement of spectator from one installation to another by circumstance mimics the ping-pong-like motion from father to daughter created in the earlier work. A childlike "game" of cause and effect might be said to reverberate around the totality of the exhibition space, creating a number of points of intersection between the works, and intriguingly in the reactions of the spectators.

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[1] Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996)

[2] See *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation*, Claire Doherty, ed. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004)

[3] Statement by the artist

[4] Ibid.

[5] Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film*, London: Reaktion Books, 2004, 8.

[6] Statement by the artist.

[7] Ibid.