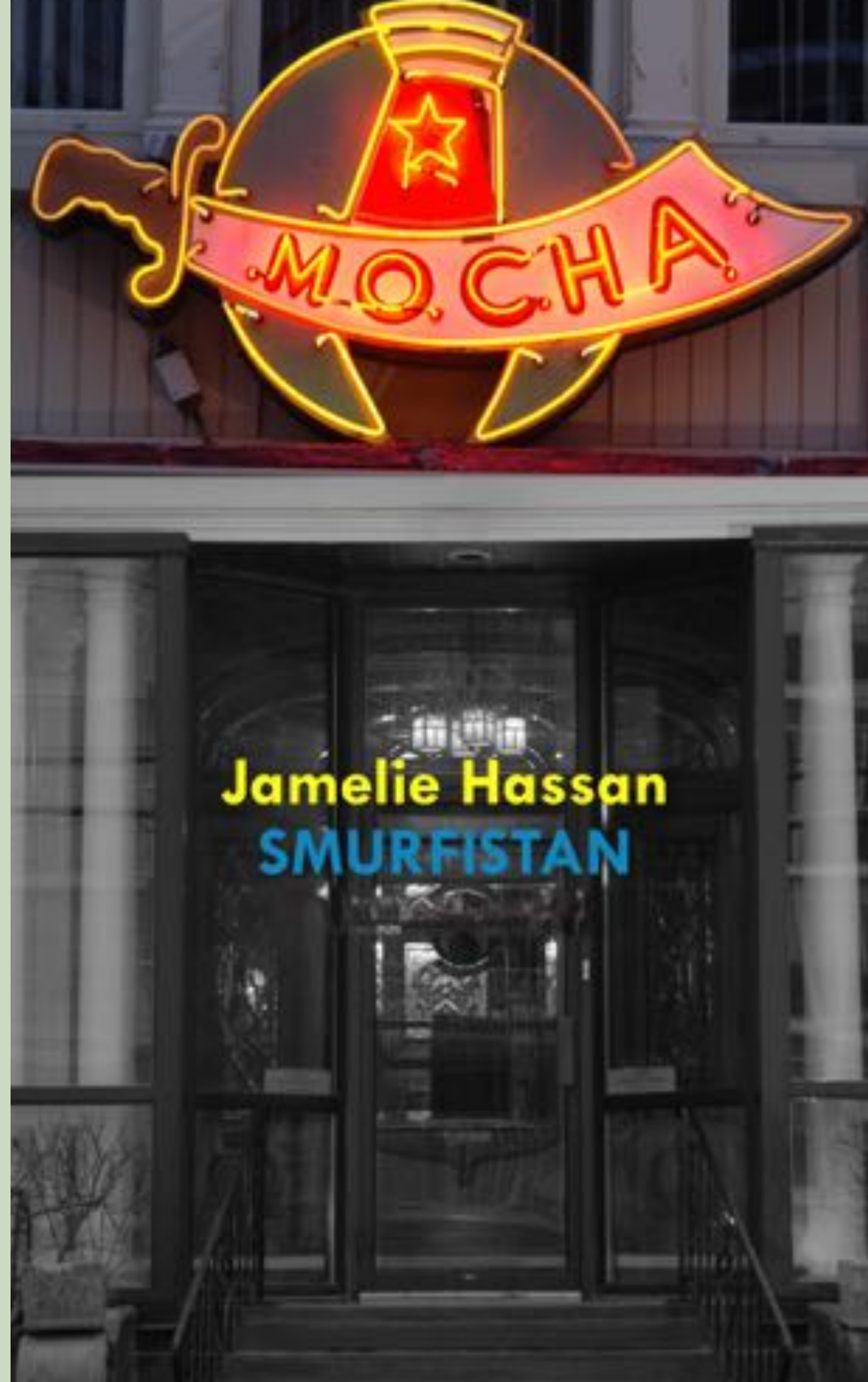




onestar press jamelie hassan smurfistan



Jamelie Hassan
SMURFISTAN













cial clip now being shown on Belgian TV aims to demonstrate that war can happen in the most innocent of places, Henon said.

“We get reactions from all over the place,” said Henon. “People are shocked and want to know the reasons behind this cartoon image.”

