

no more potlucks

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Editorial

Mél Hogan (4–5)

Adventures in Deconstruction

Mary K. Bryson (6–21)

Boycott de Madame Arthur

Line Chamberland (22–26)

The Postman

Dianah Smith (27–29)

sweetest thing/ tierra sagrada

*Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
(30–32)*

La Bombe

Julie Doucet (33)

**The Two-spirited Rebirth of
Indigenous Nations:****An Interview with
Waawaate Fobister**

Stu Marvel (34–40)

100 Butches, Number 35

Elisha Lim (40–41)

3 Poems

Trish Salah (42–44)

Sexual Healing

Nicholas Little (45–47)

La New Born Canadienne

Mathilde Géromin (48–53)

Deep Lez I Statement

Allyson Mitchell (54–56)

**An Interview with
Catherine Opie**

Marie-Claire MacPhee (57–67)

**Patty Hearst Gets Laid:
The Scandelles Meet
Bruce LaBruce**

Dayna McLeod (68–70)

Cover (71)

Editorial

A birth is a beginning – a moment of coming into, of coming out of, and of emerging from, a new existence.

It is this kind of “birth” that has inspired the first issue... and not so much the cultural obsession with babies. Birth of a new year, birth of new era, birth of a new way of being afforded by technologies like print-on-demand, content management systems like *Drupal* that make websites dynamic and easy to use, and of course, your everyday, DIY, recording equipment. We are looking for people all across Canada to post short entries and photos on our media page, online.

The birth of (a new) NMP – a journal of politics, arts, and culture – will come to define itself through you, the readers. We look forward to your feedback, your reactions, your contributions to further issues dealing with a range of topics like copyright, ego, health, softball, making out, spirituality and interactivity. Our next issue, out March 1, 2009 carries the theme of “Trespassing/Transgressions.”

Ce premier numéro est un début, un renouvellement pour NMP, dorénavant publié sous forme de journal-zine qui, tous les deux mois, vous offrira une vaste gamme d'articles et d'entrevues sur une thématique particulière.

NMP continues to be run entirely voluntarily by a group of people impassioned by cultural production, re-defining culture in each issue. We're trying something new here and we hope you are going to like it.

I am grateful beyond words to people who contributed to this first issue, who trusted us blindly to make this come together. Merci à toutes les personnes qui ont permis à ce projet de voir le jour.

I followed Mary K. Bryson's *Adventures in Deconstruction* online for the past few years. This, after a series of uncanny, albeit virtual, encounters. It's quite something to grow to care for someone you have never met in person, to follow them on such an intimate journey, to have a friendship born through and bound to the internet. It is an honour to have her writing published in this first issue.

Nous sommes tout aussi enthousiasmées de publier ici un article de Line Chamberland, militante lesbienne féministe, portant sur le boycott du bar Madame Arthur. Ce précieux récit me donne envie d'entreprendre une démarche concertée de recherche et de publication de contenu historique, et de contribuer d'une façon plus systématique à la redécouverte et à la célébration de notre culture, dans toute sa richesse et sa diversité.

De plus, vous trouverez d'éclectiques et fascinantes contributions de fiction, de

poésie et de style « manifeste », par plusieurs artistes et militantes triées sur le volet par les éditrices de NMP pour cette édition d'inauguration : Dianah Smith, Julie Doucet, Trish Salah, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha et Allyson Mitchell. Nous espérons qu'elles sauront alimenter et renouveler votre réflexion critique et artistique.

In journalistic and academic form, Nicholas Little and Stu Marvel explore the interplay of health, culture, art and identity.

A stunning cover image entitled "Thrown" taken by Montréal-based photographer Nikol Mikus adorns our first issue. Mikus sets the bar very high for future issues and we are very proud to feature her work as part of NMP's rebirth.

Finally, four fascinating features by NMP editors include Marie-Claire MacPhee's interview with internationally famed photographer, Catherine Opie, bringing to light her work on temporary communities – fishing houses and surfers – complementing her earlier seminal queer portraiture. Dayna McLeod delves into the work of The Scandelles and Bruce LaBruce, a well-known porn amateur and filmmaker, becoming NMP's first of many exclusive video art features. Mathilde Géromin offers us a self-reflexive account of "becoming" Canadian – and I am so very happy to have her here working with us. Elisha Lim's astonishing *Butch Portraits* are to be a regular feature

of NMP – more of Lim's work to come in every issue.

Also, you'll never miss another *Dykes on Mykes* show – we have them all archived for you on the NMP website.

A very special thank you to my lesbro Jeff Traynor for his technical support with the website – I know you've put in a crazy amount of time and energy into this. And thank you to Maryse Bézaire for configuring the NMP of yore, which we are working to archive and make accessible in the near future.

Big love to M-C MacPhee and Dayna McLeod who have lost more than a few nights' sleep over this, and to Mathilde Géromin and Elisha Lim who seriously enrich the scope and reach of this project.

Thank you to our translator, Gabriel Chagnon, to copy-editors Lindsay Shane and TS, and to you, the readers, to whom we are committed to bringing forward the greatest and most audacious magazine ever made, in the entire universe.

Mél Hogan



ADVENTURES IN DECONSTRUCTION

Mary K. Bryson

The following is an excerpt from:
<http://brys.wordpress.com>

"Adventures in Deconstruction: Field Notes From a Cancer Battle Ground Where Queer Life Meets Precarious Life Head On"

June 30, 2007

Dancing on Knife's Edge

I have wondered how to start this blog. Just thinking about writing my cancer onto the screen is way too real.

I have been living with a breast cancer diagnosis for three short weeks - days that have been filled to bursting with specialist appointments, blood tests, MRI, and hundreds of desperate and sometimes awkward conversations with friends and family. And I have cried. I have never cried so much as I have over the past 21 days. Buckets. I never know when the tears will start.

The beginning of this story probably involves a minimum of three combustible elements: queer love, a tattoo and cancer. I could start this account 17 years ago, when I had fallen desperately in love with a woman called Ange. She seemed like a heroic figure to me at the time. When I met her, Ange had just been through surgery for colon cancer. She had "the bag". And she had a poster on her bedroom wall of an Amazonian woman with an amazing floral tattoo that wound its way across her double mastectomy scar. Ange died of cancer about six months after getting the all-clear

from a doctor at the B.C. Cancer Agency. And now, today, I am quietly waiting for my own bilateral mastectomy (double) which is scheduled for the day after the day after tomorrow. And the tattoo that I have so proudly sported for the past seventeen years - a floral wreath that winds its way across my breasts in Ange's honour - will itself be severed, and distorted; brutally cut short, just like my love of Ange.

I wanted to start this blog right away - back then - in the early days - but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I didn't have the energy or perhaps, the courage. So this first entry will be a retrospective on the first three weeks.

June 8 - a mere three weeks ago - I got the call from my doctor with the results of my core biopsy. I was sitting in the Edmonton airport, waiting to fly back to Vancouver after having done a couple of really good research interviews. I am working on a project where I am looking at media, sexuality, communities and knowledge. When I saw my doctor's name flash across the call display I knew before I even clicked the little green button that the news wasn't good. After all, why phone me with good news? "Are you sitting down?" she ventured. My doctor told me that the biopsy of the right breast had revealed DCIS (ductal carcinoma in situ). "We've found it very early," she exclaimed buoyantly, "and it's totally curable. 100%" She then told me that she was heading out of town herself, but that

she had set up an appointment with a surgeon. I remember that I couldn't hear the surgeon's name, and that I was utterly at a loss for words. I couldn't metabolize the information at all.

It was a Friday, which meant that I couldn't get into the doctor's office until Monday to read the radiologist's report on the biopsy. So I read whatever I could get my hands on about DCIS. Monday, I knew what to look for in the report. And when I finally got to see the report, I couldn't fathom the intention of my doctor's good cheer. The DCIS was multi-focal, grade 3 comedocarcinoma, and with a focus of microinvasion. Not good. But my doctor wasn't around, and the next step was to get in touch with the surgeon, and to see what I could find out about her.

Dr. C works at VGH and is an oncological surgeon. So far so good. I found published papers she had authored. I didn't find anything awful, although I am not sure what I was expecting to find. When I called Dr. C's office, her secretary set up an appointment the very next day. I was just four days post-biopsy news, and heading into the oncological surgery floor of a major hospital. I didn't take that as a very reassuring sign although, of course, I was also really grateful.

Dr. C's office manner was a breath of fresh air for me. She took one look at my page crammed with notes and questions, and

asked me what I thought about the situation. I remember thinking, "Wow. How novel. A doctor who wants to know what I think before even giving me her opinion." So I ventured forth with my impression of the biopsy report, outlined my family history of bilateral breast cancer, and ended with the notion that I would probably be more comforted with a simple mastectomy of the right breast than a lumpectomy, despite the equivalent survival rates, because the fear of recurrence would likely prove untenable for me. My presentation felt oddly clinical - like I was an extra on House who had just nervously stumbled her way through a case presentation during Rounds. I thought Dr. C would vigorously disagree. After all, how hopelessly old fashioned of me to suggest a mastectomy for DCIS when I could opt for lumpectomy and radiation - or what we call, "breast conserving" treatment. But instead of trying to persuade me to keep my right breast, Dr. C steered us right down the path of deciding the fate of the left breast, and about 60 seconds later, I had settled on a bilateral mastectomy. There wasn't a whole lot left to talk about at that point, save for a discussion of the sentinel node biopsy - a technique for testing the cancer status of the lymph node closest to the cancer and that is designed to reduce the risk of unnecessary lymph node removal. Then came the date for the surgery. July 3. 3 days from today.

I don't know how to accommodate to the fact that I have cancer, nor to the fact that

in three days, my breasts will be removed. Some days, the loss of my breasts seems like the really bad thing that I have to somehow get used to. And then, cruelly, comes the realization that after all, what's the loss of breasts in comparison to the very real possibility of metastatic cancer?

July 7, 2007

Living in Prognosis

It's amazing to read something that seems to speak directly to you when you are in the grip of an extraordinary trauma. I can imagine getting really flaky, which I could not have envisaged pre-cancer. Yesterday my friend Stuart gave me a paper by Sarah Jain called "Living in Prognosis: Toward an Elegaic Politics" (Representations, Spring, 2007). It's a funny thing, coincidence. I met Sarah Jain last year, having exchanged articles by email sight unseen, as folks commonly do these days. And then I discovered that another new email friend, Kris, from the University of Chicago, knew Sarah Jain, as does Stuart. How odd is that? And now this incredibly smart woman who teaches at Stanford and whose work I have been getting to know is writing about uncertainty, risk, discourses of temporality and breast cancer. Wow. I am almost ready to start talking about angels.

Everyone wants to know when I will get my pathology report and it concerns them

greatly that (a) I am not sure, and (b) I don't seem to be motivated enough about reading the analysis of the evidence from the diagnostic work on the breasts following the mastectomy. These folks who are concerned about my apparently lackadaisical attitude don't have cancer. Well let me correct that. They are not "living in prognosis" - to use Jain's elegant formulation. Prognosis is a very inexact set of practices. The reassurance that my well-intentioned friends think will be provided by a set of statements about the tumour and the presence of absence of cancer cells in the two lymph nodes removed in the sentinel node biopsy is actually a pipe dream. In fact, someone working in a lab will look at slices of the breast tissue and the lymph nodes, and provide a set of descriptive statements that, as a collective set of facts, will link up with another set of aggregated probabilities. The relationship between the population statistics and what the pathologist notices, and between these two sets of relations and treatment options - well, it's just a big huge open field of uncertainty.

Tumour size, single or multi-focal, cells in the lymphs or not, estrogen and/or progesterone positive or not, age on diagnosis, micro-invasion or not — yes they all translate into slots in an actuarial chart — but no, there will be no moment of clarity and comfort in this clinical picture. Chemotherapy yes or no, radiation yes or no, hormone therapy or removal of the ovaries or both. Any and all are possible elements for my

treatment and I am rather glad that at this point, today, as I am riding the waves of post-anaesthetic nausea, that there is a lot that I still don't know.

July 17, 2007 **Full Circle, Kind of...**

Includes the verse: I am no longer afraid of mirrors where I see the sign of the amazon, the one who shoots arrows.

There was a fine red line across my chest where a knife entered, but now a branch winds about the scar and travels from arm to heart. I started this blog not so very long ago with the story of a woman I loved, and a poster on her wall of a post-mastectomy woman (Deena Metzger) with an amazing tattoo. Well, I found that image today - yes, today - even though I have been looking for it unsuccessfully for weeks. And today I found out from my pathology report, again, unexpectedly, that I am prognostically-speaking, cancer free and that my treatment has come to an end. Yeah I know, it's really weird. I have not exactly adjusted to the news yet. But it's amazing and real.

Think about the symmetry here — I get a tattoo on my chest in the late 1980's to mourn the death from cancer of a woman I loved. I get this tattoo on my chest because of the post-mastectomy tattoo in the poster by Deena Metzger on Ange's bed-

room wall. And then like Deena Metzger, I get breast cancer, and that tattoo gets redrawn. And in the most unlikely turn of events, (a) the surgeon decides to save my tattoo, which looks virtually the same as before my mastectomy, and (b) I get a clean bill of health in the pathology report. And then life starts again. Hope you weren't sleeping at the wheel. Ha ha.

I had to go to the surgeon's office five days prior to what was supposed to be the unveiling of the post-surgical pathology report because I have developed a very common complication following a mastectomy - a fluid build-up that the body can't drain in the space where the left breast was, which is known as a seroma. So, in we go to visit Dr. C and get the seroma aspirated. Back to the scary place at the hospital. The wonderful R, Dr C's nurse, mentioned quite casually when we arrived that she had received the pathology report and so would be cancelling the planned follow-up on Friday. YIKES. I had kind of anticipated that the report might be there and so had figured out a preliminary set of questions for Dr C — questions about chemotherapy, radiation and hormone therapy — but I SO wasn't actually ready to hear the news.

Ready or not, there was Dr C and in we went. She had the report in her hand and I can't likely ever adequately convey the state of stark dread with which I was anticipating the information about the post-mastectomy pathology. "Well it doesn't get

any better than this." is how Dr C began the conversation.

The pathology report was as follows: No invasive cancer beyond the DCIS in the ducts. No cancerous cells in the lymphs that had been removed for the sentinel node biopsy. Clear margins.

The bottom line from this kind of report is that any systemic treatment would have a higher probability of causing harm than the probability of stray cells going metastatic. End of treatment.

My reaction to all this has been disbelief and disorientation. I had so thoroughly prepared myself for systemic treatment that I am not sure how to reorient myself to no treatment at all. That's ok. It probably is totally predictable.

I will have to keep going back to the surgeon's office to get the seroma aspirated until it stops filling up again. But apart from that, I can now get on with the business of recreating my life, again.

I will have more to say about all this, but I wanted to post something as soon as I heard to get the word out. I don't quite know how to thank all of you for your support. So for now, let me just say that I am incredibly moved and very grateful. You have been very kind and very courageous to step into this awful place with me and hold my hand.

July 22, 2007

Dumb Fairy Tales and other Discourses of Femininity

I now look at myself every morning, every evening, naked, in the mirror, equanimously, as I always did, and what I see is not a maimed body. Some might call this denial. Yet - I look at this flat expanse of my chest and I do not find it ugly, or repellent. My face, somehow, "goes" with this chest, there is a harmonious continuity from my face all the way down my body. There is, in all human beings, when they are bare-chested, a touching symmetry between the eyes and the nipples, and this symmetry, of course, in my case, is gone. Yet, and this may sound scandalous, absurd, or even mad: this breast-less body is not devoid, in my eyes, of a certain pure and abstracted beauty. If it is indeed monstrous, it is so in the manner of some magical, not quite human creature - a fairy, a mermaid - an Amazon. Anne-Marie de Grazia

Likely you know the fairy tale of The Princess and the Pea. A prince is looking for a bride. A woman appears at the gate of his castle who claims to be the real deal but she looks, well, pretty disheveled. Old ma knows how to tell the difference, and so places a pea under the pretending princess' twenty mattress bed. When the parvenu wakes up she whines incessantly about having slept so poorly because there was something amiss with the bed and BINGO everyone knows she's the real deal-

The prince marries his newly authenticated bride. The pea is put in a museum.

