

jil p. weaving  
TO BE CONTINUED...

jil p. weaving: to be continued...

BY RANDY LEE CUTLER

Artist's Statement (2002)

BY JIL P. WEAVING



**jil p. weaving: to be continued...**

by Randy Lee Cutler, 2002

Born in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, jil p. weaving has been a practicing artist since 1978 when she completed a B.F.A. at the University of Victoria. She has since shown her work in the provincial capital and throughout the lower mainland both as a solo artist and in group exhibitions. Her artwork, primarily site-specific, is not usually made for galleries. She was a founding member of The Association for Noncommercial Culture (Vancouver 86-95) where she collaborated on alternative artists' projects including: Benchmarks a public art work on the backs

jil p. weaving  
*to be continued... (panel #1), 1998*

mixed media installation  
(122 x 183 cm)  
SAG 1999.05.01  
gift of the artist

Photograph by Cameron Heryet

of sidewalk benches and *Letters from Home*, a set of mass produced cards positioned in tourist information sites and brochure racks.

Her installation *to be continued...* was first shown at the Surrey Art Gallery as part of the two person *field notes from maternal territory: an exhibition about mothering* - with Margaret Naylor (11/10/97 to 03/1/98). Influenced by feminist art practices as well as the birth of her first child in 1988, weaving has demonstrated a sustained commitment to social justice issues. She has contributed to residencies, forums and symposia on social change, community arts initiatives and cyberfeminism. Representing artists and communities, she has also been a Research Coordinator for Canada Council for the Arts (with the Laidlaw Foundation). While her interests and art practice have followed the developments of community engaged endeavors they have also lead the way in envisioning socially engaged, interventionist cultural productions.

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Set in the not too distant future, *to be continued...* is an imagined story of utopian/dystopian motherhood, an ironic myth informed by feminism, socialism and current discourses around reproductive technologies. The artwork consists of two parts, a website and a

series of oil on panel paintings. The website presents the official voice of the Department of Maternal Affairs (DMA), the fictional Inter-governmental ministry of culture, industry and creation whose policies sanction the widespread implementation of reproductive technologies. "In these pages you will find an introduction to our national system of child care; a system which conforms fully with The Consortium of Friendly Nations recommendations on reproduction and maternal care." Dissemination of this information in the form of an Internet site presents an 'authorized and authentic' source to an otherwise disturbing proposition. The governing presence and control which is suggested by an 'official' website is ironic especially as the origins of online culture were structurally an anarchistic form of communication. Simultaneously familiar and strange, the information and its earnest presentation provoke feelings of unease and even horror at the implications of the Department of Maternal Affairs' mombot technology. A mombot is a techno-organic apparatus cloned from the DNA of the future mother's rib. (The allusion and inversion of the Biblical story of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib further adds to the work's irony.) These cyborgs are designed to replace the physical and emotive activities of motherhood with a 'superior technology'. The website positions the viewer as a

## DEPARTMENT OF MATERNAL AFFAIRS

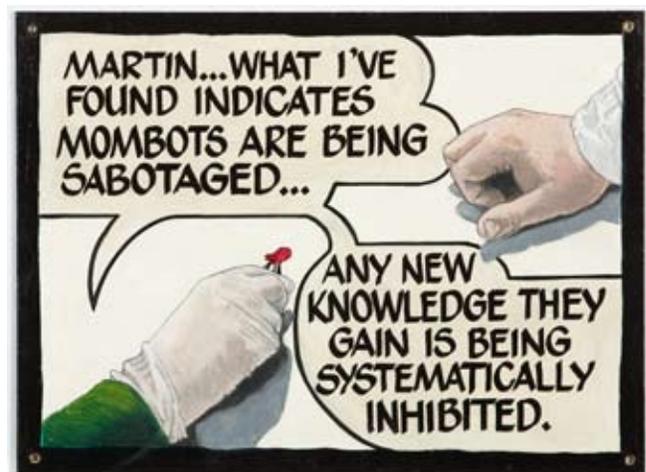
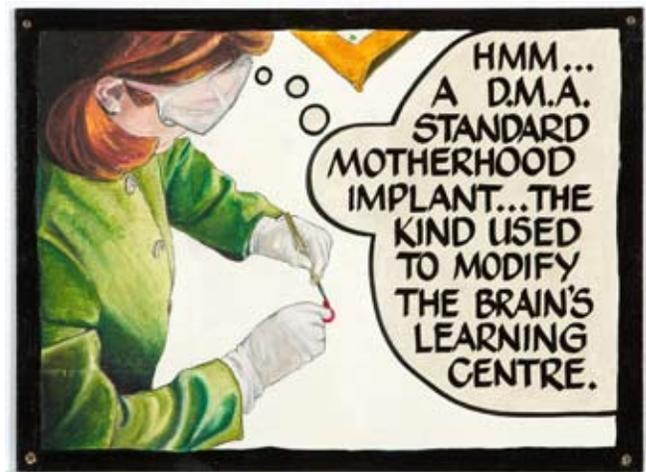


jil p. weaving *to be continued...*, detail from the *to be continued...* web site. 1998 mixed media installation SAG 1999.05.01  
Gift of the Artist. Photograph by Cameron Heryet.