The appeal is meant to raise money for UNICEF projects in Burundi, Congo and Sudan, He-

non said:

However, due to its graphic and disturbing scenes, this cartoon is not for everyone. The advertisement is aimed at an adult audience and is only shown after 9 p.m. to avoid upsetting young Smurfs fans.

The video is peacefully introduced by birds, butterflies and happy Smurfs playing and singing their theme song when sud-

denly out of the sky, bombs rain down onto their forest village, scattering Papa Smurf and the rest as their houses blaze.

The bombs kill Smurfette, leaving Baby Smurf orphaned and crying at the edge of a crater in the last scene, which finishes with the text “don’t let war destroy the children’s world.”

It calls on viewers to donate.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Children & Social Space: Why did Derrida say no

Marwan Hassan

*“Why did Derrida say no?
He was not a happy dumptruck.”¹*

Conventionally, children play in parks and only in parks. These are their social spaces. A few swings, climbers, a patch of grass and a couple of trees, a certain pleasantness with the illusion of freedom, however fenced in. But the notion of play is also of the mind, the playfulness of children proceeds from a playfulness in the eye and emerges from their position of infant vulnerability and method of movement, crawling which brings them closer to the earth's surface. The alertness of a newborn's eye following the movements of form, light and shadow, and the tenacious grasp of the hand reveal both a peculiar vulnerability and strength. The baby's powerful set of lungs and the splendour of his or her cry also indicate strength of character and a capacity to inform and arouse any adult who is not being attentive. Play has its origins not only in physical space such as the parks or the baby's physical intimacy with the earth but in the playfulness of the child's mind. As much as any child may enjoy parks, they are constructed for adults not for children. Places of confinement where surveillance can occur with more ease on the part of adults rather than with the explicit purpose of intensifying the experience of play itself. Play safe is a euphemism for surveillance.

“I'm a pastavore.”

Contemporary toys despite their seductive surface appearance possess merely the dry bones of the semblance of play. My daughter was anxious to have a barbie doll but she never got one until a schoolmate gave her a barbie as a gift for her fifth birthday. Two days of casual play and barbie was a neglected adult. Within two weeks of intermittent play, she gave barbie a punk, butch haircut, spiky hair-do, and began to dance her naked up and down the hall, half-discarding her out of boredom. Barbie was widowed with spiky hair. Pathetic.

Paper, sticks, glue, string and things of the adult world which can be changed or rearranged are the objects longed for. What the child observes as useful can be turned to more interesting play than what is manufactured, given and consigned a predetermined use: g.i. joe, barbie doll, hot wheels, etc.

Children half hate, half love these manufactured toys hence they mutilate and scar them in a sort of totemic manner. What toys generate is what adults and the toy companies wish to have them generate in children: a desire for competitiveness, the prestige of the new, the priority of ownership and the aura of acquisitiveness. Today's dolls are unlike dolls of the past which were fetishes of affection, symbolic meaning, and rites. Children observe and intuit the tyranny of toys. Contemporary manufactured TV toys are for jocks who fashion and model these toys in the corporate

worlds, making fetishes not of affection and sacred rites of birth, death and burial but of combat, killing and competition. The modern toy brutalizes consciousness while the self-made toy develops a fusion consciousness based on principles of reciprocity (where the worked upon object as it comes into form is as much a creative expression of the child as it shapes the child's creativity) which intersect play and work in the child's gestures, muscles, eye and mind. One need only observe at any child's party how the newest toy possessing a special status often stimulates conflict among the kids.

"Do cats play outside in a thunderstorm?"

Do children like work?

The victory over the more arduous forms of drudge child labour was an important victory but it also betrayed the failure of capitalism and the West's political culture of colonialism. Child labour has not been eliminated but dislocated to other spaces, other nations, other countries out of a combination of embarrassment, moralistic humanism, colonialism, technological advances and racism: what's no good for Europe's children is good enough for Asia's kids.

Now, moral superiority is the order of the day over the destitute Asians, Africans and Latin Americans, not unlike the English mine owner's moralizing superiority over the Welsh miner or Irish labourer. But if one or two adults can't make it then the family has no choice but to turn to every hand capable of sweat and work. Hence economics compel the poor Arab or Indian or Mexican to send his or her child into indentured labour, after all what's left but starvation for the entire family. Let us pass no judgement on the Welsh miner or Irish day labourer or Egyptian or Indian peasant.