As a child, I felt deeply ambivalent about this story. The fetishization, in women, of useless knowledge seems to me epitomized by the positive spin placed on the princess' ability to find the pea. And when the possession of that useless knowledge is the litmus test for jubilant heterosexuality, well, then its existence, let alone cultivation, is most assuredly far from innocent.

How then, to feel about the fact that it is now my task, imposed by the medical establishment, to effect local control of a breast cancer recurrence by finding the pea. "When it comes back" my surgeon explained patiently, the other day, "it almost always feels like a pea." Keeping track of the pea is not a new job for me. My family tree is chock-a-block with breast cancer, which is why I have been dutifully going for yearly mammograms since the age of 42.

Little did I know that mammograms are a very unreliable method for tracking early breast cancer in women under the age of 50, and that this lack of accuracy is even more pronounced for women with what are known as "dense breasts" - small, prone to cysts... After all, I had a "good" mammogram just ten months before my cancer was diagnosed. It had been missed the time before. It is also the case that I did not know that MRI's are considered by some to be a much more reliable tool for detecting

early breast cancer in women under 50.

I wonder about how my chances of finding that pea would be affected by reconstruction. There is a lot of pressure on women to undergo reconstruction after a mastectomy. Audre Lorde talks about this phenomenon in her *Cancer Journal*. When I went to visit my GP about a week prior to my double mastectomy, she asked me which surgeon was going to do my reconstruction. She guffawed when I told her that I had decided against reconstruction. “You’re in denial” she proclaimed. “I am going to sign you up. The waiting list is two years anyway. By then, you’ll be more than ready.”

Oncological research appears to indicate no impact of reconstruction on detection of recurrence. But there is a clear set of normative assumptions at work in this research, which go something like this: (1) breasts constitute a vital marker of femininity, (2) women will benefit from the restoration, post-mastectomy, of their “spoiled identity” (E. Goffman) and therefore (3) reconstruction should be made widely available to all women undergoing mastectomy.

This is what the official story regarding reconstruction and mastectomy sounds like:

“Deciding on Mastectomy Making the decision to have a mastectomy can be very difficult. It can be hard to imagine living without your breast, and you may feel like your identity or femininity is being threatened.

The procedure can often be made easier by having breast reconstruction after mastectomy. This helps to reshape your breast and reduce any disfigurement, and may help you to feel more comfortable choosing mastectomy. Ask your health care provider for more information about this option.”

No where in all of this research are the side effects and complications of reconstruction clearly delineated. Reconstruction surgery involves an initial long and very painful operation followed by several additional surgical procedures. The impression of breasts is created either by means of implants or the use of a woman’s own tissue (abdominal) which is relocated to the chest area.

So what is the medical establishment’s priorities in relation to breast health, cancer, and morbidity amongst women? Clearly, millions, if not billions of dollars is going to the improvement and funding of breast reconstruction. And it is equally obvious that virtually no money is being directed to programs that would improve the reliability of cancer detection in populations at-risk of mammogram failure. Whose job is it, actually, to find that pea? How terribly convenient for medical discourse inappropriately to relocate responsibility to women to find that pea, and in so doing, exaggerate the agency possessed by individual women in determining the likelihood of survival in relation to early stage breast cancer.

What a different world it would be if we de-

cided to spend all of the breast cancer research dollars on the (a) identification (and elimination) of the actual causes of breast cancer, (b) widespread availability of accurate methods of early detection, (c) appropriate methods to deal with post-surgical complications (e.g., lymphedema, which is very common and extraordinarily challenging), and of course, (d) a cure for cancers of all kinds. Hallelujah!

August 23, 2007

Breastless in Vancouver, and You?

So yesterday, at the breast/onco surgeon's, the resident comes in first, to prep me before the big cheese herself. When she prepares to do the examination of my incisions, she says, "Let's have a look at your breasts..." <AWK Pause> "I mean" she continues, having clearly funbled the ball, "Where your breasts used to be." WOW. Talk about a shitty save. I can't believe she said that. No matter how good I feel about my mastectomy, to be defined entirely by lack in such an explicit way really sucks.

My biggest challenge today was when the manicurist asked me, "What shape do you like your nails?". Yikes. This is not something I have ever spent even 2 seconds thinking about. I stared at her rather intently, hoping for clues, and then rather awkwardly confessed that, "I don't think I have a favorite shape". I knew that was

the wrong answer. It was like being back in school. She wrote me off. I tried to recuperate my girl points by commenting on her highlights, but it was in vain. It was probably even worse than if I had just let it die quietly on the vine.

She did spend rather a long time trying to figure out why my chest was so totally flat. But looking would not yield an answer to her curiosity. I have seen this look, now, many times. When I catch people looking, they are scanning from the chest to the face and back again. I guess they are trying to figure it out. Hm m m m m. Looks like a woman's face, but no boobs. So they look at the face again, maybe the buzz-cut short hair is another distractor, then back down to the washboard chest.

I spend countless time here and there scanning the crowd for boob-less chests myself, I must now confess. I want to see more people who look like me. I feel lonely in my state of exception. I keep hoping that I will look out into the crowd at the mall and see an obviously breast-less chest like mine, thrust proudly forward into the flow of life. But I don't — EVER. In the Cancer Journal, Audrey Lorde talks about the politics of visibility of walking in the world, breast-less. Lorde is very passionate about the politics of visibility for the breast-less and excoriates those who would foist prosthetics or reconstruction on mastectomy patients.

I have no interest in being critical of any-

one else's choices. But I would like more visibility for those of us who travel the world without breasts. Come out, come out, wherever you are. Send me a picture of yourself. Tell me how it is, for you. Maybe we should start a Facebook group. Or make t-shirts.

September 9, 2007
Born to Be Alive: Drag King, Tantric Sex, and White T-Shirt Contest

Okay, so for an audio track to listen to while reading this post, go grab this on for size: Patrick Hernandez, the one and only original Disco Queen, and Born to Be Alive crooner. If you are observant, and have laid eyes on me in the last three months, you will notice that finally, Mary is BLOND again. YAY!!! Months of AC (after cancer) guilt about carcinogenic hair dye stopped me from reaching for the bottle (of bleach). How dull.

This weekend was my first AC BIG social excursion. Unexpectedly, I found myself at the BOLD conference (Bold Old(er) Lesbians). And I say, "unexpectedly" simply because I have a pretty uneasy relationship with the "lesbian" moniker, let alone "old". Call it internalized homophobia if it makes you feel better, with maybe a dash of unresolved misogyny and ageism. I wouldn't deny any of it. Identification is complex ground. I can live with/in/as queer, or even

dyke, but the L word just doesn't work for me, and never has. At any rate, there I was Friday night listening to a panel of amazing women at a literary reading, and it turns out that one of them, Betsy Warland, read from a recent work that features a primary character living in the altered state that results from a bilateral mastectomy. The "never the same" ontological house of mirrors that breast cancer effects is also the theme of *Only This Blue*, a long essay-poem by the talented Warland. It's on my pile of things to read this month, quite close to the top, in fact. The pile is substantial!!!

One of the highlights of the conference for me was a performance by drag king troupe, 3 Dollar Bill. After the show, I was hanging around outside the main ballroom, and someone came up to me and asked me if I was a drag king. I have to say that I was incredibly excited by this instance of mistaken identity. I decided it had to be because of my stunningly flat chest, which looked, perhaps, like a really skillful instance of chest binding. Flush with excitement, I practically flew over to my pal J, from Little Sisters bookstore, who was standing in a crowd that included all the guys from 3 Dollar Bill, and breathlessly relayed the anecdote. J quickly suggested that perhaps I should perform my first drag king act at a social event the group had planned for the Xmas season at the Majestic. The "real" kings decided that maybe, I could give it a whirl, and that they might even offer tutoring. My first homework is

to choose “my song”. I was given sternly delivered instructions about how important it would be to pick a song that I could really “fill” — as in, “fill the space”. F*ck!.

Earlier in the evening, while innocently perusing the amazing array of desserts, a conference-goer mistook me for the demonstration gal in the Tantric Sex workshop. I am not sure exactly what kind of energy I was giving off last night, but it was good.

I even had my very own first vision of a post-mastectomy-no-reconstruction-honest-to-goodness-dyke at this wonderful conference (yeah, so, I’m a convert). I did my best not to gape, but I really felt like I can only imagine someone might feel who had gotten very lost in the woods for oh, fifty years, only to emerge and experience their first sighting of a fellow human. I drank in her image. I even screwed up the courage to talk to her and get her card. Good for me. I am not always good at stuff like that. Social multi-tasking is definitely not my strong suit.

In honour of her, I took off my sweater to go and dance. I realized the other day that of-late, I have been carefully adjusting my wardrobe so as to avoid the plain solid colour t-shirt directly worn over flat chest. It is, well, just too bold, even for me. I have been wearing a white t-shirt and then another t-shirt over top of that one. Or I have been wearing a white t and a button-up shirt over that. Got the picture? Well

buoyed with excitement about my sighting I decided to toss off the 2nd layer of protective armour - the sweater - and go and dance wearing just my light white t-shirt. I felt practically naked. There was no hiding the fact that my chest is completely flat. And I felt GREAT. It was really liberating. While I was dancing my heart out, I discovered my drag king song — Born to be Alive (the one and only and incomparable Patrick Hernandez). It doesn’t get any queerer.

Yeah. I am. Still Here. Queer. And definitely, Alive.

PS> Oh, and about that BOLD conference. (1) Many thanks to community heroes Pat Hogan and Claire Robson for organizing this cultural extravaganza. This kind of work is SO very important. (2) Bold - Yes, Older - Yum, and Lesbian - double Yum.

October 30, 2007 All Clear!

Yesterday was eventful. I went to see Dr. R at Sunnybrook Hospital, in Toronto, for my second opinion dialogue. My wonderful pal and sister-in-law, M, came with me. I have been staying with M and my brother, Tom, for the last couple of days. They have been so incredibly kind and generous as hosts, inviting over friends and family, cooking marathon meals, and generally being the wonderful people they are.

In some significant way, it is M's own cancer story, or part of it, one really important detail, that may have saved my life. M had pain in her left breast a couple of years ago that prompted her to seek a diagnostic mammogram, only then to learn that she had breast cancer. When I experienced continuous pain in my left breast this past Spring, it was the echo of M's story that sent me on my own path to my GP seeking a diagnostic mammogram, and finding likewise, cancer in the other breast.

M and I made our way to Sunnybrook Hospital, and to Dr. R's office in the Cancer Centre. To recap, for the uninitiated, following my surgery, there was a conflict between the cancer diagnosis at time of biopsy (microinvasion) and at the time of pathology analysis following surgery (no invasive cancer). I located, with Dr. R's assistance, a dedicated breast pathologist who specializes in the kind of cancer that I had (DCIS) and had ALL the slides sent to her for re-analysis - a fresh and highly skilled pair of eyes. Dr. R offered to provide a consultation regarding the whole case once the pathologist had finished her work.

The important facts that emerged from my conversation yesterday with Dr. R are as follows:

- No indication of invasive cancer
- Clear and significant surgical margins (greater than 1 cm)

-Mastectomy was, in fact, my only surgical option because the cancer was not just dispersed (multi-focal) but also existed in two large and separate locations (multi-centric) which removes lumpectomy as an option.

The clinical implication for the findings is that there is no need for any further treatment of any kind, and I don't even need to pursue any kind of follow-up monitoring.

I really appreciate the effort and commitment demonstrated by Dr. R, who organized the pathology second opinion, and offered to talk to me with no formal referral — just following contact by email. I can't say clearly enough how wonderful it was to be able, finally, to ask my questions and feel heard.

You have likely participated in some way in my cancer story, if only as a reader of this blog, which has been, for me, a vital way to connect with a social network of folks who offer solace, wit and the critical factor of co-presence. To all of you, I need to say how very grateful I am that you have been strong enough and persistent enough to be part of my life in this strange time. With this new clarity concerning the present - my present body - I feel like I can finally take a big first step away from this grotesque disease that is cancer.

November 28, 2007
The Politics of Aesthetics

When we ask what the conditions of intelligibility are by which the human emerges, by which the human is recognized, by which some subject becomes the subject of human love, we are asking about conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all. Judith Butler (2001). "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality". *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7 (4): 621-36.

Today I wore boxers. It felt transitively gender appropriate and maybe even, essential, since I was heading off to see the plastic surgeon about chest reconstruction. Recall, that this is the only plastic surgeon in British Columbia who does chest surgery for fTm trans folks AND who does breast reconstruction. This guy, I figured, would get my particularities. But still, I needed the performative insurance boxers might provide. After all, I would need to convince the surgeon that doing chest contouring would be, in my case, an genderqueerly appropriate form of post mastectomy/breast cancer "reconstruction surgery".

Typically, chest, or "top surgery" is regarded by the medical professionals and the health care system in British Columbia as a form of fTm Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). The rules regarding SRS are archaic and extraordinarily discriminatory towards transgendered folks. They include proscrip-

tive requirements, such as, for example, that a candidate for SRS "pass" successfully for a member of the "opposite sex" for a minimum period of two years PRIOR to approval for surgery and that this successful "passing" be observed and recorded by "qualified professionals". It is also the case that candidates for SRS need to be interviewed and approved for surgery by two mental health professionals.

Step Two, if we are to think of Step One, as the deliberate selection of the Calvin Kleins, involved filling out copious forms. Dr. B wanted to know such a lot about me. There were 8 pages of questions about my sexual and gender identity in relation to temporality, as in, "Who were you when you were born?" (identification via biology), and "Who would you like to become?" (identification via surgery). I was asked to use the space inside of an empty circle to demarcate, with a single dividing line, just how much of ME was f or m at those two critical times - past and future - actual and virtual. All my circles were covered with lines going every which way, tartan-esque, and sported a lively mix of f and m. It was appropriately messy.

Complete these sentences: Gender Identity. I think of myself as a _____. Ideally, I would like to think of myself as a _____.

I experimented with playful answers, as in: How did others perceive your gender identity as a child? Answer: Simplistically. How

do others perceive your gender identity now? Answer: Generously.

Step Three was the live interview with Dr. B, who was intelligent, informative and kind. Dr. B is a really stunning example of ethical medical sensibilities. He was emphatic about wanting to use respectful language in asking me about “personal aspects” of my life, and encouraged me to correct him if he went astray. Dr. B didn’t read my answers on the forms. That impressed me. He just chatted away and asked lots of questions. Medical protocol requires doctors to establish that patients seeking any form of SRS actually, seriously want surgery based on what is called, in transgender health discourse, the test of Real Life Experience (RLE). And so the performative criterion becomes, Can I establish that I have a stable and longstanding record of making successful choices in the world that are recognizable and public actions which would pass as Otherly gendered?

I knew that many of the queries were quite important to get right, no matter how casual they may have appeared, like, “Would your ideal gender identity include male genitalia?” If I sounded like I love being a woman “just the way I am,” including all my womanly parts, I would fail the necessary performance of some stable elements of gender dysphoria that would make wanting a male chest something other than totally pathological. Fortunately, “bottom surgery” (as we trannies call it) is a pretty

risky biz, so I made some kind of blisteringly ironic statement about preferring a dick I could slam in a drawer to one that might wither away and drop off my body. It seemed persuasive. And I meant well. “Have you told your parents?” This was a tough question, on all kinds of levels, not the least of which is, “What’s to tell?”. Once again, humour was my friend. Most of the time, I was able to assert my stubborn attachment to a transitive relation to gender — a moving project with no fixed address. I insisted on standing in the space of gender queer, and of living a life that is about playful complexity, rather than having ever inhabited something as apparently simple as a tick box on a form.

We moved on to Step Four, because I passed Step Three. OMG. Who was born of this moment - this institutionalized accomplishment of intelligibility?

Dr. B told me enthusiastically that he would not require me to be evaluated by a psychiatrist, because it seemed like I “had a really stable and healthy identity in relation to my complex gender”. And so I learned about the various options for my chest reconstruction, which include several variations, from fixing the problems residual to the bilateral mastectomy, to a full chest contouring operation. I have lots to think about. At the end of today, I was fixated on two thoughts:

If I had been talking about using recon-

struction to get a 36DD chest, I would not have been required to disclose whether I felt like I had been born, secretly, as Dolly Parton, and now needed surgery to correct a lack of fit between the inside feeling and the outward appearance.

