

PREFACE

Saint Jerome [on the cover], is depicted in the painstaking translation of Scripture from Greek to Latin – language moves from sacred to secular . . . and back again. Reading as an unattended pleasure is discretely undermined in this image by the figure of a sinister messenger from the outside world. Peering in through an open window, to the left of Jerome, is the presence that denies that closed universe of scholastic solitude. This presence, in the political lexicon, will be the name for whatever undoes the whole.

The urgency of staging the body through the local and oral, against a chastely encyclopedic rendering of the body, perseveres. The wide range of topics addressed by artists, theorists and critics in this issue of *Public* (which originates in a series of lectures and discussions on the body that took place in Toronto last year) serves as a valuable contribution to critical thinking on the body, the resonance of a series of conversations that will circulate not as gossip, but as gaps marked by the text in between. In this sense this book is a body.

From Simon Watney's politicization of AIDS and its discourses to Nicole Brossard's insistent use of the body as metaphor for writing, the body in question is plural. The various representational histories (the body in space), psychoanalytic paradigms (the body in pieces) and social technologies (the body in bits) that are scrutinized, mitigate the pre-defined typologies that have made of our bodies one unitary coherence: a secret to be penetrated.

The strength and uniqueness of these essays lies not only in the diversity of the positions they represent but also in the manner they seek to redefine the body in terms other than the natural. The common link between them, and the pivotal concern for this issue of *Public*, is the body as always already caught up in conflicting fields of meaning.