But do children like work? Is work something in a balance between creating and play, between shaping order and developing what children crave? Children no more accept compulsion in work or play than any adult will without feeling humiliated. The principle of the compulsory for children has not disappeared but has metamorphosed into education, not nearly as drudgelike but nevertheless humiliating because it is based on coercion, repression and compulsion.

If children gain a certain relief from drudge labour and improved physical health, they proportionately lose a certain freedom of mind in compulsory education. We can say their mental ecological space is infringed upon once again from a different angle. Despite a certain elitism and faddism now associated with them, an attempt to liberate learning is apparent in the works and projects of Steiner, Montessori, Summerhill School and the many other alternative schools. They have not so much failed as they exist within a constrained space delineated by parochial education, economics, the constraints of social space, and remain unable to mature and achieve their full scope. However experimental the approach, the educational space is institutionalized, defined and limited by the buildings themselves, the school buses, the commute to the museum or park for hyper-supervised

learning and play, in short the administration of knowledge. We might ask what is being learned and where is the actual place or space of learning? Regulation of movement is being learned. Children know playing hookey is not just another form of hockey without rules and referees as the agents of repression. It is the search for the zone of freedom in a social space beyond the playgrounds and the schoolrooms of compulsory education. The truant officer as enforcer was a necessity to establish the legitimacy of compulsory education as a norm for children, not merely to get kids into the classroom.

"I can do four things all day long. I put my foot up with my arms down and my other foot down. Two feet up in the air and both my hands down. Hop on one foot. Stand on one foot. Put my hand down like this. That's four things all day long."

Children are so bereft of basic human rights that it shakes the political and legal foundations of the definition of rights. None of the logic of law will rationalize their exclusion. They are the first to be the victims of war along with their mothers and grandparents – witness the Gulf War, the Iraqi children incinerated in the underground shelters. Or the USA's military napalming of Vietnamese children. The wreckage of Beirut. The murdering of Mayan children by Death Squads of Central America. The murdering of Jewish and Gypsy children by the Nazis. Los desaparecidos of Argentina during the time of the fascist generals. Or the Palestinian and Lebanese children punished for rebellion by the Israeli military. These are the horrors.

But in the details of stable "civil society" and the law, the child's status and notions of maturity, through a combination of the calculus of numbers and the concept of age, is determined. The lines drawn through the law codes for most statutes defining legal status, summed up in such terms as "minor", age of reason, age of majority, are exclusionary. What is this exclusion based on? And how old must a human being be to qualify fully as a political being? The logic invoked of protecting the children themselves seems to be a dubious rationale given the wantonness with which children are often dismissed. Note, the categories of child abuse, emotional, physical, and sexual. A hundred years ago brutal caning of a child was justifiable by both law and social norm bound up in the truism: spare the rod and spoil the child.²

"What is an intestine?"

"It's to test food."

In the fifties, virtually any adult could seize a child and spank or hit that child in the street and it was not an uncommon custom. I remember a confrontation between my mother and a neighbour over an incident with one of my brothers who was hit for chasing a baseball into the neighbour's ferns and damaging them. He was hit, threatened and chased home by the

adult. My mother was rebuked for “spoiling her children” for not using corporal punishment. My brother on another occasion was given the strap for throwing a snowball in the air after the morning bell rang. In each of these incidents, there were also elements of racism. But I also did observe many children in the street being publicly humiliated by corporal punishment or verbal abuse from their parents. The entire loss of public dignity for both child and parent but no matter because the object of humiliation was no more than a child.

In each category of law, in the name of protecting minors the law does not so much protect children as circumscribe and qualify, now with seeming reason, then with a call to pragmatism or common sense, now again arbitrarily, the scope in which children can act independently and with freedom and volition.

“I can do thirteen things all day long. Flip. Fall over. Bump my head on the couch. Rolling down on the couch and bumping my bumbum. Fall down with two legs. Trying to hold myself up and not fall down. That’s thirteen things I do all day long.”

It is so laughable to imagine adults to have exclusive relations to rational thought. From the outset of a child’s development, it is apparent that reason is a child’s playmate not by some idealized innateness or the pristine but by the desire for life to persist in the world. The formal categories of logic from infant through adult reason are a classification system constructed to dismiss a child’s consciousness and powers of argumentation by diminishing them, by suggesting they are lowest in this hierarchy from the female infant’s, base and unformed at the nadir, reaching up to the male adult’s, esteemed, paradigmatic and dignified, at the zenith. This absurd hierarchy betrays the poverty of the adult’s definition of reason.