Maybe everyone should have to read Foucault as a right of passage into adulthood, and yearly thereafter. There might even have to be a test.

I am left with enormous respect for a doctor who has learned so very much about how to care under conditions of institutionalization, uncertainty and risk. I am, also, so very proud that I found within myself the courage to insist on speaking truth to power about a kind of complexity of intelligibility for which there are so very many punishments, sanctions and harsh measures.

December 26, 2007

Mary's Christmas Queer

I had an amazing Christmas yesterday, and you helped to make it so utterly memorable. It wasn't about the gifts. Janice and I decided to skip that part of Christmas this year. There wasn't any overwhelming reason. It wasn't about anything worthy or principled. We just didn't feel like piles of presents. What we felt like, was celebration. The very fact that enough psychic

space has been cleared in my life so as to permit celebration is attributable directly to the support and overwhelmingly generous love and social connection that so many of you have shared with me. No one knows what to do in the face of cancer. I didn't have a f*cking clue. And you somehow, against all odds, found the courage and the insight to step into the void, beside me.

So last night, on Christmas, celebrate, we did. Lots of people who I love came to our house for "A Little Christmas Queer". And please don't think 'queer' is about the sex/gender of who folks cozy up to. It's just about affirming a principle of kinship that is other than blood ties. And of course, many people who I really wanted to celebrate with DID have family things happening that were good and wonderful, and so couldn't be celebrating with us last night. So it was far from the whole queer family. But maybe that's all there ever is anyway — that particular queer family, that night, in that place, and f*ck the idea that there is ever a "whole" anything. What I do know for sure is that there was a lot of love in our house last evening and also, that all my research into how to cook the perfect turkey sure did pay off. Some things should not be an 'adventure in deconstruction' and a turkey, perhaps, is one such entity. Although even this claim seems quite suspect.

Yesterday, the bag of breast cancer books that has been a fixture in the living room

finally got moved to the back room. It's almost out the door. I haven't consulted one of those books for weeks, and the last of the stray volumes that were, up until recently, strewn about the house, was collected up and deposited in the bag.

Loki the super-dog cozied up to everyone, and saved a very special kiss for one of her (many) one-true-loves. Somehow, she manages to find space on the couch for the great dane self, even when there isn't any. If ever there was a postmodern mathematician with a very post-structural theory of space, it would be Loki.

I started this blog with a story about queer love, a tattoo, and a poster on Ange's wall that inspired me so many years ago. Last night, P, who knew Ange for many years, brought me that very poster - the very poster of the Deena Metzger photograph that I had spent so many hours staring at on Ange's wall. After Ange died, P had been guardian of the Metzger poster. P's generosity in passing on the poster to me is extraordinary. Ange's poster now sits on my kitchen table, leaning against the wall. I had forgotten that there is a verse of Metzger's poem on the poster. I was inspired by Metzger's beauty and courage back then, as I saw it embodied by Ange in her own struggles with cancer. And now, it reanimates my own life. As you do.

Thank you so very much for walking with me, this year, in the most ghastly places

that we have had to inhabit. Your courage and kindness have inspired me, and kept me company. I will leave the last word to Metzger.

I am no longer afraid of mirrors where I see the sign of the amazon, the one who shoots arrows.

There was a fine red line across my chest where a knife entered, but now a branch winds about the scar and travels from arm to heart.

Green leaves cover the branch, grapes hang there and a bird appears.

What grows in me now is vital and does not cause me harm. I think the bird is singing. I have relinquished some of the scars.

I have designed my chest with the care given to an illuminated manuscript.

I am no longer ashamed to make love. Love is a battle I can win. I have the body of a warrior who does not kill or wound.

On the book of my body, I have permanently inscribed a tree.

January 8, 2008 **Say Hello, Say Goodbye**

I think we're done, here. How's that for an ambivalent ending?

I hate endings. I hate saying, "Good bye".

I am back at work, and my mind has been

relentlessly elsewhere than on breast cancer. I had thought that by changing the name of the blog, from “Big Grrls DO Cry” to “Adventures in Deconstruction”, that I could shift the emphasis of the blog from cancer, to the politics of everyday life as a breast cancer survivor. And who knows, I may do that some day. But for now, I think that I need, definitively, to step away from cancer as a site of cultural production and analysis.

I want to thank you, for being here. If I know something that might be helpful, I will gladly pass it on. That function has been just one of the joys of maintaining this blog. What can I say? I am compulsively attached to some kind of idea of the Internet as a viral knowledge network that really does make a critical difference to lives where agency is imperiled. And sure as donuts at Tim Hortons, breast cancer and its attendant social/medical institutions, imperil one’s core sense of freedom, identity, value and viability.

Presence. It’s all we are, and all we have.

<http://brys.wordpress.com>
Mary K. Bryson
Vancouver, British-Columbia

Dr. Mary Bryson is Professor in the Faculty of Education and Director of the Center for Cross-Faculty Inquiry and the Network of Centers and Institutes in Education. Mary has numerous publications on theoretical treatments of gender and technology, queer theory, and equity in education, including “Radical Inventions: identity, Politics and Difference/s in Educational Praxis” (SUNY Press, <http://www.ecps.educ.ubc.ca/research/mbryson.htm>). In 2000, Bryson was a recipient of the Canadian “Pioneer in New Technologies and Media” award. Emerging from scholarly engagements with queer and feminist theory, Bryson’s program of research contributes significantly to the production of theory at the interdisciplinary intersections of critical studies of gender, sexuality, and new technologies. Making the crucial step away from both disembodied narratives of virtuality and humanist accounts of liminal subjectivities, this program of research charts new directions for sociocultural work in queer theory, educational, curricular and critical media studies.

*The poster image is of the writer Deena Metzger.
Poster design by Sheila de Bretteville.
Photographer: Hella Hammid.*

*The poster, “I Am No Longer Afraid,” also known as “The Warrior,” can be obtained from:
Donnelly/Colt: www.donnellycolt.com
E-mail: info@donnellycolt.com*

BABY FACE

BOYCOTT DE MADAME

ARTHUR

Line Chamberland

Le bar *Madame Arthur*, situé au 2170 Bishop, accueillit entre 1973 et 1975 plusieurs centaines de lesbiennes qui y découvrirent amour, sexe... et fierté. Il est évoqué par Marie-Claire Blais dans son roman *Les Nuits de l'underground*, traduit en anglais sous le titre *Nights in the Underground*.

Début novembre. Un mercredi ou un jeudi soir. Nous sommes en 1974. Nous étions peu nombreuses chez *Madame Arthur* ce soir-là, surtout des habituées. Il y avait Fran, la belle Fran. Infirmière, elle venait de démissionner de son poste dans le bloc opératoire de l'hôpital, exaspérée par le harcèlement sexuel des médecins. Fran s'était rasée les cheveux en signe de révolte. Comme à l'accoutumée et

malgré nos protestations répétées, le proprio avait laissé entrer un de ses chums de gars qui venaient zieuter et cruiser des lesbiennes. Pour nous, l'enjeu de la bataille qui allait se déclencher ce soir-là était clair : l'espace était exigü, nous étions suffisamment nombreuses et fidèles pour assurer la rentabilité du bar, nous en avions marre de la présence de ces gars et nous demandions le respect. En revanche, le détail de l'événement se prête à plusieurs interprétations. Que s'est-il passé au juste ? Fran aurait été agacée quand le gars-ami-du-proprio (encore un après cette sale journée !) lui aurait passé une remarque, selon Nicole Lacelle, elle aussi présente ce soir-là. Ou encore, la blonde de Fran, la grande et bataillieuse Élisabeth, aurait quelque peu agressé le gars verbalement. Excédée, Fran a lancé sa bouteille de bière dans le miroir. S'ensuivit une échauffourée entre Élisabeth et le gars selon une version. Ou encore le barman aurait maîtrisé Fran de manière brutale. J'ai personnellement le souvenir d'une fille allongée par terre, mais pas Nicole. Entretemps, le proprio avait appelé la police qui, arrivée sur les lieux, avait arrêté Élisabeth. La petite histoire veut que la police lui aurait demandé si elle était une femme ou un homme, ce à quoi elle aurait répondu par ce qui allait devenir une réplique célèbre : « I'm more of a man than you'll ever be; I'm more of a woman than you'll ever have. »

Lise Balcer voulut s'en mêler mais moi (Lise était mon ex et quoique notre relation

fut brève, je lui portais encore une grande affection) et d'autres l'avons retenue : elle avait déjà eu suffisamment de démêlés avec la justice à cause de ses liens avec le Front de Libération du Québec et avec le Front de Libération des Femmes, il ne fallait pas qu'elle se fasse arrêter de nouveau.

C'est ici qu'arriva ma minute de gloire. Nicole évoque parfois cette minute devant des amies communes. Pour ma part, lorsqu'il m'arrive de raconter l'événement dans mon enseignement à l'UQAM afin d'illustrer la radicalisation des lesbiennes féministes dans la première moitié des années 1970, je le dépersonnalise, omettant même de mentionner ma présence. Quoiqu'il en soit, revenons-en à ce moment fatidique. La police circulait dans le bar. Pour affirmer son autorité, elle nous insulta et nous ordonna de nous asseoir, sans toucher à nos bières. J'étais debout, une bouteille à la main. Un policier qui me faisait face me dit : « Petite chienne ! Assieds-toi pis mets ta bière sur la table ! » Je n'ai pas obéi. Il me l'a arrachée des mains et l'a déposée sur la table en la cognant. Je ne me suis pas assise. J'ai repris ma bière et j'en ai bu une gorgée. Je me souviens que mes genoux flageolaient, mais j'avais soif et j'étais décidée à lui tenir tête. Il laissa tomber. Question de courage ? En tout cas, ce courage était collectif.

La police avait appelé le panier à salades et décidé de vider les lieux. Nicole prit l'initiative. Nous nous donnâmes le mot :

pas de voiture, c'est risquer de se faire arrêter pour conduite en état d'ébriété. Rendez-vous chez Neva, qui habitait tout près. Discussion : que fait-on ? Y en a marre de ne pas se faire respecter ! C'est nous qui le faisons vivre ce bar, après tout. Décision collective : organiser un boycott pour le week-end suivant. De mon côté, et avec d'autres, je m'occupais de Marie-May, qui avait avalé d'un coup ses nombreux caps de mescaline et se sentait un peu-beaucoup mal. Je lui devais bien ça. Johanne et Marie-May, les deux grandes acadiennes fraîchement débarquées à Montréal, me protégeaient quand nous nous faisions écoeurer par des hommes dans la rue, ce qui était courant. Elles répondaient du tact au tact, y compris par des gestes agressifs.

Vendredi, samedi et dimanche : boycott ! Trois soirées à marcher en cercle devant le bar, à convaincre celles qui s'y présentaient de ne pas y pénétrer tout en expliquant le pourquoi de notre action. De nombreuses lesbiennes sont entrées comme si de rien n'était, mais plusieurs autres ont rejoint les rangs des piqueteuses. Parmi elles, quelques-unes venaient de loin et avaient très envie d'aller faire un tour dans ce lieu dont elles avaient tant entendu parler. Par exemple, Claudine Vivier, qui venait tout juste d'immigrer au Québec, ne put se résigner à franchir une ligne de piquetage : par conviction politique, elle n'en traversait aucune. C'est ainsi que se sont nouées des solidarités entre celles qui ont organ-

isé et respecté le boycott. Plusieurs se sont transformées en amitiés durables. Pour moi, ce moment reste celui où ma gang de lesbiennes s'est soudée, où un Nous est apparu, où notre riposte est devenue collective.

Moment-clé de la naissance d'un mouvement de lesbiennes féministes au Québec, cet incident a presque disparu de la mémoire collective et la mienne s'embrouille de plus en plus. J'imagine qu'il en va de même pour les autres « héroïnes » de cette lutte. Quelles traces en reste-t-il ? Pas de photos – il n'y avait que les flics ou leurs informateurs qui en prenaient à cette époque. Les patrons de Madame Arthur, eux, nous ont bien regardées et les organisatrices ont été définitivement barrées de l'endroit. Nous nous sommes mises à fréquenter le bar de *Baby Face*[2] qui nous avait bien à l'œil elle aussi – mais toujours pas de photos. Il existerait un récit narré par Nicole Lacelle et vidéographié, mais je n'ai pu le découvrir. Les rares sources écrites fournissent des versions différentes du déclenchement des hostilités. Un article de Tavormina[3] met l'accent sur l'agressivité avec laquelle le waiter s'en est pris à Fran après que celle-ci eut fracassé le miroir. Même chose pour *Long Time Coming* – la revue lesbienne de l'époque – qui poursuit en affirmant que Fran fut traînée à l'extérieur et battue par plusieurs hommes, jusqu'à ce que des lesbiennes interviennent pour la délivrer et qu'elle puisse s'enfuir[4]. Enfin, selon le mémoire d'Andrea Hildebran[5], la

bataille éclata plutôt entre un client et la costarde Elisabeth qui ripostait à ses insultes, celle-ci se retrouva allongée parmi des débris de verre (venus d'on ne sait où) et le waiter en rajouta en lui donnant un coup de pied dans le ventre... Quoiqu'il en soit, toutes les sources s'accordent pour souligner le ras-le-bol des lesbiennes face au traitement méprisant et arbitraire qui leur était réservé dans les bars, la colère qui éclata ces jours-là et l'effet catalyseur du boycott.

Aucun récit ne corrobore entièrement la mémoire que j'en conserve. Celui de *Long Time Coming*, écrit dans la foulée de l'événement, exagère selon moi l'ampleur de la mêlée et son degré de violence. Les deux autres reconstruisent les débuts du mouvement des lesbiennes à partir d'entrevues réalisées 15 à 20 ans plus tard ; le boycott de *Madame Arthur* n'est qu'un des moments reconstitués, d'où une description relativement sommaire de la séquence des événements et partiellement erronée selon mes propres souvenirs. Mais ceux-ci sont eux aussi partiels et dépendants de ce que fut mon champ de vision ce fameux soir-là.

Comme le rappelle Tavormina, l'énergie des lesbiennes a continué longtemps de hanter l'espace du bar *Madame Arthur*, lequel fut recyclé par l'université Concordia pour devenir partie de l'Institut Simone-de-Beauvoir. La Lesbian Studies Coalition y tint ses rencontres à partir de 1987 et le premier

cours crédité en études lesbiennes au Canada s'y déroula à l'hiver 1990.

[1] Cet article est une version légèrement modifiée de celui paru originalement dans *L'Archigai. Bulletin des Archives gaies du Québec*, no 18, 2008. Merci à Nicole Lacelle pour sa mémoire et sa fidèle amitié, ainsi qu'à Ross Higgins pour m'avoir signalé l'article de *Long Time Coming*. La difficulté de reconstituer un événement pourtant si mémorable dans l'histoire des luttes lesbiennes à Montréal montre bien la nécessité des archives gaies et lesbiennes.

[2] Durant les années 1970 et 1980, *Baby Face* fut la gérante de quelques bars s'adressant à une clientèle exclusivement lesbienne et auxquels elle donnait son propre surnom d'adoption. Le *Baby Face Disco* était situé au 1235, boul. René-Lévesque Ouest (anciennement Dorchester). Voir Chamberland, Line (1993), "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975", *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 25, no 3, p. 231-269, ou une version remaniée parue en français sous le titre « La conquête d'un espace public : les bars fréquentés par les lesbiennes », dans Irène Demczuk et Frank Remiggi (dir.) (1998), *Sortir de l'ombre*, Montréal, VLB éditeur, p. 129-164.

[3] Tavormina, Patrizia (1991), « Le bar *Madame Arthur* et le mouvement des lesbiennes de 1970 à 1975 », *Amazones d'hier, Lesbiennes d'aujourd'hui*, no 22, mars, p. 104-114.

[4] Orchard, Leslie (1974), "Fighting Back", *Long Time Coming*, vol. 2, no 2, décembre, p. 31-33.

[5] Hildebran, Andrea Logan (1997), *Lesbian Activism in Montreal : 1973-1979, mémoire de maîtrise en histoire*, UQAM, p. 46-48.