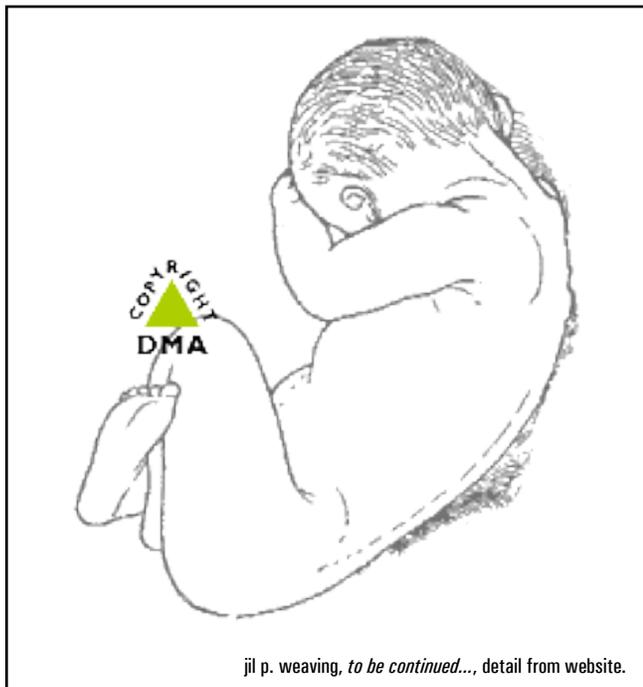
This allegedly utopian model of motherhood, under the auspices of the National Program of Reproductive Assistance and Cyborg Caregiving, outlines a prospectus for the conception, gestation and rearing of children that is advantageous to the health and harmony of the mother, her career, the child and society as a whole. The cultural contradictions of motherhood - compromised career prospects, thwarted intimacy with the infant and stay at home mothering - are efficiently eradicated by the presence of virtual motherhood. Up-to-date information on childcare, development and safety are implanted in the mombot's 'brain' to influence and support the maternal qualities provided by the cyborg. The Department of Maternal Affairs website, with its managerial directives, suggests that peace of mind can be had when the state controls this new system of motherhood. In this Brave New World, command, control and surveillance replace natural nurturing, love and human engagement. Can the introduction of mombots be interpreted as perhaps the loss of one's (maternal) self, not to mention the supremacy of the marketplace definition of the (productive) self?

The second part of the artwork, painted panels configured to mimic comic book images, that weaving has recently transferred into a digital format, is also set in the not too distant future. The design evokes both a bygone era of detective novels and the more contemporary cultural artifacts of Japanese manga (comic books). In contrast to the serious tone of the website, these images are initially sensationalist by virtue of their visual style. But this accessibility is soon shifted by the panels' narrative, which investigates transgressive behaviors within the realm of techno-maternity. These images recount a future world where the 'motherhoods' implanted in the mombot's brains



jil p. weaving *to be continued...* panels #2, #3 and #4, (each 46 x 34 cm)  
1998 mixed media installation SAG 1999.05.01  
Gift of the Artist. Photographs by Cameron Heryet.

are apparently being sabotaged. The special agents working to solve the mystery uncover two competing actions, the covert manipulation by the DMA and the rise of a mombot liberation movement. The techno-terrorism enacted on these government cyborg units



represents perhaps some of the displeasure that the populace feels toward the erasure and disposal of the caregiver and her experiences. The utopian aura evident in the website is counteracted with this transgressive social response in the panels. This narrative is reflective of how, since its introduction to mainstream culture, there has been a conflicted response to often invasive and profit driven biogenetics.

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The nature and medium of weaving's practice traverses fluid social and political spaces. Indeed, all of her artwork is an investigation of the overlaps between space and place. Significantly, weaving's

work portrays an embodied opposition to the potential application of scientific research combined with corporate and political interests. An embodied response speaks from the knowledge garnered from the physical experience of mothering as well as art making. Situated or embodied knowledge challenges conventional objectivity, which is disembodied, disengaged and therefore out of touch with lived experience. The humor and criticality of *to be continued...* come from a position where motherhood is valued even as deep contradictions are acknowledged.