“My bum, bellybutton, my vulva and my stomach don’t laugh at them. They’re just part of my body.”

The greatest challenge of political and intellectual culture will be to bring children in as equals, not to set them aside as a special class and treat them now in a privileged status, then excluded or ignored, in other instances deemed too difficult or complex to allow for their inclusion. A child’s language, tongue, reason and insights have a tendency to bring an adult to the threshold of anarchy and chaos. An adult dislikes being laughed at by a child. Once a child learns this, one of the first lessons of childhood, their knowledge, experience and exchange of information go subterranean. Hence the shifting ground of children’s language, their multilingualism, fabulous argots, spoken in secret tongues among one another. Secret names and pseudonymous selves proliferate faster than any adult can pin them down. One need only listen to a two or three year old chatting amicably in an onomatopoeic tongue to an infant of two or three months. This is not the baby talk which an adult attempts to simulate. Such cooing simulation

merely highlights the adult’s stupidity and betrays just how unilingual and brittle an adult’s tongue is. This cagey bilingualism beyond the norms of standard linguistic definitions which lingers on in children until five or six reveals a coded knowledge linked to syntax in language and reason, which seeks to refute an adult’s hegemony over the child’s acquisition of language, particularly where language itself is the locus of power, command and hierarchy. A child’s language grows more subversive as subversive as any anti-colonial coded tongue.

“I’m going to let my fingernails grow up to the ceiling.”

Children are for neither reason nor order. For neither order and the law over and against anarchy and chaos. Nor for anarchy and chaos over reason and order.

But they do enjoy exploring the contingencies of things, achieving absurd connections and dislocating the categories of mind. They also enjoy returning out of freedom to a place of rest and security. To run to the edge of the forest and sleep within and return to some place and an embrace more familiar, sure and comforting. The anarchic quality of a child can best be felt in the environment of self-discipline. Children resist imposed discipline and easily identify it as coercion and punishment.

Civil society as it is manufactured occludes children. They know it and they resist this occlusion. Civil society is a pair of scissors trimming their wings. The conference of the birds does not occur in the adult world.

“Can a girl marry two boys?”

As adults a detailed inquiry into the nature of the authoritarianism of mind in relation to children is a necessary step before freedom.

Children’s vigorous inventiveness and our adult desires to be fulfilled are in contradiction because the social space of children both of the mind and the world is so constrained by adult consciousness.

Here I make a modest argument to allow children to enter our minds and reshape the mental space, to turn to social spaces and take back spaces occupied by the car and TV, the school and the family, the professional sports world of the monolithic stadium with big games and dull megaconcerts. A big game is a bad game.

We must respect children’s epiphanic consciousness and imagination if we desire their freedom. Their notion of play is small scale and close to the earth.

“Open up your mouth and let me look inside and see the elephant.”

Epilogue

For a long while now I have been searching for the droolbackdog and his companion the smellahax. The manner of their forms. The nature of their claws and limbs. The colour and texture of their hides. And the tint of their eyes. The scent of their flesh. Whether they pass on two limbs or four or are more affiliated with creatures of the wing or those of the scale or fin. Each time my boy speaks of them, they metamorphose, change into some other form. Their tricky instability of form and feature are elusive, beyond the power of my adult eyes to observe. I search for these enigmatic creatures but they resist discernment. And remain beyond vision.

We were driving by the woods at dusk. And he murmured as he gazed out through the car window into the depth of the dark forest that it looked like a good place to sleep. I wondered if the droolbackdog and the smellahax, his companions would be lingering there beyond the powers of my sight and imagination. In that space where no adult could go without first relinquishing authority.

Notes

¹Text in italics are quotes by Baalqis (5 years old) and Qays (4 years old).

²See Ian Hacking's Essay "The Making and Molding of Child Abuse" in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 253-289.

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© by Marwan Hassan "Children & Social Spaces : Why did Derrida say no", 1993.

Marwan Hassan is a fiction writer who lives in Ottawa, Canada.