A lesbian and feminist activist since the seventies, Line Chamberland has published Mémoires lesbiennes – le lesbianisme à Montréal entre 1950 et 1972. As a sociologist, she does research about discrimination against lesbians and gays in the workplace, about lesbianism and aging and about homophobia in secondary schools and cegeps. She teaches a course on Homosexuality and Society at UQAM.

Militante lesbienne et féministe depuis les années 1970, Line Chamberland a publié Mémoires lesbiennes – le lesbianisme à Montréal entre 1950 et 1972. En tant que sociologue, elle fait des recherches sur la discrimination envers les lesbiennes et les gais en milieu de travail, sur les lesbiennes âgées et sur l'homophobie dans les écoles secondaires et les cégeps. Elle enseigne le cours Homosexualité et société à l'UQAM.

Photo Baby Face par Suzanne Girard

THE POSTMAN

Dianah Smith

In grade two I wanted to be the postman on Valentine's Day. The Postman got to deliver all the Valentine's cards and didn't have to worry about being embarrassed by the small number of cards on his or her desk. The year before, Miss Hahn had sent a class list and a note home instructing parents to buy enough cards for each student on the list so that no one would be left out. And yet, I still received very few cards. So while the other kids giggled and counted their cards, my face burned with embarrassment and humiliation.

Karyn came to Viscount Alexander in grade two. I had spent the whole summer worrying about not having a best friend. Anna, my best friend from grade one, had left at the end of the school year. I always thought Anna and I had been destined to be best friends because she was Spanish and I knew that my dad had been born in Spanish Town, in Kingston, Jamaica. I wondered if my dad understood her language, and if that meant that she and I were related in some way. Before I could discover our shared roots, she moved away and went to another school.

The next September Gracie, Sot Bell and Karen Devey were back. So were Pan-kaj and Jiban and Suzie. And there was a new girl. When I walked into the classroom there she was sitting in the front row – a little white girl, with brown hair cut in a bob, hands folded politely on the desk, sitting very straight, looking very attentive. I was worried for her.

She lived on King Edward Avenue in a house at the bottom of the hill. Most of us lived off of Mann Avenue in the low rise apartment buildings at the top of the hill. I knew I had to protect her from Scot, Karen Deevey and Gracie. Especially Gracie. They liked to pick on new kids, but they wouldn't mess with her if I was with her. I decided I would be her bodyguard. She was soft and delicate, unlike the tough, loud, and brash crew that dominated Viscount Alexander Public School.

It didn't take long for us to become best friends. We could always be found with our heads together giggling about something, whispering about Gracie or Karen Deevey, or trying to guess the identity of the secret admirer who had left a chocolate bar in her desk everyday for a week. Eventually we figured out that it was Andy, a pudgy, freckle faced, white kid from the top of the hill. He and his three sisters returned from lunch every day with Chef Boyardee sauce around their mouths. We were both disappointed when we found out it was him. The week before Valentine's Day we were

sent home with a list of all the students in our grade two class. Mom bought a package of Valentines cards with McDonald's characters. I picked out the Grimace card for Karyn and wrote 'I love you' inside the card. It was the first time I'd written those words.

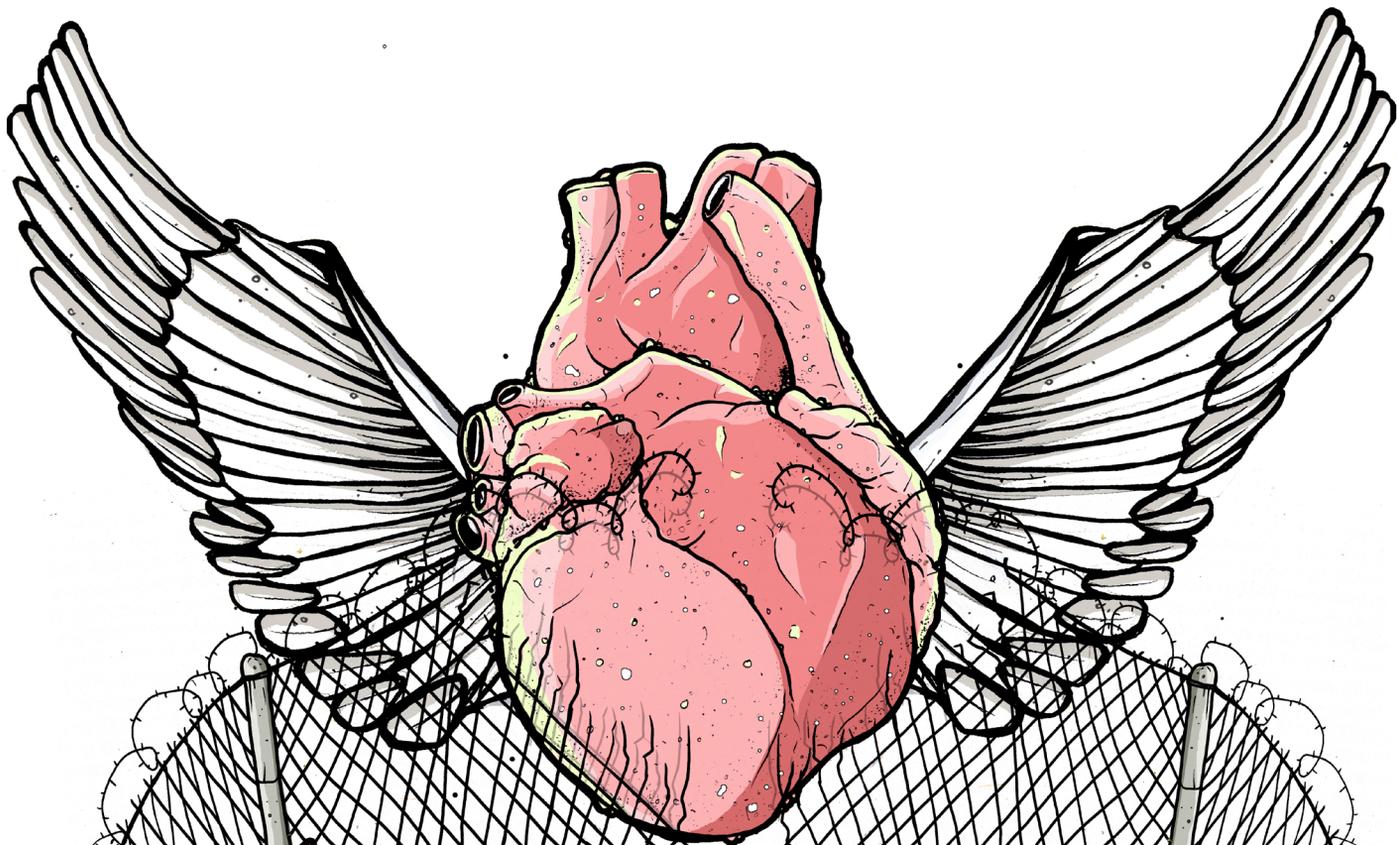
That year my wish came true, and I was chosen as the Postman for our afternoon Valentine's card delivery. I delivered everyone's cards, but saved my Grimace card for recess because I wanted to present it to Karyn in private. I gave her the signal to meet me at the water fountain at the back of the classroom. At the water fountain, I told her that I hadn't forgotten to get her a card I was saving it to give it to her at recess.

Although it was February, there were still patches of grass all around the schoolyard. It was a cold day, in the minus double digits, but I was feeling hot in my jacket. Normally it didn't provide much warmth but in that moment, I was overheating from nervousness. We stood at the edge of the asphalt where the cement met the grass, me in an oversized robin's egg blue nylon jacket, and Karyn in her pink, perfectly fitted winter jacket. I took a few deep breaths before handing her the card. She opened it and read my little note ending in 'I love you'. I held my breath wondering what she would say, worrying about what she would do. Kids ran past, snowballs whizzed through the air, but I heard none of that. It

was just the two of us. No one and nothing else existed. I remember everything that happened after that. She looked up at me after reading the card her brown hair framing her face like an angel, I heard her say 'I love you too'. The world fell off its axis. The schoolyard started to spin. She loved me. I wanted to throw my hat in the air like Mary Tyler Moore in the opening sequence of the show.

She loved me.

Dianah Smith is Jamaican-born, Ottawa-raised writer, teacher and arts educator. She is the Founder of 'A' is for Orange (www.aisfororange.org) a reading series featuring queer Caribbean emerging writers, and the former curator of When the Rainbow Isn't Enough a monthly reading series sponsored by the Toronto Women's Bookstore featuring queer and trans emerging writers of colour and two-spirited emerging writers. Dianah is the recipient of several grants including an emerging writer's grant from the Toronto Arts Council and a Writing Mentorship grant from the Ontario Arts Council. Dianah has been published in Siren and Flirt magazines and most recently in Shameless magazine (Summer/Fall 2008). She says 'Writing is a way to grieve/retrieve the past, make sense of the present and leave a legacy for the future.'



MANGOES WITH HELI

QUEER BORDERLANDS TOUR 2008

SWEETEST THING/ TIERRA SAGRADA

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

1. I have an ongoing thesis about brown people loving brown people and brown people loving white people. It's an unfinished one with lots of unproven hypotheses. I need to gather more raw data to evaluate, but there are times when the scientific method breaks down and is inadequate to describe what goes on in my pussy and my heart.

This is what I know. Sometimes it's the sweetest thing. Some times its boredom and bullshit. Sometimes I open my legs and give up my head, heart, and panties to the sky based on nothing more than skin that is the same color as mine and lips as full. Lips that can say my name right, or at least make a stab at it. I'll forgive them if they fuck it up, if at least they try hard at it. I'll forgive them so much. I need so bad to be forgiven

I want to fuck them back to before. before before. before the ships arrived on our lands, before our white parents fingers probing genitals, hair and skin looking for marks of the devil. before the breakups with each other like earthquakes we never expected that threw carefully arranged

plants, plates and books to the floor of the room. I want the fingers inside their holes to dry erase their scars the way theirs did to mine. I want it to be precious. I want it to be private. I want to be fearless.

There are certain things you just don't do, certain things you just don't tell anybody. Not family business that should be shared, but certain things secret like a cervix or that crinkled place that cries in my cunt. Like how I never talk about my spiritual beliefs, despite the altar that has taken up a quarter of my room since I turned 18 and got a room of my own. I don't trust people who run their mouths about Yemaya or their pagan healing circle. The gods don't talk to people who talk about them too much. You get down on your knees to her in private and she gives you things. that's how it works.

And there are certain things you don't give white people is what I've thought

I am a nationalist!

I mean it!

I mean

I may fuck you when there is a shortage but I won't hold your hand in public!

I won't cook you Sri Lankan food
call you kunjū

make my culture a Disneyland road map for you

There's certain shit that's our secret I had to work hard enough to find it and I'm holding on to it

like our ancestors held onto the location of Palmares

like that last apartment where the Tamil woman activist is holing up from the cops and the LTTE

like the last bit of rez we've held on to there's certain things you don't ever give up to white folks

no matter how much you might love them no matter how idiotic some of our own might be

There are so few of us and, like Chrystos said, that's why we don't fuck sometimes

because there are so few of us because friendship is safer and lasts

but for a year I fucked my peer group, and nothing was sweeter on my tongue nothing was sweeter than these excerpts of my magic fuck life

2. I usedta have a rhyme with that one lover, like:

white boys are like fast food well advertised a lot has gone into making them taste good

sometimes there's nothing else on the side of the highway

but they sure leave your tummy feeling funny after!

white girls are different! sometimes they're like fast food too sometimes they're a vegan hippie salad! sometimes they're fatback biscuits and

gravy

sometimes brown people fall in love with us on the first date

give us a UTI cuz they're banging your pelvic bone so hard

or just ain't it but sometimes

sometimes....

"I don't even look at white girls anymore," said my friend as I am sobbing in his mom's bigass deluxe four poster bed. It's the first in what will be a year of sobs about how my perfect brown boyfriend had left me two days after I opened letters from my father, first time I talked to him in a decade, for a femme so platinum she practically glows in the dark. My lover will never write me back and it's a bhangra song from a movie starring Amitabh, Parveen Baba, and a gun about lost letters, plane tickets, pretty brown men who been and gone.

A year later my friend is dating a blond woman because he likes her, because "it's just easier," and I don't judge him. My heart attack of perfect open pussy heart brown boy love, scars, feathers torn in half valentine has left me drinking, working, jerking off, dancing, sitting meditation with grief and talking to him in my head for a year.

I know how high stakes this love is. And I know I haven't wanted to be fed anything else but dynamite. Nothing but brown-

ness like sweet chai and paan chewed and sipped on the sidewalk under Christmas lights, sold by an uncle with a card table when it is oh so cold.

Basically it is Arabs and Latinos and the occasional South Asian and any kind of mixed person who wants to do it with me. And then of course there are the white geeky post anarchist guys who used to hate me and later loved me and wanted to fuck me because white anarchist boys always want to fuck angry brown girls as a complement to their bell hooks collection. I am an ex-punk who hated it, who now likes to sometimes walk through those group houses aloof. I used to make white guys give me head for nineteen hours as some form of reparations, beyatch! for colonialism.

And then I got over it. Brownness was a relief. The biggest exhale.

4. Sometimes the queer community of color is so small. so wanted. so necessary. so drama filled. so exhaustion ridden. I know everyone's secrets and keep them safe. I have boundaries, I have rules. That there is no room to move into the spaces that I so desperately want.

I don't know how the story ends. I am still gathering data. I know love never stops seeing color. I know love is an anarchic bitch that will slap your ass and upside your head and send you to places you'd never thought you'd go.

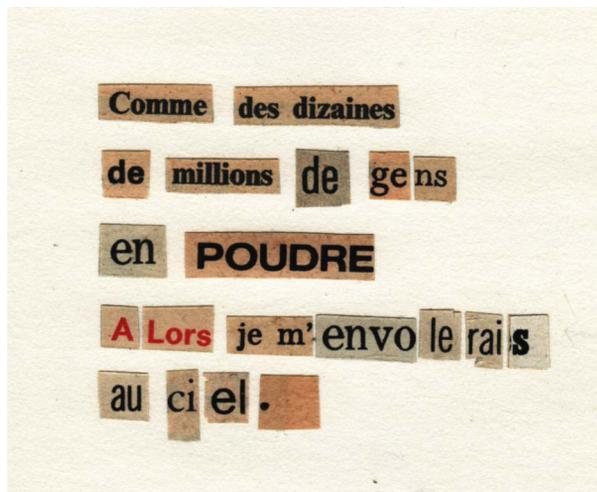
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha is a queer Sri Lankan writer and performer, based for ten years in Toronto, recently relocated to Oakland, CA. The author of Consensual Genocide (TSAR, 2006) her work has been widely anthologized in the queer, feminist and of color press, including in Yes Means Yes, Homelands, Colonize This, We Don't Need Another Wave, Bitchfest, Without a Net, Dangerous Families, Geeks, Misfits and Outlaws, Bent on Writing, Femme and A Girl's Guide to Taking Over The Word. She writes for Bitch, Colorlines, Herizons, Hyphen, Make/Shift and Xtra magazines, and regularly performs and tours her work throughout North America. She is the co-director of Mangos With Chili, North America's only annual touring cabaret of queer and trans of color performers. Visit her at www.brownstargirl.com



LA BOMBE

Julie Doucet

Julie Doucet est née à Montréal en 1965. Elle s'est fait connaître avec ses bandes dessinées autobiographiques. Elle a vécu à New York, Seattle et Berlin. À son retour à Montréal, Julie Doucet se consacre à l'estampe et au livre d'artiste. Elle vit toujours à Montréal et découpe des mots et des images.





WAAWAATE FOBISTER
photography by: Nadya Kwandibens

THE TWO-SPIRITED REBIRTH OF INDIGENOUS NATIONS: AN INTERVIEW WITH WAAWAATE FOBISTER

Stu Marvel

More than 155 Indigenous nations of North America had a word to describe people beyond the binary of male and female, with some tribes recognizing up to six different gender categories. Individuals were usually observed as ‘neither man nor woman’ from an early age, with many communities holding rituals of passage to determine whether a child would be drawn to a unique combination of gender roles. In others, a portentous dream or vision was often regarded as a signal. Such people were generally held in high regard, with their qualities seen as a gift conferring important spiritual responsibilities. Anthropologist James Thayer writes that they were “said to possess supernatural powers for healing (Cheyenne, Arapaho, Plains Cree) or for naming (Dakota)” and would often hold a ceremonial role as shamans

or prophets (Lovejoy 2008).

