Volume 23 Number 2 $5.50 A magazine about issues of art and culture

FUSE MAGAZINE

Earl Miller on JenniCam

Art & Scandal

Can-Asian Nation?

Review of Foodculture

www.fusemagazine.org

PICT

August 11 - October 8, 2000
Curators: Yvonne Force Villereal
& Carmen Zita

John and Lou's 1923 Voyage

October 20, 2000 - January 21, 2001
Curator: Melanie Townsend

The Banff Centre for the Arts

The Walter Phillips Gallery is supported in part by The Canada Council for the Arts and The Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

PICT

August 11 - October 8, 2000

Curators: Yvonne Force Villereal
& Carmen Zita

Curated by Corinna Ghaznavi
September 14 to October 14

DIGITALIZED: INSIDE THE ELECTRONIC DREAM

Trinh Coballe, Karen Eull, Janine Ezard & Andrew Reyes
Curated by Michelle Jacques
October 19 to November 18

FUSE MAGAZINE

Volume 23 Number 2 September 2000

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Cover: *Jennifer Ringley, from her website at www.jennicam.org.*

September 14 to October 29, 2000

Fifteen Minutes:
Michael Buckland, Suzy Lake, Sasha Yungju Lee, Mitch Robertson
publication available

Photo: Suzy Lake as Suzy Spice, 2000

November 2 to December 10, 2000

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Symptoms of Affection
Alexander Irving
September 13 - October 14

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R. Houle, detail, *Zero Hour*

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David Mabb. *Sweet Briar Flower* (Detail), 1999, Paint on Fabric, 160 x 160 cm.

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Glove Study (2), Lisa Levitt

Video Still from Call Waiting by Rodrigue Jean (1998)

Poetic Narratives

Stephen Andrews, Dominique Banoun, Vera Frenkel, Nelson Henricks, Rodrigue Jean, Gunilla Josephson, Allan MacKay, Monique Mounblow, Kate Thomas

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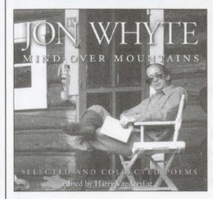

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Shelly Low *WaterWork* image: P. Litherland

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La pêche miraculeuse
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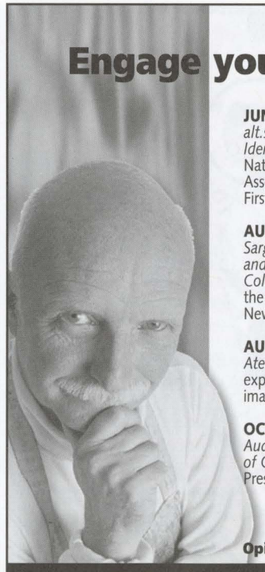

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OAG GAO

In Memoriam

Susan Kealey 1959-2000

Susan Kealey died on Tuesday, May 30, of a stroke.

Now she is flying
More terrible than she ever was, red
Scar in the sky, red comet
Over the engine that killed her—
The mausoleum, the wax house.

Excerpt from *Stings*, a poem by Sylvia Plath, 1961.

I first met Susan through the above excerpt. She had used it as part of an installation entitled "Is There Any Queen at All in It?" at Gallery 76 in 1988. The installation included seven panels of framed text that contained excerpts from the supreme court divorce hearing of Rosa Becker, a woman who had jointly owned a beekeeping farm with her common-law husband. It was a relationship that left Rosa Becker without property, and she ultimately committed suicide. In the centre of the installation was a wooden beehive. I was impressed by this work and wrote about it for *Parachute Magazine*. We became friends at this time and later worked together on the Editorial Board of FUSE.

I liked this work because it was compassionate and critical, two qualities I've always admired in art. It was also richly metaphorical, and I now see a lot of Susan in this piece: she was remarkably hardworking and her life was unfair. But unlike Rosa Becker, Susan would never have given up on life; all the complications of leukemia she suffered from never prevented her from living her life. Susan was a tireless volunteer, and sat on many boards. Even while sick, she was a fixture in the artist-run centre scene, not only as a board member, but as an editor and organizer. At a memorial get-together held for Susan at YYZ Artists' Outlet on June 14, many people talked of her courage in dealing with her illness, but also of their surprise at the extent of her illness. It was difficult to believe that Susan was even sick sometimes, considering her energy level and the optimism she often exuded.