This installation is significant for its many faceted presentation of difficult issues. While "maternal voices have been drowned by professional theory, ideologies of motherhood, sexist arrogance and childhood fantasy"<sup>1</sup>, weaving, along with likeminded artists and writers, has investigated the act of mothering. There is evidently a push-pull between career and family intimacy, between individual and social pressures. Figures such as Adrienne Rich (*Of Woman Born*, 1976) and Mary Kelly (*Post-Partum Document* 1976-95) have spearheaded the discussion on maternal discourse. Since then many Canadian artists have added to this rich and contradictory area. In Vancouver, artists like Jin Me Yoon, Elizabeth Mackenzie, Kati Campbell and Margaret Naylor have each attempted to make visible the nuances of motherhood and what constitutes the female subject. They continue to remind us that mothering is something that occurs within a specific social, economic, cultural and historical environment. The multiple identities and arenas are evident in weaving's twofold construction of painted and digital elements. Each form captures different aspects (fictional, parodic, metaphoric, cautionary) of how reproductive technologies will alter the experience and contribution of maternal care.

By speaking about her experience through the language of new media, popular culture and metaphor, weaving makes the issues both visible and accessible. The computer screen simultaneously captures the authority of a government website and the hacker sensibility of disenfranchised individuals and communities. Speaking in popular idioms, the networked computer and the comic strip, *to be continued...* communicates its message of the potential problems that come with new medico-scientific frontiers. As Anne Balsamo has observed, "with the deployment of the new reproductive technologies come the cultural construction of a new set of possibilities and a new set of social agents..."



jil p. weaving, *to be continued...*, installed in the Surrey Art Gallery TechLab 2002

each of whom can now stake a claim on the outcome of the reproductive encounter. Thus are born new ethical, social and political dilemmas."<sup>2</sup> The parody website is a popular form of resistance to cultural norms by conflating various strategies under one critically challenging structure. Its message questions conventional representations, which reinforce what constitutes femininity. Women everywhere are rewriting the cultural codes. weaving like her peers, creates interference patterns within culture and

society. Since its first exhibition in 1998, the work's meaning continues to evolve with real cyborg politics. The mombot and comic strip figures are additions to a cast of characters that reflect real-world institutions and systems that thrive on gender separation and hierarchy.

The juxtaposition of the comic book form with its tale of transgressive behavior and the authoritative Department of Maternal Affairs website provokes the imaginative apprehension of the problem of how women's bodies and technology have been intertwined. The masculine mastery over nature often found in technological discourse has evolved into the "birthing" of human substitutes or rent-a-wombs. Here, fiction and lived experience go far in describing how reality operates. With its various components, the work reveals current symptoms of our cultural anxiety about reproduction and the fear of active female sexuality. With each new advance in reproductive technologies and biogenetics, the fictional world that is envisioned in this artwork has become more real and more insistent. The future implications of technology and motherhood are themselves to be continued...

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Footnotes:

1 Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, page 40.

2 Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996, page 160.

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**Artist's Statement (2002)**

As you enter this installation, you move through time into a future; a future forecast from scientific and reproductive technologies initiated in the late 20th century. A future in which many women's current dilemma --choosing between being 'good' mothers and doing the important work of raising their children or staying in the paid workforce and providing necessary financial support while hopefully moving forward in their careers-- has been solved for them. In this brave new world, a political and corporate partnership has created mombot technology. These cyborg surrogates allow for women to stay in the 'productive' workforce while a cloned and 'improved' version of themselves raises their children. Just check out the website in the office, at the Department of Maternal Affairs (DMA) for the details.

But wait! There seems to be inexplicable events, conspiracies, denied realities. 'Motherhoods' are turning up in the oddest places. According to the DMA this can't be happening, 'motherhoods' are implanted on the cloned brain of the mombot and when she turns herself in to have her biological components flushed, the 'hoods' are dissolved along with the flesh. Why a mombot without her hoods would be indistinguishable from the general population. She could do all kinds of things a properly socialized mombot couldn't, that is, wouldn't. It would require an organized resistance, people who felt there was some reason for mombots to exist after their children were in school...

Watch as the story unfolds, as the two federal agents, tipped off by an anonymous government official, follow the clues, reveal transgressive behaviors and suspect that they can trust no one.

So what year is this? What are the crimes and who is perpetrating them? That is for you to decide. Just remember... the truth is out there.

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### An Open Book

a catalogue of artworks from the Surrey Art Gallery's Permanent Collection  
ISSN 1910-1392 ISBN 978-0-92018-181-2 Published 2007



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