The ease with which multiple gender formations were received within tribal cultures represented more than the hiving of an extra category into an essentially binary system. Rather, it spoke to a worldview that valued the complex interrelationships of all living things. Many Aboriginal nations respected the powers of transformation, with creatures and spirits from traditional cosmologies shifting between the worlds of fish and sky; birth and death; man and woman. If a person was born with both male and female characteristics it was expected that their creation had received great care from the Spirit and they were consequently blessed with unique abilities. As Dakota elder Eva McKay explains, “They were special in the way that they seemed to have more skills than a single man or a single woman...He is two persons, this is when people would say they have more power than a single person. They were treated with respect” (Carter 2008). Such

physical and spiritual embodiment was in keeping with a mobile order of being that had little in common with the European societies developing across the Atlantic, where a dualist mentality of good-versus-evil grappled furiously within a nascent Christian theology.

As Western colonists eventually poured off their boats and onto the shores of what is now Canada, they brought along a cargo of relentless dichotomies that explained to them how the world worked. Man over woman, mind over body, life over death, light over dark, humans over nature. The colonial encounter with Indigenous peoples encouraged white Christian men to place themselves on the upper half of this schema, and to construct a global hierarchy within which they stood supreme. Through the denigration of ‘savage’ peoples to a lower order of nature, a host of new racist, heterosexist and classist categories were invented to prop up European society at the apex of human history.

A central goal of this imperial project was to make the world over in Europe’s image, bringing ‘civilization’ to all and installing three primary virtues at the heart of assimilationist ideology: the superiority of nuclear family patriarchy, the importance of land ownership (preferably when owned by Europeans!) and the infinite wonders of capitalism. The determined elevation of these values over Aboriginal understandings of kinship, harmony with the land, commu-

nally held property and – importantly – a respect for gender variance encouraged Western settlers to hoist aloft the banner of a Canadian federation. Amidst the heat of genocide and gendering a country was born.

These violent legacies are today being challenged, however, as the rights of Indigenous peoples are demanded the world over. Struggles for self-determination and cultural preservation have been taken up in both domestic and international legal arenas as Indigenous peoples and their allies ground themselves in movements for social justice. Crystallized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted in 2007 after 22 years of drafting and negotiation, a vigorous global movement is working to achieve the goals of decolonization.

On a Canadian level, a young man from the Grassy Narrows First Nations reserve in Ontario is doing his part to unearth Aboriginal traditions from the bedrock of imperial history. Actor Waawaate Fobister is just 24 years old and yet he has already taken to stages across the country to retell the forgotten stories of his people. Incorporating the Ojibwa language, where the word agokwe referred to a ‘man-woman’ while a ‘warrior woman’ was known as ok-icitakwe, Fobister’s most recent creation is a one-man show in which he performs multiple characters. Simply titled Agokwe, the play uses the trickster and shapeshifter

figure of Nanabush to evoke ancient histories of transformation. It traces the journey of two Aboriginal boys who fall in love at a hockey tournament while dealing sensitively with the brutality and complexity of homophobia on the reserve. "I guess I'm doing my small part as a person, as a storyteller," Fobister explains, "and that's the way my ancestors have been for generations, for centuries. That's how our stories are passed down. My role as a storyteller is to come back and bring these ideas of agokwe, two-spirited people through my storytelling."

The term 'two-spirited' was born in 1990 at a Native American/First Nations gay and lesbian conference in Winnipeg, as a way of distinguishing the spiritual nature of tribal gender categories from an identity politic based primarily on same-sex desire. Two-spirit is not merely an analogue to 'gay and lesbian' or 'transsexual' or even 'queer'. Indeed, many Aboriginal LGBT communities resist identifying with a Western linearity that (typically) ranges gender across a continuum from male at one end to female on the other. Traditionally, two-spirited people occupied a variety of spiritual and cultural positions upon a wheel of gender possibility. Yet as mentioned above, with this special status came significant responsibilities. When Fobister is asked if he personally identifies as two-spirit he hesitates for a moment, pondering the weight of the title: "I don't know...it's such a big responsibility and a big role, so for me to

call myself that is huge. And I don't take it lightly."

An important part of Fobister's journey from a closeted teen on the reservation to spokesman for gay Aboriginal youth has been through the teachings of Ojibway traditions. He explains that while growing up in high school he didn't know that gays even existed, let alone two-spirited peoples. It was only after he became the first of his extended family to graduate from high school and moved to Toronto to pursue an acting career that any context for his experience came into view. After contacting the Two-Spirited People of the First Nations, Fobister was introduced to the term agokwe and began to learn about the histories of his people. He explains, "It made me feel so empowered. I was like, this is so amazing and strong and powerful!"

Fobister is careful to stress the importance of elders in passing on these teachings and in refusing to forget the oral traditions of a colonized people: "All of my knowledge is mostly from elders, from listening to their stories and what they have to say and what's important to them. There's a saying that 'when an elder dies it's like a library burning down.' I try to take as much in from the elders as I possibly can so I can pass it on and keep that tradition going. Elders are really important in our communities because we can learn from them and they have these stories that are important to our lives. They have messages."

This contemporary re-claiming of two-spiritedness is occurring within a broader resurgence of Aboriginal traditions, as Native peoples are strengthening old practices suppressed under centuries of colonization. Montreal activists Fiona Meyer-Cook and Diane Labelle describe how this emergence of gendered and sexual difference ties in to other sacred aspects of community life: “In the same way that the drum, the sweat, the pipe and languages are re-emerging, Two-Spirit people are beginning to make their voices heard.” Embracing and living openly as two-spirited means addressing not only homophobia, but the entwined pressures of racism, imperialism, sexism and neocolonialism (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004).

While the traditional esteem held for categories such as *agokwe* and *okitcitakwe* is now being remembered, this resurgence should not be romanticized over the tough reality faced by contemporary two-spirited peoples. Such experiences can only be understood within the context of Aboriginal peoples as a whole and the violence of colonialism in Canada. To take the example of Aboriginal persons living with HIV/AIDS, not only poverty but the homophobic legacy of European society continues to beleaguer many communities. This makes it difficult to talk about the same-sex transmission of disease or begin working on prevention and support initiatives. The impact of these obstacles is painfully apparent in national health statistics: Although they

represent only 3.3% of the Canadian population, Aboriginal persons comprised 5-8% of prevalent infections and 6-12% of new HIV infections in Canada in 2002.

Meyer-Cook and Labelle also point to the negative memory association that many residential school survivors hold in regard to the sexual abuse experienced at boarding schools, much of which was same-sex in nature. As they explain, this means that “Two-Spirited people are seen in the same light as sin and sexual abusers.” Without an analysis that places the factors of racism, poverty and multi-generational trauma in the context of colonization, two-spirited people can quickly become vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination. A 2007 study entitled *Leading an Extraordinary Life: Wise Practices for an HIV Prevention Campaign with Two-Spirit Men* found that many two-spirited men had experienced a painful litany of family and community shaming, discrimination and abuse. As the report concludes, “The effect is that Two-Spirit people have become displaced people within Aboriginal and Canadian society.” It can be difficult to muster up the courage to stand against rejection or physical threat from within one’s own kinship circle while still working toward better social and economic conditions for all Aboriginal nations.

Yet such courage is casually expressed by Fobister as he relates difficult stories from his past with both strength and humour. He talks about performing an earlier play

called *Savage*, the story of a young gay boy who grows up in a small town and is helped by a mentor. A thorny and revealing piece, Fobister has toured it all over the province to public and private schools, on reserve and off. He recounts the Q&A that followed a performance in Moose Factory, when the first questioner from the crowd of assembled students wanted to know if he was actually gay himself.

Fobister explains, “They asked in kind of a snotty way – they’re high school students right – and so I go up and say, YES! I’M GAY! (laughing) And they had this really awkward reaction and didn’t know what to do, because no one ever ever says they’re gay in those communities. No one says that, because it’s been lost. And then I have young gay people that come up to me after the shows, and are like ‘you inspired me so much because I can’t ever say that, and for you to come here and say I’M GAY in front of these people, a gym full of people, I feel so empowered. And like there’s hope for me’.”

In providing a model for other Aboriginal youth, Fobister clearly envisions his role as that of a traditional storyteller. He is explicit about the desire to reach out to remote or marginalized communities and speak to young people who may feel as isolated as he did. “Those are the people that I want to reach and that’s why I keep doing the things that I’m doing. Because it can inspire somebody. And hopefully that person

will be able to do some of the things I’m doing, in their own way. And keep informing people.”

In the book *Me Sexy*, Daniel Heath Justice explains how the time-honored role of two-spirited people as spiritual guides can be reclaimed as a powerful tool to work toward healing the wounds of colonialism. He writes, “In the traditions of many Indigenous nations, queer folks had – and continue to have – special gifts granted by the Creator for the benefit of our families and the world at large. In this understanding, our sexuality isn’t just a part of our Nativeness – it’s fuel for the healing of our nations.” As Indigenous communities in Canada are increasingly mobilizing to demand legal recognition, reparation for the residential schools legacy, land restitution and the renewal of sacred ceremonial practices, two-spirited peoples may most ably represent the fluidity and far-seeing knowledge of these ancestral traditions.

As the birth of Canada was nestled in the uncompromising cradle of a dualist worldview, so the re-birth of Indigenous traditions may pivot upon the reclamation of more complex ontologies. It has been argued that the disruption of equitable relations between men, women and other gender categories was a key colonial strategy to erode and damage the vitality of Indigenous nations. As historian Andrew Gilden writes, “These efforts radically transformed the traditional Native American beliefs as

to child autonomy, relative equality of the sexes, and commitment to the tribal community” (Gilden 2007). Under the impact of colonialism all gendered relations changed, but a particular vitriol was reserved for those who existed outside the male-female binary. The distinctive threat that two-spirited people represented to settler society is evident in the patriarchal, heterosexist language expressed from the earliest days of colonization.

Europeans who encountered multiple genders were both titillated and horrified by the existence of what they called berdaches, a derogatory term which comes to French through the Arabic word bardaj meaning “kept boy” or “male prostitute”. Treatment not only focused on what was erroneously labeled male transvestism (women rarely figured in these field notes) but fixated almost exclusively on matters of sexual coupling. White ethnographers were relatively unconcerned with the social significance held by two-spirited people, choosing instead to dwell on the fevered perversions of sodomy. The spiritual role of multiple genders was condemned by the church and branded with shame as discourses of ‘morality’ ensured that only heterosexual couples joined by Christian marriage (and preferably non-miscegenated) could receive the approval of the state.

Thus in helping to reaffirm the two-spirited traditions of Native peoples, young leaders like Fobister are challenging a fundamental

plank of the colonial platform. In revealing the restrictive impact of a gender binary that kept women at home, men at work, property in private hands and spirituality in a book, two-spirited peoples may be able to function once again as visionaries for their nations. In *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, Leanne Simpson retells a well-known Nishnaabeg prophecy: “The later part of that prophecy relays that we are currently living in the Seventh Fire, a time when, after a long period of colonialism and cultural loss, a new people, the Oshkimaadiziig, emerge. It is the Oshkimaadiziig whose responsibilities involve reviving our language, philosophies, political and economic traditions, our ways of knowing, and our culture. The foremost responsibility of the ‘new people’ is to pick up those things previous generations have left behind... .”

Simpson explains that the current generation of Native people holds a profound ability to contribute to the recovery and rebirth of Indigenous nations. Through a return to original visions of peace and justice, the keepers of the eighth fire can forge new relations with other nations and engage with settler society to decolonize their relationships. Only then can a sustainable future be created upon a renewed foundation of mutual recognition, justice and respect.

In discussing the impact of his work and how it seeks to honour the forgotten role

of the two-spirited peoples in Native communities, Fobister is modest yet passionate about the fire he hopes to light. "That's why I wrote [Agokwe] and that's why I want to go tour it, so in a way I'm trying to give it as a rebirth myself. And giving back to our communities because the old ways of how people were back before colonization have been lost and disappeared. So I find my responsibility as a storyteller is to tell it as much and as true and honest as I possibly can."

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Stu Marvel is not as young as she used to be, but she's a whole lot gayer.

100 BUTCHES, NUMBER 35

Elisha Lim

Elisha came out so late. When she was 26 she dumped her fiancé and moved to Berlin, which started a sharp learning curve including lesbian squat houses, queer trailer parks, transgender pride parades and an Ethical Slut reading group. She has since played in Drag King circuits from Berlin to Jerusalem, illustrated for queer zines in London and Vienna and runs a tribute night in Toronto called Lesbian Blues from the Thirties. She draws a comic strip called 100 Butches about Butch-gazing, which has been featured in lesbian magazines in Australia, England, Austria and the U.S. You can check out more of her beautiful comics here:

www.qpoccomics.blogspot.com/

100 Bitches Number 35

I hear that Mei Lin is expecting to have a son. I wonder about it a lot. I imagine a baby emerging from between those scabby, knobby knees, and the kind of swear words shouted out of her irreproachable mouth.

It all began with her. At school I waited for her by the fish pond. The peaceful circling fish just made me even more tense. But if I was lucky she would come out of class across the pond, notice me, get curious, and wander over to flirt with the shocking feeling of forbidden desire.

How totally crude it felt, I remember! Why are we touching each other? Are we just bored? Are we so desperate? Are we settling for an imitation of real love?

The whole thing was more disturbing for her. I was willing to risk it. I was baffled by my attraction to her, but I was helpless to the power of her nonchalant swing up the hallway, her clever soccer passes, and her awkward, sadistic affection.

But it was disturbing for her, and eventually she got herself pregnant. By her husband. Three continents away. And she'll have, inevitably, a beautiful, cheeky, rebellious little baby.

May all of his dreams come true.



3 POEMS

Trish Salah

KERN

In the transparency gestation
she has whiling been within
long limned interiors.

(Culled of)

hopefulness of translation
hoping, when we break, all fall out.

3 AM ON MAITLAND (RECOLLECTING)

The girls are crooning, tell us a story. And you know what they mean. Tell something hot.

Okay, this was me out at the Pope, with beer and bad disco, drag kings performing white trash.

Now, then and then, there I got snarky, tending your drunken, tending to looks “spoilt,” intending on “such a witty and subversive gesture” and “oh my identity,” to get past too, into it, to pick up...

I still remember her, she or I with suburban femme prettiness. That was maybe the offence, losing nights at the bar; it is how the body behaves, or the community. Eyes sliding down and away, as if to announce, “You can’t police desire.” It’s not so obvious, some stumbling i am I aim to be—

So, slipping past, and having gotten tossed, going nowhere home but still luminous, I cannot help, who cannot help— But notice

my stride and skirt, short and tight like my boots,
high gloss to thighs gash hips, top scraps of net,
as the cruiser pulls up, its driver hails me.

I’m unpracticed, unprofessional, so very

slow to realize he is looking to pick up—

I refuse the offer of a ride,
and his cruiser shadows me,
and he’s a gentleman, sweet talkin’ me.

I’m curious as I get in, still playing my part, but virginal
or the part of a girl who plays virginal, in a scrap of net, slip of skirt, big boots walking a working girls’ stroll.

He’s Black and I convince myself that cancels out the gun, the uniform,
so drunk I float on the thought we’ve something in common and he’s...
he’s just fucking massive, and somehow that’s exciting when
he’s so nice and from Brampton, even.
I don’t know if that means I’m “safe.”

Anyway, I’m nervous but reeling him in, reeling away, going on about my college, asking about his marriage... in the moment I’m such a white girl
I could be wearing angora, you know?
Still not knowing if or how I want to be “safe.”

I let myself be dropped a few blocks from my door,
Try to imagine, my boyfriend, the cop—
keep his number for months.

HANDS OVER FIST

1.
I can't make myself walk into the new
Flamingo, Speakeasy, whatever...
I put my nerves on you, waiting.

As queer a girl as I to hold in this past my
hand
a brick in it, even if grade 8 small to hold.

Being asked for is not always clear, what
is
her pause is also your visible age, my visible
sex.

Holly came from Miami, F.L.A., scratchy on
u.h.f.,
as junior high Sexies threw the punches.