Susan was, more importantly I think for her, also a prolific and dedicated artist. I know that her artwork was very important to her. I remember a story she once told me about meeting with art dealer Carmen Lamanna when she was a student. Thinking her another idealistic young art student, he questioned her commitment to a career in art and Susan replied that she already had two other degrees and had left a well-paid job to return to school to study art. I don't think anyone could doubt her commitment to art. I don't think I have ever known Susan to give up on anything, and this strength carried her throughout various illnesses, including her long struggle with cancer.

Susan, who was diagnosed when she was a teenager, was frail and often sick even back when I first met her. It never seemed to dampen her voracious appetite for life. Her illness gave her empathy for the plight of others and this was often reflected in her art work. Like all friends, we had difficulties and ups and downs. She could be stubborn and obstinate. But she was also a very giving person, and I am grateful to her because I have benefited from that generosity on many occasions. My only regret is that I didn't see much of Susan during the past year. I know that I speak for many people when I say that her presence as a friend and her role in the Toronto art community will be missed for a very long time to come.

—Tom Folland

Egg Curry, Elaine Tin Nyo, performance still, 1997, (ArtLab). Video still: Elaine Tin Nyo.

Editorial

One thing that sets FUSE apart from other magazines covering similar territory is its consistent, continuous attention to issues that get short shrift elsewhere. One case in point is the pleasant overlap between the last issue and this one. Adrienne Lai's essay in vol. 23, no. 1, "Renegotiating the Terms of Inclusion," is a thought-provoking critical analysis of Jin-me Yoon's *A Group of Sixty-Seven*. That piece, well-known and much-written-about, is central to the emerging canon of Asian Canadian art. FUSE, as long-time readers will note, has covered Asian Canadian art over the years, and in a real sense, has been and continues to be an active participant in and interrogator of that very canon-formation.

The past few months have seen the deportation of the vast majority of the Chinese migrants profiled by Larissa Lai in "Asian Invasion vs. The Pristine Nation." This essay—written before the recent deportations generated so much reactionary glee in the letters sections of papers like the *National Post*—provides an interesting counterpoint to that of Adrienne Lai. While last issue's essay takes Asian Canadian art as a given, this issue's contribution illuminates just how tenuous categories such as Asian Canadian are, even this late in the twentieth century. Balancing out this negativity however, is Larissa Lai's detailed exploration of how artists in the Vancouver area came together to battle racism.

Underlying Larissa Lai's essay and the other feature-length essay in this issue, Earl Miller's "Jenni's Web," is the notion of boundaries. Where Lai shows the actual consequences of migration across physical boundaries, Miller takes on the World Wide Web and its often-touted ability to transcend boundaries. Miller uses the case of Jennifer Ringley, the American real-life webcam pioneer, to argue against the idea that the web is a place of freedom. Miller suggests that, in fact, the commercially oriented web is an impediment to freedom and democracy, and perhaps not an ally of art.

This issue marks a change at FUSE. After several years as Managing Editor and in-house designer, Petra Chevrier has handed over the design component of her job to Peter Dako. We'd like to thank Petra for her inspired design work over the years. The staff and editorial board of FUSE are very happy with the results of Peter's first go at designing FUSE, and we hope you like it too. —The Editors

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Agatha Marie Goudine, 100 years old
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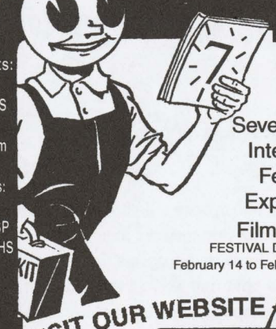

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Art & Scandal
Public Controversy in Contemporary Art