His recent novels include: "Dust Numbers", (2003), "The Lost Patent" (2004) and "As the Crow Dies" (2005) published by Common Redpoll Books, Ottawa, Canada

Jamelie Hassan *Smurfistan*

Dix ans après un projet de résidence intitulé *Simurgh et la montagne du Lotus, Chine*, c'est comme artiste invitée du 25e anniversaire que Jamelie Hassan revient à la Chambre blanche. La pratique artistique de l'artiste canadienne se développe autour des notions d'identité, d'exclusion, de dépaysements, de langue et de processus de communication. Ses installations combinent diverses disciplines juxtaposant références culturelles passées et présentes à des éléments de sa propre histoire. Ces deux éléments se confondent sous un couvert où l'histoire officielle et la vie quotidienne s'affrontent.

L'installation présentée à Québec sous le titre de *Smurfistan* est une version amplifiée de celle qui fut créée à la Winnipeg Art Gallery en 2002. Un film de deux minutes, *Des olives pour la paix* accompagne l'installation de Québec et amplifie la surimposition d'images d'un enfant jouant dehors avec des images de conflit, inspirées de dessins d'enfants palestiniens. À l'intérieur du domaine spatial de l'installation, plusieurs objets réels simulent la chambre d'un jeune enfant, telle un laboratoire social. C'est dans ce capharnaüm de jouets d'enfant que luttent et se côtoient soldats, cowboys, dragons, dinosaures et Schtroumpfs. Des Schtroumpfs (Smurfs, en anglais) qui, coiffés de leurs bonnets blancs, prennent un air vaguement musulman. À l'instar d'œuvres antérieures, Hassan porte ici une attention particulière au monde des enfants, aux situations d'apprentissage et de rupture des normes socioculturelles. L'enfant apprend à (re)créer son univers en imitant la réalité. Mais aujourd'hui, quel modèle et quelles valeurs la société occidentale offre-t-elle à un enfant musulman d'origine arabocanadienne ?

Jamelie Hassan est née à London, Ontario, Canada où elle vit toujours. Ses œuvres figurent dans de nombreuses collections publiques, comme le Musée des beaux-arts du Canada d'Ottawa, le Musée des beaux-arts de l'Ontario à Toronto et le Nouveau Musée d'art contemporain de New York. Dès le début de sa carrière, Hassan a collaboré avec des centres d'artistes autogérés et répondu à l'appel des artistes, auteurs, critiques et activistes engagés dans le mouvement de renouveau des idées et de la production artistiques. En 2001, on lui attribuait le Prix du Gouverneur général, reconnaissant ainsi sa contribution des 30 dernières années au milieu canadien des arts visuels.

Jamelie Hassan *Smurfistan*

Ten years after her residency project entitled *Simurgh et la montagne du Lotus, Chine*, Jamelie Hassan returned to la chambre blanche in Quebec City in Jan. 2004 in celebration of the artist-run gallery's 25th anniversary. This Canadian artist has created works addressing issues such as identity, exclusion, displacement, language and methods of communication. Her installations combine diverse artistic disciplines juxtaposing cultural references both past and present with her own history. These two elements merge under a canopy of tension colliding official history with everyday life.

Jamelie Hassan's installation entitled *Smurfistan* presented in Quebec City was an expanded version of a work she created in 2002 at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. A two minute film work, *Olives for Peace* accompanied the Quebec City installation which further layered images of a child outdoors with images of conflict based on Palestinian children's drawings. Within the spatial realm of the installation various actual objects parallel the room of a young child as a social laboratory. It is in this calamity of children's toys – where soldiers, cowboys, dragons, dinosaurs and Smurfs fight and dispute with each other. These Smurfs, which sport their traditional white caps, seem to vaguely resemble Muslim attire. Similar to her previous projects, Hassan focuses on the world of a child, learning situations and the rupture of socio-cultural norms. A child learns to (re)create his/her universe by imitating reality. However, what values and models does today's western society offer to a Muslim child of Arab-Canadian origins?

Jamelie Hassan was born in London, Ontario, Canada and continues to make this her home. Her works are part of numerous public collections, including the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto and the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, USA. Hassan has collaborated with many artist-run centres and has heeded the call of engaged artists, authors, critics and activists in the movement of ideas and production of works of art. In 2001 she received the Governor General's Award in recognition of 30 years of contribution to visual arts in Canada.



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