In queue, look to the proper young couple
all in leather,
their baby swaddled against the cool night
air.
"Did you like the band?"

A suspect want, once voiced, a school
yard kiss,
an earring torn out to the limits of pretti-
ness...
steals a self from Jen, again.

Or, trying to protect me, you ask, "Should
we just go home?"

2.
In rubber tire swings, in the church yard-
we do not make it- overlook the lamp lit
parking lot.

Not sure where the snow storm was, when
we fly,
travel home is always moving down time

- legs in fishnets splayed wide, a grassy
slope -
to the wrong you. Boys keep swinging, I
can't-

understanding is no ground clearer.

You don't just cut people out of your life,
you do it with years of violent hollow.

To come round here and expect to just
be her. To look everywhere without a right.

How to word it, these two weeks in sum-
mer...
Everyone's home.

*Trish Salah is a Montreal-based writer, activist and teacher at Concordia and Bishop's Universities. Her writing addresses questions of desire, identity and the precarity of belonging. She has been politically active in grassroots, campus-based and labour organizations, on issues of Palestinian solidarity, anti-capitalism, sex workers' rights, anti-racism, queer and trans rights. Her first book of poetry *Wanting in Arabic* was published by TSAR in 2002 and her recent writing appears in the journals *Open Letter*, *Atlantis*, *Aufgabe*, and *West Coast Line*.*

SEXUAL HEALING

Nicholas Little

Originally published in Capital Xtra, vol. 197, December 10 2008.

Dyspareunia. Vulvovaginitis. Pubococcygeus. Sacrotuberous. Each of them a Scrabble knock out in its own right.

My full time job is handing out lube in Ottawa's bathhouses, but in my off hours I teach women and men how to give blow-jobs at Venus Envy, an education-focused sex store downtown. I started doing it last year when Shelley, the owner, moved to Halifax for a year with her partner Steve, who'd been giving the workshop up to that point. They didn't interview me for the job and as far as I know they didn't talk to any of my former lovers. It's one of the only places that'll hire you as long as you truly suck.

About a month back I got invited to a free workshop for Venus Envy staff. The email was pretty brief - it just said we'd learn about the pelvic floor. Somehow in my head I interpreted that to mean they'd teach us how to squeeze our bums in special ways while getting done to make our prostates go bonkers. In retrospect, that was a really dumb assumption given that

I'm the only guy on staff and chicks don't have prostates.

Did you know that 17% of all women have chronic vaginal pain that can make it hard to use a tampon or have sex? Well the vaginal physiotherapist who came to tell us about it did. I felt the chakra-shattering prostate orgasm of my fantasies escaping me once again and settled in to learn about pre- and post-menopausal vaginal challenges that can make sex a painful experience, get in the way of developing confident sexual self-esteem and also prevent you from wearing your pants as tight as you'd like.

The instructor, who had been practicing physiotherapy for 25 years, re-trained mid-career to help ladies with incontinence issues. She said she enjoyed that but eventually it, too, got to be the same old, same old. So she retrained to be a vaginal physiotherapist. She told us that in vaginal physio training courses, students learn hands-on by practicing on each other.

A woman burdened with dyspareunia or vulvovaginitis can meet with a physiotherapist to reduce pain, increase functional ability and reclaim the life of great sex and hosiery she's entitled to. Over 6-12 months, in weekly or bi-weekly sessions, the therapist will guide the patient through a series of exercises, which the patient also practices at home. For the first couple weeks, the therapist may penetrate

the patient anally in order to mobilize her coccyx bone, to which many of the pelvic floor muscles attach. Once mobilized, the following sessions will involve incremental vaginal penetration: first one finger, then two, slowly working out the pelvic pain. The therapist will model diaphragmatic breathing for relaxation. She might use vaginal dilators - hard plastic dildos, basically - to progressively stretch the patient's vaginal walls with comfort.

Then it struck me: here is a lady who deeply understands wellness as the intersection of the many dimensions of self. Aside from the toll it takes on her body, living with chronic physical pain can thwart a woman's capacity for intimacy, confidence, sexual satisfaction and the freedom to define how she will engage with the world around her.

The physiotherapist uses her own hands and body as curative tools, sometimes inserting them inside the client, in order to heal, soothe and increase the capacity for pleasure. It is a physical intervention to facilitate sexual, social, emotional and perhaps even spiritual wellness. A truly holistic remedy. And a testament to the integral role of physical and sexual needs if a life is to be balanced in health.

I hear people trash talk hookers all the time. When the veneer on a friend's front tooth came off, exposing a haggard, filed down spike in her smile, she lamented how much it would cost to replace it and joked

that she'd need to stand on a corner in run-down Hintonburg to earn enough money to go see her dentist - "...after all, with one tooth missing, I've already got the right look."

Last year a local gay guy approached me and asked if I was involved in planning the Ottawa actions for December 17th, the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. Yeah I am, I told him, think you'll come check it out? I dunno, he said. I mean, I'm definitely against violence in all its forms, but sex work... This was one week after jurors found Robert Pickton guilty of brutally murdering six sex workers on his pig farm in Vancouver.

When I was a kid growing up in Alberta, the mother of one particularly devout family at the local Full Gospel Tabernacle Church used to talk about "ladies of the night" as if they were stiletto-wearing phantoms that wafted out of sewer drains. Once she even took us to see them in a twisted kind of horror spectator sport. Guys from the high school used to drive by and throw pennies.

How do sex workers become extraterrestrial beings in our mind's eye? How do we come to construct them as so utterly inhuman and unlike us normal folk that at a panel discussion on prostitution earlier this year, Jeff Leiper, President of the Hintonburg Community Association, inexplicably argued that Hintonburg hookers aren't

part of his community – they just happen to live and work in the very same neighbourhood.

Some people think all sex workers must be victims, because who – given real options – would choose to do that kind of work. They argue that we are too poor, young, dominated or addicted to know what we are doing. And so they must help us by speaking for us and acting on our behalf. They discount sex worker voices that say it is not the sex that is killing them and it's surely not the money - it's the police violence, the constant incarceration and their neighbours' vigilantism to deny them their Charter rights and dismantle due process before the law.

On a good day, in the right headspace, when both the client and I manage to temporarily suspend our egos, sex work can be an act identical in intent and execution as that of the vaginal physiotherapist. It isn't always that. And it doesn't always have to be. It can be purely erotic, purely a laugh, purely kinky experimentation or purely labour. But it can also be the provision of pleasure as antidote to the cumulative pain amassed by any human who dares to survive and thrive in a world that constantly seeks to obstruct self-determination, be it individual or collective.

For an hour, sometimes two, I use my own hands and body as curative tools, sometimes inserting them inside the client,

in order to heal, soothe and increase the capacity for pleasure. It is a physical intervention to facilitate sexual, social, emotional and perhaps even spiritual wellness. A truly holistic remedy. And a testament to the integral role of physical and sexual needs if a life is to be balanced in health.

Nicholas Little is a sex educator, outreach worker and writer living in Ottawa. You can follow his blog at <http://www.ickaprick.blogspot.com>

LA NEW BORN CANADIENNE

Mathilde Géromin

Au moment où la France fait la chasse aux immigrés illégaux jusque dans les écoles primaires, je deviens ce qu'on appelle une néo-canadienne, une immigrée légale, qui peut payer ses impôts, voter et voyager avec ce fameux passeport. À considérer comme un honneur d'après le gouvernement canadien.

Sachant que si je le déshonore, ce même gouvernement peut décider de me l'enlever...

Il s'est passé un temps infini entre le moment où j'ai décidé de vivre sur le sol canadien (1995) et celui où je peux enfin vivre sur ce sol sans avoir d'angoisse de papiers (2008).

Un temps de course contre la bureaucratie et la bêtise humaine.

Malgré cette bureaucratie et cette bêtise étant là pour en décourager plus d'un, j'ai décidé d'immigrer. Pourtant je n'ai fuit aucune situation économique dévastatrice, ni aucun régime politique destructeur, ni même une histoire de vie horrible. J'ai encore de la famille, des amis que j'aime et qui m'aime, dans mon pays d'origine.

J'ai voulu immigrer parce que je peux toucher le bonheur de plus près ici, c'est tout et c'est beaucoup.

Le libre échange des marchandises sur les continents, les océans et dans l'air ne cesse de s'accroître, la circulation de l'humain est de loin la plus contrôlée.

Le libre droit et choix de décider d'habiter et de travailler dans un monde meilleur, reste et restera pour longtemps encore comme une idée folle et saugrenue pour la plupart des gouvernements sinon tous.

Car c'est bien connu : les immigrés viennent voler le travail et les femmes et c'est à cause d'eux si il y a la crise. Alors on ferme les frontières.

Et quand par bonheur on fait parti des élus, on vous entrouve la porte mais il faut s'essuyer les pieds longtemps (on ne sait jamais, si on avait de la crotte sous les talons), montrer patte blanche, et s'allonger de tout son long par terre pour qu'on vous carresse gentiment le ventre, sans grogner, surtout ne pas grogner.

Garder un profil bas, toujours, c'est un honneur, ne l'oubliez pas, que ce grand pays vous accueille.

« Les Canadiens et les Canadiennes sont fiers de leur citoyenneté, qui figure parmi les plus prisées au monde. » site du CIC

Alors comment qu'on fait pour devenir KANAYIENNE???

Ben c'est simple :

Déjà si t'es sidatique, pauvre, pas éduqué, noir, musulman, et que tu as plus de 40 ans...oublie-ça.

Si ton travail fait partie de la liste des métiers non désirés, oublie-ça!

Sinon tu fais ce qu'on appelle un dossier de demande de résidence permanente, ça coûte 550 \$.

Alors c'est une série de questions, sur tes études, ton travail etc.

Plus t'es jeune (et encore à l'âge de la procréation), plus tu gagnes des points.

Tu as fait des études universitaires, tu gagnes encore des points.

Plus tu as de points, plus tu peux gagner le droit de t'établir.

Moi j'ai échoué une première fois

Raisons :

Pas assez d'années de travail (il faut au moins avoir travaillé 3 ans à temps plein), pas assez d'argent sur mon compte en banque.

Ah oui?...Euhhh bon d'accord.

Je suis retournée faire mes devoirs, j'ai appris qu'il fallait leur prouver que je possédais (au moins pendant trois mois) la somme de 6000\$ sur mon compte en banque. Chaque étranger d'où qu'il vienne doit posséder cette somme. Donc l'immigration canadienne est une immigration de « riches ».

Alors que faire quand on est pauvre? On attend de devenir riche? Ou bien on emprunte cette somme à plein de gens différents (amis, famille), on la garde sur son compte les fameux trois mois pour avoir des preuves bancaires, et on redonne

l'argent à ses amis une fois que les photocopies signées conformes par la banque ont été approuvées...

Autre obstacle :

J'avais échoué le passage de la visite médicale obligatoire.(coût : 100\$)

Car au Canada « L'examen médical vise à garantir que le demandeur n'a aucun problème de santé qui représente un danger pour la santé ou la sécurité publiques, ou qui serait un fardeau excessif pour les services sociaux ou de santé au Canada. »

Alors avec mon pipi (et un peu de sang dedans) je devenais un fardeau excessif pour le gouvernement.

Donc mon dossier est resté en hold jusqu'à ce que je puisse leur démontrer que j'étais assez normale.

Alors re-visite chez le médecin (100\$) pour certifier ma bonne santé.

Pour ce faire je fais attention de ne pas boire d'alcool ni fumer de « drogue » pendant deux semaines. Juste des légumes et de l'eau, pour faire un beau pipi et donner du bon sang.

Et bingo...j'ai réussi le test.

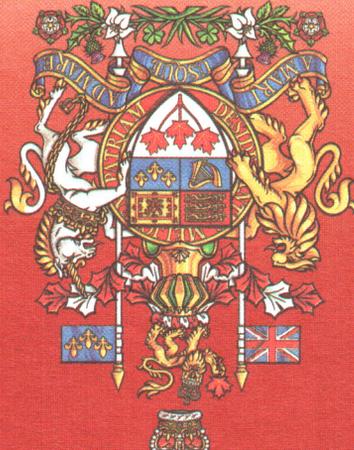
Mon corps est apte à s'établir sur le sol Canadien sans le mettre en danger.

Me voilà résidente permanente.

Je peux y rester toute ma vie, si le droit de vote ne m'intéresse pas.

Mais tous les 5 ans il faut refaire sa carte de résidence (50\$). Ça veut dire remplir encore et encore des papiers, attendre des

MATHILDE CÉCILE GÉROMIN



On this, the occasion of your becoming a Canadian citizen, I offer my congratulations and those of the Prime Minister and Government of Canada.

You are now entitled to all the rights and privileges of Canadian citizenship and are subject to all the obligations and responsibilities of your citizenship.

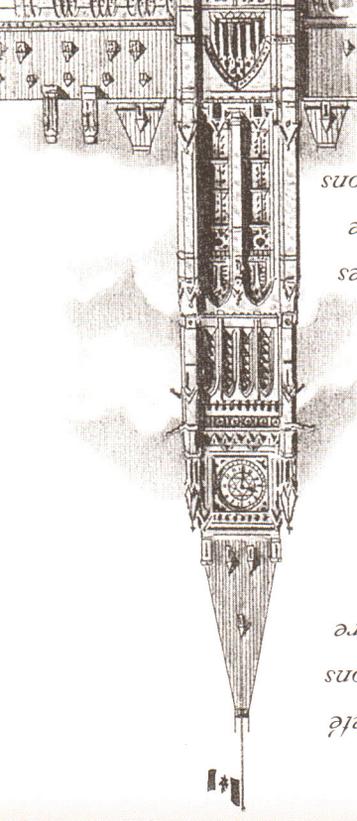
As a Canadian, you must uphold the principles of democracy, freedom and compassion which are the foundation of a strong and united Canada.

Welcome to the Canadian family.

En ce jour où vous obtenez la citoyenneté canadienne, je vous offre mes félicitations de même que celles du Premier ministre et celles du Gouvernement du Canada. Vous bénéficiez dorénavant de tous les droits et privilèges que confère la citoyenneté et êtes assujéti(e) à toutes les obligations et responsabilités qu'elle comporte.

Si vous revient de défendre les principes de la démocratie, de la liberté humaine et de la compassion qui sont les fondations d'un Canada fort et uni.

Bienvenue au sein de la grande famille canadienne.



mois, pour obtenir une carte valide. Et pendant ce temps on ne peut pas voyager, car on ne peut pas prouver quand on rentre au Canada, qu'on est résidente permanente puisqu'il garde l'ancienne carte quand on fait son renouvellement....Et si on décide de faire un grand voyage, surtout penser à ne pas dépasser les six mois fatals hors du pays. Sinon la résidence permanente est annulée, et on retombe dans la case départ.

Alors pour éviter toutes ces paperasseries et ces regards obliques à chaque fois qu'on revient de l'étranger, j'ai décidé de demander ma citoyenneté. Bon c'est vrai j'avais aussi envie de pouvoir voter un jour NPD.

Et puis d'avoir un passeport qui me permettrait de ne pas passer par la case déclaration des douanes de l'aéroport à chaque fois que je reviens de France. Car je suis toujours une terroriste alimentaire qui veut faire passer sous le manteau, des boites de fois gras, du fromage qui pue ou encore des litres de vin rouge, normal je suis FRANÇAISE....

Donc maintenant je serai CANADIENNE, et les canadiens c'est bien connus sont de gentils touristes bien élevés.

Pour ça il a fallu attendre d'avoir vécu sur le sol candadien 1095 jours minimum. Ensuite tu payes 100\$ pour remplir encore et encore des papiers, où on te pose toujours les mêmes questions (comme s'ils je-

taient tous les papiers à chaque fois). Ensuite tu reçois un beau carnet qui s'appelle « Regard sur le Canada » avec une petite note qui te dit de bien lire le document car tu dois te préparer pour passer l'examen de citoyenneté.

Et puis tu attends 1 an et demi avant d'obtenir le droit de passer ce bel examen.

Oui oui un examen comme à l'école avec des questions à choix multiples.

Car si tu veux devenir canadien tu dois connaître tout sur le pays (pourquoi pas).