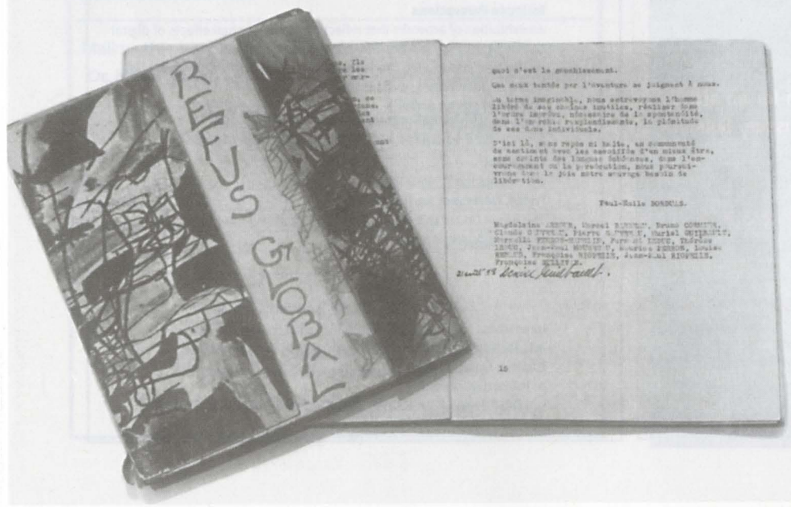
by Kevin Dowler

Fearing political controversy during the Quebec referendum, in 1995 the National Art Gallery, which had purchased Dennis Tourbin's work *La crise d'octobre/Chronology* in 1991, cancelled their exhibition of his fifteen-year painting project about the media and the FLQ crisis. (See Clive Robertson on Tourbin, *FUSE 21*, no. 3, 1998, p.12.)
Silenced Patriot (In Memory of my Father), Dennis Tourbin, 1994, acrylic on canvas, two sections, 182.9 x 243.8 cm. Collection: Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum, Charlottetown, PEI. Photo courtesy Nadia Laham.

Dirty pictures seem to arouse the same responses at the end of this century as they did at its beginning. It appears that to "Épater le bourgeois" is just as effective now as in the past. You would think that, given all the time that has elapsed since the first signs of alienation of artist from society, the public would get a little tired of shock, or that the obscenity of the everyday production of the image industries would inure it to the scandal of modern art.
After all, in the post-Lewinsky phase of international media politics, who gives a shit about paintings, especially ones that are made of shit? Or, is art just crap anyway? It is certainly clear, as recent scandals attest, that art still holds a fascination for many, even if expressed negatively in terms of disgust and moral outrage.

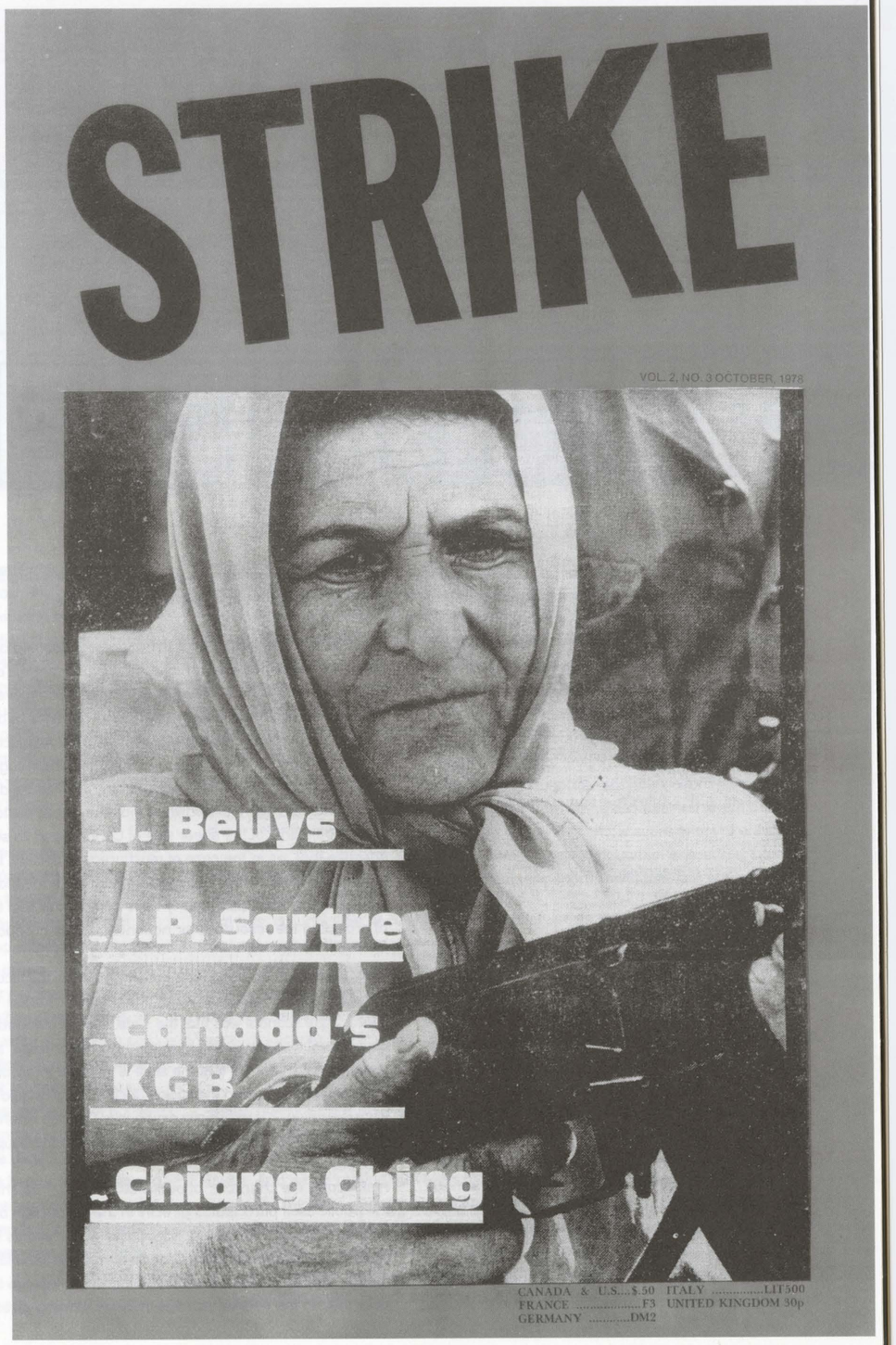
I want to suggest that the character of scandal has changed from that of the turn of the century. At the outset of modernism and the avant-garde, protest was directed at the works of art themselves, and indeed the artworks brought to the forefront the question of what a work of art might actually be. A typical example might be the ways in which the cubists utilized collage techniques to incorporate fragments of everyday life, such as newspapers or matchbook covers, into their works. This as we know had all sorts of interesting consequences both for artists and those who tried, or failed, to grasp the meaning of what confronted them in the name of art. Recent controversies have less to say about the status of works of art, and are more inclined toward attacking the conditions under which art is now made or exhibited.