« # Examen de la citoyenneté

Ce que vous devez savoir au sujet du Canada pour réussir l'examen pour la citoyenneté et ce à quoi vous devez vous attendre pendant l'examen »

Alors un jour tu te retrouves dans une salle comble de 80 personnes dans le même cas que toi, toutes immigrantes, à qui on parle avec un petit air condescendant comme si nous étions les derniers débilés de la terre.

Et là tu réponds à des questions aussi débilés les unes que les autres. Et tu enrages parce que tu te dis que si tu étais née ici, jamais au grand jamais tu n'aurais eu à passer cet examen sous le regard méprisant de la reine accroché au mur.

allez hop un jeu: un petit aperçu quiz de la culture canadienne extrait de

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/quiz/questions-fra.aspx>

« Questionnaire sur la citoyenneté qui vous permettra d'évaluer vos connaissances en matière de citoyenneté.

Question 11

Quel personnage de bande dessinée a été cocréé par le Canadien Joe Shuster?

- A) Wonder Woman
- B) Superman
- C) Batman

C) Exact! Superman a été inventé par le Canadien Joe Shuster.

Lequel des sports suivants a été inventé par un Canadien?

- A) Le football
- B) Le tennis
- C) Le basketball

C) Exact! Le basketball a été inventé par le Canadien James Naismith en 1891.

Ayoye les canadiens ont créé la culture américaine... »

Bref le Canada a inventé l'inconscient collectif américain.

Et après ce magnifique moment de culture canadienne si on obtient la moyenne sur 20 on est accepté pour la cérémonie de citoyenneté. Attention toutefois de bien répondre à la question concernant le doit

de vote car si la réponse est fautive, retour à la case départ de la demande de citoyenneté...

« # Cérémonie de citoyenneté

Ce que vous devez savoir au sujet de la cérémonie de citoyenneté une fois que vous avez complété toutes les étapes menant à la citoyenneté canadienne »

Ouiiiiiiiiiiiii faire allégeance à la reine, je sais, tout le monde en rêve, et moi je l'ai fait!

Convocation un mercredi matin à 9h30.

En présence de 375 autres immigrants, on attend tous que le Canada se fasse plaisir avec ses petites cérémonies d'intronisation, et nous on attend que ça passe...ça fait 2 heures qu'on attend assis dans cette grande salle.

On trépigne pour signer encore des putains de papiers. Un ennui certain se lit sur tous les visages. Et j'entends un employé dire que c'est mieux des grands rassemblements, comme ça ils font une batch de 375 d'un coup!

Le gouvernement dépense moins d'argent, mais dépense le temps de ses futurs citoyens sans problème. Et en plus, après avoir signé ces papiers, t'es obligée de rester pour chanter ô Canada et jurer allégeance à la reine...

Si tu veux aller pisser on te prend tes papiers pour t'obliger à revenir!!!

Et tous venus de 75 pays différents, on se lève indifférents pour lever la main droite et prêter le serment d'allégeance à la reine

numero 2 d'angleterre (et oui nous sommes toujours une sorte de colonie) et à ses descendants...

Et ensuite on se relève cette fois pour chanter Ô Canada, ou plutôt marmonner et faire du Lipsink sur la magnifique et importante musique jouée 2 fois, d'abord pour les francophones et la 2ème pour les anglophones.

J'ai même pas eu droit à mon petit drapeau rouge, ni à un pins... Mon amie Caro, une belge, a passé son examen et sa cérémonie en une seule fois, le même jour. Et en plus elle a eu droit à son drapeau et son pins et même que la juge lui a parlé ...c'est parce que là, le gouvernement ne voulait pas faire perdre trop de temps à ses employés (elle travaille pour le gouvernement).

Alors toi aussi si tu veux devenir a new born canadian et que tu es née sur le sol canadien, tu peux le faire et vivre des émotions royales.

Je t'invites donc à participez à une cérémonie de réaffirmation de ta citoyenneté afin de montrer ton engagement envers le Canada et the queen of the queens.

« Organisez une cérémonie de réaffirmation. Vous pouvez organiser une cérémonie de réaffirmation dans votre collectivité, sur votre lieu de travail ou dans votre établissement d'enseignement. Pour ce faire, veuillez suivre les étapes suivantes.

»

Tu as juste à visiter

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/francais/celebrer/menu-reaffirmation.asp>

me voilà donc une des quelques 185 000 nouveaux arrivants devenus citoyens canadiens chaque année. Et j'étais le numéro 155 du matin.

J'aime bien les numéros. Je suis la sujet de sa reine numéro 155. Quel ravissement!

En tout pour devenir le numéro 155, j'ai dépensé : 7050 \$

Et après on pense que les immigrés sont pauvres et aculturés...
Bienvenue au Canada.

Mathilde Géromin. Son travail porte sur le corps dans sa représentation ou son senti, essentiellement en traitant des genres et l'image de la femme. Toujours avec humour pour prendre une distance nécessaire, toujours en musique pour sentir les corps vivants en mouvement rythmique. C'est un jeu de montage, un jeu de point de vue. Une mise en avant du quotidien évident et trop souvent invisible. Née en France Lamathilde vit et travaille à Montréal, elle fait partie du collectif de performances les WWKA, et est une membre très active de la scène des arts visuels de Montréal.

DEEP LEZ I STATEMENT

Allyson Mitchell

Deep Lez is an experiment, a process, an aesthetic and a blend of theory and practice. Deep Lez is right this minute and it is rooted in herstories and theories that came before. It takes the most relevant and capable ideas and uses them as tools to create new ways of thinking while simultaneously clinging to more radical politics that have already happened but definitely aren't over yet. Part of the deep of Deep Lez is about commitment, staying power and significance. Part of the deep of Deep Lez is about philosophies and theories, as in "wow man, that's deep."

Deep Lez uses cafeteria-style mixings of craft, context, food, direct action and human connections to maintain radical dyke politics and resistant strategies. Part quilting bee, part public relations campaign, and part Molotov cocktail, Deep Lez seeks to map out the connections between the second position feminisms that have sustained radical lesbian politics and the current 'third wave' feminisms that look to unpack many of the concepts upon which those radical politics have been developed. These recent feminisms have set forth a host of important critiques about

radical lesbianisms as they have historically unfolded, and look to provide correctives in this regard. Unfortunately, this is often accomplished through the wholesale dismissal of a radical lesbian practice and identification. Deep Lez was coined to acknowledge the urgent need to develop inclusive libratory feminisms while examining the strategic benefits of maintaining some components of a radical lesbian theory and practice. This project is carefully situated not to simply hold on to history, but rather to examine how we might cull what is useful from lesbian herstories to redefine contemporary urban lesbian (and queer) existence. In so doing, 'lesbian' is resurrected as a potential site of radical identification, rather than one of de-politicized apathy (or worse, shame).

Deep Lez originally began as a cultural project of mine, largely informing my art practice. I make lesbian feminist monsters using abandoned domestic handicraft. This has meant the creation of giant 3D sasquatch ladies and room-size vagina dentatas. The objects and environments that I create are about articulating some of the ideas and imaginings from second-wave feminisms that were so foundational to me, while still remaining committed to an inclusive third wave theory and practice. In a short time, this idea grew beyond my own practice, and took hold among a variety of local and international communities. For example, the language of Deep Lez has been adopted by those at the Michi-

gan Womyn's Music Festival who lobby for trans inclusion, as well as the organizers of Camp Trans, who use an article about Deep Lez in their annual trans solidarity packages. Here, Deep Lez is mobilized to move radical lesbianism and identification with or allegiance to trans communities out of the realm of either/or and into the space of both/and. I also recently received word that a Deep Lez art exhibition is being mounted in San Francisco next year, in which lesbian identification is to be explored as a relevant and strategic site of young queer urban politics. Given the growth of this idea, I am currently undertaking the project of writing a Deep Lez manifesto that begins with this Deep Lez I statement.

Deep Lez is meant to be a point of departure for me to start thinking about my politics and what is important to me and my communities. Deep Lez is meant as to be a macramed conceptual tangle for people to work though how they integrate



art into their politics and how they live their lives and continue to get fired up about ideas. Deep Lez can offer alternative ways of imagining the world and who we are. It is meant to be passed hand-to-hand from crafter to filmmaker to academic to students to teachers to leaders and back again. My wish is that it permeates and also loosens things up.

Deep Lez is not meant to become its own dogma but to encourage thinking about new feminist and dyke strategic positions. Every Deep Lez text, installation, manifesto and potluck offering is different because it is contingent on the contributions and participations of many and also because it is accumulating and discarding as it goes. We can band together through Deep Lez to imagine and realize our way out of this dysfunctional habitat to create new ecologies, new policies and new styles without war, poverty, violence and waste.

Deep Lez is the volunteer, the workshop coordinator,

the curator, the consumer, the first initiated and the instigator - anyone who gets intrigued by this bell-bottomed fat-assed catch all: whether they are dykes or not, they are still Deep Lez.

Signed in solidarity for new kind of sisterhood that isn't based on gender and privilege and a new kind of brotherhood that isn't based on rape and pillage.

Allyson Mitchell is a maximalist artist working predominantly in sculpture, installation, and film. Since 1997, Mitchell has been melding feminism and pop culture to play with contemporary ideas about sexuality, autobiography, and the body, largely through the use of reclaimed textile and abandoned craft.

Her work has exhibited in galleries and festivals across Canada, the US, Europe and East Asia, including the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, the Andy Warhol Museum, and Walker Art Center. In 2009, Mitchell's show Lady Sasquatch will tour galleries across Canada. Deep Lez Film Craft, a program of her films with fellow filmmaker Christina Zeidler, is also currently making its way across North America. She has also performed internationally, most notably with the fat performance troupe Pretty Porky and Pissed Off, as well as publishing both writing and music. Currently, Mitchell is curating a survey of Judy Chicago's textile based work titled When Women Rule the World for the Textile Museum of Canada opening February, 2008.

Mitchell holds a PhD from York University, where she is Assistant Professor in the School of Women's Studies.

You can find more of her work at: allysonmitchell.com and the Feminist Art Base at the Brooklyn Museum http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/allyson_m...



**AN INTERVIEW WITH
CATHERINE OPIE**
Marie-Claire MacPhee

On November 4, 2008, the date of the United States Election that anticipated the victory of Barack Obama, Marie-Claire MacPhee interviewed Catherine Opie. Opie's mid-life retrospective, **Catherine Opie: American Photographer** opened at the Guggenheim Museum in New York on September 26, 2008 and runs until January 7, 2009. For more information about the exhibition see: www.guggenheim.org

I'll start out by asking you how things are looking in the US today?

Well, we'll see. It was really amazing. I live in a predominantly African American neighbourhood I've been here for 6 years, and I've never seen a line at the

polls, but today we had to wait an hour and a half to vote. I think that it's true that we're going to see an unprecedented number of voters out, and that's really exciting.

What's the feeling around who will win, and is there any fear surrounding this election?

Obama will win.

I think the only fear right now is that we all feel so confident that he will win, and we'll be highly disappointed if all of a sudden he doesn't. That exact same thing happened in the first election with Bush and Gore. And to wake up the next morning and see that Bush was elected was a shock, and we've been living in that shock for 8 years as a country now. After experiencing that, I feel like we're in a position of really having the potential for a positive change. We're all hoping for change.

Given the current political reality in the US, and given the history of the work you've done representing queer communities, raising serious questions about the "American Dream" and such, how does it feel to have this really important show at the Guggenheim right now?

My work is not only political, it's personal, and there are also highly aesthetic moments in it. Because of some of the content

of the show, I was really excited to have it up during this historic political campaign as well as after the election.

I hope the show allows people to think in terms of their own notions of representation, and how they begin to relate to ideas of humanity by looking so humbly at people that they might fear, or at certain positions that they might fear. Do they walk away with an increased sense of homophobia or do they walk away with the hope that maybe the world's not actually such a weird place?

Even though I've always been out in my work, I've never really known if that actually provides any possibility of social change in people's minds, or if it is just really important for me within my own community in terms of visibility and representation.

Did you play a key role in selecting all of the images for the show?

Oh completely. The only body of work that I did not select were the pieces from American Cities, which were picked by the curator, Jennifer Blessing. Otherwise, I had models that I worked on in my studio for a year and a half, then we printed everything to scale, and then we hung it. So we knew exactly what the show was going to look like going in to it. It's really important if you have four floors of museum like that for it to be very precise.

After staring at those models for a year and half, how was it to see the real thing?

Oh it was amazing, just mind-boggling actually. It's one of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences. To have a museum give over that much space to you when you're only 47 years old is just phenomenal. Everybody keeps asking me if I have the post-show traumatic syndrome or if I'm depressed, and I'm not at all, I'm still kind of shocked that my work is being viewed by almost 5000 people a day, so there's no room for being depressed in that.

Of your entire body of work, do you think there is a particular series or even a specific photo that you're most well known for?

Probably Self-Portrait (1993) of the cutting on my back. That is definitely the most printed photograph and it's the most iconic. It's a stick figure of two girls holding hands which is cut into my back with a scalpel and it's dripping a little bit of blood. Not a lot blood, but enough for people to want to see it.

Does the popularity of that image (and of your other work) change in various communities; in the queer community vs. the "mainstream" art world?

I don't think so. Actually, that's one thing that has always been surprising about my

work. The art world has always gone along with whatever I'm thinking, whether it be issues of queer identity that I bring forward in different years and times, or by studying American culture and how it's constructed around us, what it looks like, and what it means in relationship to another kind of specificity of identity.

I get dumb questions; I remember in the beginning, everybody would be looking at my portraits and asking "is that a boy or a girl" and I would think, "well, that's not really the point." Or with Self Portrait Cutting or Self Portrait Cutting Pervert people would ask, "Did that hurt?" or "Did you get really drunk before you did that?" And I would answer "No, I didn't get drunk, and yes it hurt, but you transcend through pain." I was explaining SM 101 to people who would just look at me like "what the fuck?"

I read that you made a very intentional shift in your work after that series and specifically after that Self-Portrait. Why?

Yeah, Self Portrait was in the 1995 Whitney Biennial. It was the largest show that I had ever been in and I was heading into a territory of being only identified as "the leather dyke artist", and I had spent my whole life working on, and being very interested in other things. Photographing my own community was something that I decided that I had to do, but it wasn't predominantly

what I was interested in. I did it because it was a very political time and it was a very upsetting time. An enormous number of my friends were dying of AIDS or were HIV positive, and there was an incredible political rift in this country; it was before Clinton got elected, so we had gone from Reagan to Bush Senior and they were completely ignoring the health crisis in the gay community, homophobia was rampant, and it was just a really hard time.

I've always been an out lesbian, and out as part of the leather community, and I felt that it was time to create something that was historical and familial and that dealt with my own ideas of representation of myself and my community.

Before that, I had made a whole body of work about the gentrification of MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, and prior to that I had done a thesis on the construction of master plan communities, so I've always talked about these structures. From American cities to the notion of ice houses and surfers being temporary communities, all of my work definitely surrounds - in a non-linear fashion - ideas of specificity of identity in relation to notions of community. But within that, I don't think that people necessarily have a singular identity; we move through many different chapters of our lives with many ideas about how we are living our lives, or what's happening at any given time.

I shifted back to doing freeways right after

the Whitney Biennial because I thought, "ok, if I don't switch it now I'm going to have a really hard time switching it later".

How was your work that followed that shift received by your audience?

Really well. It allowed me to continue a long dialogue going back and forth between issues that fascinate me, and that go beyond my own queer identity.

In terms of shifts; as someone who came out as a lesbian in the 1980s in San Francisco, can I ask you to talk about some major shifts that you've seen in that community in the last 30 years?

The 1980s in San Francisco were an incredible time. The queer community was just coming out of disco, Harvey Milk and the mayor had just been shot, and the Castro was engaged with being completely out and proud. It was also a highly politicized time; there were marches to raise awareness about El Salvador, and when Jesse Jackson came to speak, there was a large march at the Democratic Convention -- which of course brought an enormous amount of homophobes out who were all saying "You're Against Jesus."

I have black and white photographs of this history because at the time I was a street photographer. I not only photographed the

gay community, but also the financial district of San Francisco. Women were, for the first time, really entering the work force and I was looking at the gendered model of dress and what people were wearing; it was the time of the shoulder padded skirt suit and I was really fascinated with those kinds of things.

I couldn't have asked to move to a better city, but it was hard. We watched the first round of AIDS decimate the community, which resulted in these amazing enlightening moments of feeling an absolutely huge community spirit. In what other city could you - on gay pride at the Folsom Street Fair - walk down the street without your shirt on and have chains wrapped around you? It was so amazing in terms of how you could experiment with your own sexuality in relation to queer identity. But then we watched all the bathhouses get shut down south of Market, and we watched the Castro turn into a place full of mourning.

That really transformed the community in so many ways, and also created a political platform that went beyond the Castro, and those are really important things to remember. Even though Harvey Milk was huge, he didn't create the same kind of platform of activism as the devastation of AIDS in the community. So a lot of different perspectives were formed in relation to that. It was also a really polarizing time between the gay male community and the lesbian community, which had maintained somewhat

of a separatist position from each other up to that point.

Historically, I couldn't have been at a better place for such an amazing 10-15 years of vast transformation. And since then, and the early 90s I have watched so many of my butch dyke friends become men, which is another huge shift in terms of issues of identity.

Do you think that some of these major shifts in the community have affected how your work is viewed?

I would say that my work has shifted because my own personal life has shifted more than my relationship to the community. I am basically married, not legally married because we're going to see what happens today, and I wasn't going to go get married and then have it voted against, it's just too depressing. I know the numbers are really important, but I don't want to go do something that's going to be taken away from me, I've worked too hard in life to not have that experience, the thought of it makes me kind of sick, so I'm only going to do it if it sticks, if it's real.

I think that my life is just different now. I have a family; I'm not just a single dyke wondering around with my Australian Shepherd going from relationship to relationship. I'm in my first long term relationship, and I'm monogamous and doing

things that I have never really done before. And it's nice, but it has settled me in way. When you have a full time tenured teaching position at a research university a full time art career on top of that, and you have a family, you don't have much time for gallivanting around like you once used to. Things just shift and with that, your perceptions shift.

How do you feel about the fact that some people find your Self Portraits (both Cutting and Nursing) shocking?

That's a hard question for me to answer. I've never thought of them as shocking; they just always were what they were. I was always more shocked by people's reaction to them. But I think they're probably hard for some people. A friend was telling me that she took her 20 year old nephew to see the show and he asked "But why, why does a person do that to their body?" and she replied, "That's exactly the question that this artist is exploring". And that is the point: why would you go to the extent of creating such a powerful piece in relation to identity, why would a person do that? After explaining that to him, he got it. But I don't know if that's true across the board. I don't know that a homophobe will walk into the Guggenheim and leave no longer a homophobe. But maybe they'll be thinking more.

What do you think people's reactions are to

being able to see "Pervert" on your chest while you're nursing your baby (in Self Portrait Nursing)?

I think a lot of people don't even notice. I had one really bad comment in Art in America by a critic who put her personal comment in parenthesis. She wrote "the child looks too old to be nursing". It was taken right after his first birthday and he's a tall boy, and I just thought, does he look like he's too old to be nursing because I have "pervert" carved on my chest? What are you really saying here, in parentheses?

I guess a lot of people can't accept the fact that a self proclaimed pervert can actually be a mother who breast feeds her baby, who has chickens, dogs and a family.

Right, because we're not supposed to have children, don't you know that? We're going to do bad things to our children (laughter), like breast-feed them, and make sure that they're allowed to wear tutus if they want to wear tutus. Goddammit, don't you know that he should have a football in his hand!?!

What have people's reactions been to seeing the full show at the Guggenheim – seeing all of these images together?

The feedback from most people has been "wow, what a beautiful show". I haven't

read one scathing review, nor has it been censored. And I thought that there would be a possibility of censorship on this one . It's always been a very curious thing for me that I've never been censored. Chris Ofili can make paintings with dung and they'll get censored. I can have Ron Athey with pearls coming out of his ass and nobody blinks.

Why do you think that is?

I think it's because the viewer is seduced in a certain way. And they also are so referenced (art) historically, that you end up understanding what you are looking at because you know that you've been seeing this style of representation since the 16th Century.

None of the work is over the top. Some people might think that carving pervert on your chest is over the top, but it doesn't push other kinds of buttons. Maybe if I had a nun carving pervert on my chest, that would be the thing: "oh my god, she has a nun...".

It's so great that people can recognize so many aspects of your work.

I think it's really an interesting territory to belong to. I'm not interested in being sensational, I never have been. Pervert is my hardest piece and it was hard for me

as well. I was in a place of incredible sadness in relation to the attempts at trying to normalize the gay and lesbian community that ended up further alienating the leather community. It was shocking to me when that was happening. We're normal, and for other gays and lesbians to adopt the word normal created a further schism of abnormality.

I read an interview that you did where you said that SM was often framed in the language of the abnormal and doing that stripped it of its humanity. You've also said that your goal is not to normalize. Can you talk a bit about that middle ground, about the reality of trying to live outside of that dichotomy of the abnormal and normal?

It's a dichotomy of language that I wish that didn't exist, but how does one exist between those constructed lines of language? It becomes a polarity; yes it's completely normal to decorate a Christmas tree and to make sure your kid has Easter egg hunts and all of that within in the idea of family, but still, people don't believe in the ability of homosexuals to raise healthy families, and that puts me in the position of being abnormal.

And I realize that I'm a really low percentile person these days. Meaning that, I'm part of 4% (or 8%) of the population who are homosexuals in America. I've succeeded in the art world, where 1% gets to do that with

a Masters Degree. I don't believe in God and there are only 4% of people who actually don't believe in God, which is so amazing to me. All of these things could make me abnormal, but I just refuse to think that there is anything abnormal about me.

When one is a compassionate human being and is really, truly, interested in ideas of humanity through a true democracy, then there is nothing abnormal about them. But with my positioning, I am often pushed over that line. I don't want to be perceived as a person who accepts the notion of family values just because I have a family now. Language is a very complicated thing, and that's one of the reasons why I like making photographs; it's another way to engage with the idea of language and history.

There seems to be a significant stream of honesty in relation to humanity and to trying to have conversations about how people are living, can you talk about the importance of that. Back to your Portraits again; you constructed your subjects in very royal positions...

Yeah, with integrity. It's not about body parts. The predominant photography that was being done of the SM community during that period was always about the fracturing of the body, not the whole of the person in relationship to the body.

I really believe in human integrity. I felt

that we were more than a sum of our body parts, and that we were worth more than that on a visual level, and I wanted to create a history of my friends. Not only for myself, but because I was a practicing artist, I was hoping that people would show it. I had no idea that it would launch me into a big career. When I was doing it, I thought, oh fuck, I'm never going to get tenure. Nobody is ever going to hire me, this is it, I'm really shoveling a big pile of dirt over me now. And it was amazing how it worked completely opposite. I always tell my students that whatever they're scared of, or whatever preconceived notions they have in relation to their careers, is everything that they should put aside. In relation to art, you have to make what you're thinking in your head, no matter what you think of the consequences will be.

And that's basically what I did with my friends. Instead of making it all about their body parts, or play parties, or our houses where we all had loft beds with whips hanging down, I wanted to throw them on bright colored backgrounds.

I'm really interested in portraiture. I've been having a great time photographing these high school football kids. I started this project last year and I probably have one more year to go on it. I'm traveling around the country just looking at these young men. I'm not doing it to make fun of masculinity, but to look at everything that gets loaded on these young kids. A lot of them end up

going off to war in Iraq and Afghanistan and what we load on to young men is fascinating to me, in terms of identity. You look at some of them and they don't even fit their uniforms and you know that some of them just don't want to perform that, while others are completely into what that identity encompasses.

I decided recently that the reason I like to make portraits so much, is - as Julie (my partner) often reminds me - I'm always staring at somebody in public and I realized that my photographs allow me to stare for a really long time without being told "you're staring!"

So, why football?

Football is amazing to me, and the high school football field is everywhere you go in this country.

And again, in terms of specificity of identity, I can regionally map out different ideas of identity and of community through high school football, and through the American landscape.

When I'm in South Texas, it's very specific as compared to Alaska, or Ohio, or here in the predominantly African American high school in my neighborhood. It gives me a snapshot of a male component of youth culture at a given time in history. And I just find it really interesting. I grew up in Ohio

where it was football and God, and I was the tomboy who wanted to play with the boys all the time. It's always been a part of my culture to a certain extent, even though I'm not one of those people who watches football on the weekends. That would just not...well, Julie would kick me out of the house (laughter).

But I think that the temporary moments that happen in these spaces are fascinating. Like with ice fishing, with surfers or on a football field, where a temporary community is created and histories are built out of the creation of those identities.

When you provide a person, or a community with a reflection of themselves, not only are you documenting them, but you can also be providing them with a history. Do you see your work in that way?

It's complicated. At the time that I was doing all the portraits of my friends and of the gay and lesbian community, a lot of them didn't like them. A lot of them found it too intense to live with, that's what they would say, "It's really intense Cathy, its such an intense photograph". I'm really interested in this honest thing that comes out of images, and I can't really tell you what that means specifically, but there is something that I look for that I just keep finding, and I think a lot of people have a hard time with what they end up seeing.

My nephew was in the high school football series and he loved it - all of them thought that it was incredible - and there was such vulnerability that came through. And in my work, I'm always so interested in what is iconic, that I create another sense of iconic; a surfer portrait is usually of a gorgeous guy, with the hair, who is really athletic on the waves, but what do you get when you have a regular surfer just standing before you? In a way, it's trying to create more of a realistic history in my mind of how images begin to work.

Can you tell me a bit about what you're working on now? I heard recently about a series called "Girlfriends"...

Girlfriends is a fun body of work; it's a bit of a play on a title of another body of work by the artist Richard Prince who did a series called Girlfriends, but they were all biker chicks, and my girlfriends are all butch dykes. They're both famous and not famous and include: JD Sampson, KD Lang, Kate from the L-word, I think Sam Ronson is going to pose for me, and then a lot of my friends like Pig Pen and Jenny Shimizu (who we call Chicken). So to take all of these butch dykes and then to title it Girlfriends, raises all of these questions - what is a butch dyke? Is a butch dyke really a girlfriend or a boyfriend? It's playing with a lot of things and I'm also just enjoying making portraits again.

That's another really timely series; in terms of looking at a community and recording a community that some would argue is disappearing...butches seem to be a rare breed these days.

Yeah...and I'm also one of those butch on butch lovers.

You are?

Yeah. I'm a butch on butch

Fascinating. You're also a rare breed.

Again, a low percentile.

So is this project coming out of that desire?

I've always dated butches but also have been butch identified. I just wanted to make this, it's new so I don't know how to exactly talk about it yet. They're not even hanging in the studio I've just been shooting; I haven't even lived with them yet.

Is that one of several projects you're working on now?

Yeah, Girlfriends and the high school football series. Then I'm going to go to Italy and photograph in Venice for a month and

do a body of work based on Cannelleto Paintings. I might be doing this weird commission for Hanjin Shipping Lines where I get put on a container ship in Korea and ride it all the way to LA (for 11 days) and photograph well, whatever I photograph. There's always stuff.

Catherine Opie lives and works in Los Angeles. She was born in Sandusky, Ohio in 1961. She received her BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1985, and an MFA from CalArts in 1988. In 2000, Opie was appointed Professor of Fine Art at Yale University, and in 2001 she accepted the position of Professor of Photography at UCLA.

Catherine Opie's photographs include series of portraits and American urban landscapes, ranging in format from large-scale color works to smaller black and white silver gelatin prints. Moving from the territory of the body to the framework of the city, Opie's various photographic series are linked together by a conceptual framework of cultural portraiture.

Catherine Opie has exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally. A mid-career survey of her work, entitled, "Catherine Opie: American Photographer," is on view through January 7, 2009 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Recent solo exhibitions have been organized by the Aldrich Museum in Ridgefield, CT, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, The Saint Louis Art Museum, the Photographers' Gallery in London, and

the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Opie has also exhibited at Regen Projects in Los Angeles, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, SITE Santa Fe, the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva, Switzerland and the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in Germany.

In 2004, Catherine Opie received the Larry Aldrich Award and in 1999 she was the recipient of the Washington University Freund Fellowship. In 1997 she received the Citibank Private Bank Emerging Artist Award. Opie's work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; the Walker Art Center; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Marie-Claire MacPhee is a Concordia University graduate who made the obvious transition from women's studies to carpentry. When she's not learning about sustainable building, she is a freelance researcher and communications coordinator for various NGOs and consulting groups. M-C is the programmer for Dykes on Mykes Radio in Montreal and is an East Coaster who now floats between Quebec, Ontario and Nova Scotia.

*Image (of Opie) photographer: Nicole Belle
<http://homepage.mac.com/csopie/filechute/opie-hatprint-1.tif>*

**PATTY HEARST GETS LAID:
THE SCANDELLES MEET
BRUCE LABRUCE**
Dayna McLeod

Imagine getting kidnapped by sex-kitten lesbians and hot-ass butch dykes, and the Stockholm Syndrome starts to make a hell of a lot of sense. If the very idea gets your pot boiling and you're wondering where to hang out with your most unassuming expression innocently pasted on your face in the hopes of meeting your own personal body snatcher and making this dream come true, check out these clips from Give Piece of Ass a Chance, the third mini-porn is a series produced by Toronto's The Scandelles



for a few tips and tricks on getting nabbed, grabbed and brainwashed by hotties. Renowned for their smart n' sexy full-on theatrical productions that dig deep into sexual and social commentary, The Scandelles have teamed up with fag porn oh-my-God,

Bruce LaBruce in this playful political satire that pokes and prods our cultural obsession with celebutant scandal while sexualizing anti-war and feminist activist groups and activities from the 1970s.

Give Piece of Ass a Chance is directed by LaBruce and features The Scandelles alter egos in a 1972 flashback plot in which a munitions heiress is kidnapped by a sex-terrorist gang who militantly fuck her with anti-war rhetoric and guns, claiming that

later, her kidnapers are recognized by a student in a, 'Women in Consequential but Careless Anti-War Groups' class. Beautifully cut to a soundtrack of memorable oldies, *Give Piece of Ass a Chance* capitalizes on director LaBruce's cult and queercore background whose work includes spectacular alternaporn classics like *No Skin Off My Ass* (1991), *Super 8½* (1995) and *Hustler White* (1996). LaBruce's most recent film, *Otto; or Up with Dead People* (2008) features a young zombie named Otto who



the real terrorist is her weapons-producing father. The Munitions Heiress is slowly won over through brainwashing orgies, gun-sucking blowjobs and good old fashioned cuddling. She joins the group to live happily ever after in Toronto, where, 20 years

embarks on a journey of self-discovery with an underground filmmaker who is trying to complete her epic political-porno-zombie movie that she has been working on for years. LaBruce brings this signature hard-edge punk porn sensibility to *Give Piece*

of Ass a Chance with an incredible eye for composition and a self-reflexive wink to his own politically charged filmmaking practice. The results are sexy, sassy and Scandelle-licious, making *Give Piece of Ass a Chance* the ultimate homage to a collective romanticized activist past complete with unrequited ransom demands, vague pleas for peace, and that free-love spirit that lands us all in the sac with girls, girls, grrls.

For more on The Scandelles, visit
<http://www.thescandelles.com/>
For more on Bruce LaBruce, visit
<http://brucelabruce.com/>

*Dayna McLeod is a video and performance artist who likes to poke and prod feminism, homophobia, and sexually oriented stereotypes with irony, sex toys, and funny business. She has traveled extensively with her performance work, and her videos have played from London Ontario to London England- across Europe, North America, South America, Asia and a few times on TV. She majored in Sculpture in college, Open Media in grad school, and is currently working on a three-part animation with funding from le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec about the trials and tribulations of *Vagina Dentata*. Dayna is a Gemini.*



*For the last 12 years, Nikol Mikus has been working in the field of image-making. After graduating from Concordia University with a BA in Communications, specializing in Film Production, her film, *Have you seen my dog?* (1996), was screened in the New Emerging Filmmakers category of the Montréal World Film Festival.*

She continues to film artistic and corporate videos, as well as photograph dancers, actors, and fashion models within the Montréal community. Currently, Nikol is completing her degree in Commercial Photography at Dawson College. Her photography is conceptual, stylized, and cinematic, focussing on the Editorial Portrait.

www.nikolmikus.com

(Model: Alyson Wishnousky)