What has changed in the interim between the beginning and the end of the century is the appearance of public agencies devoted, in various ways, to distributing monies provided by the state for the production, distribution and

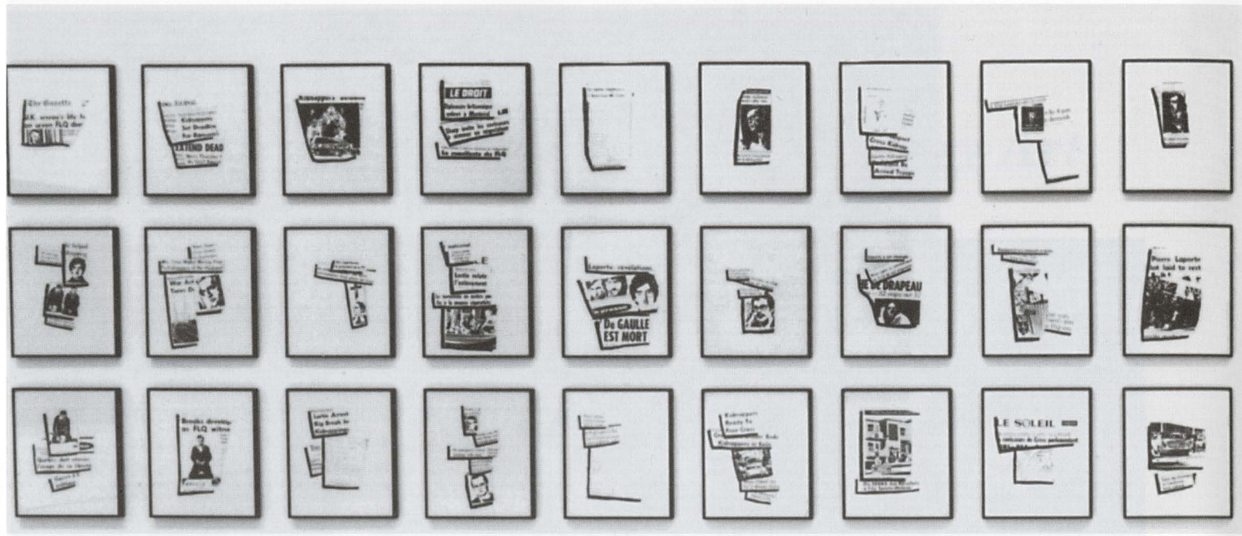


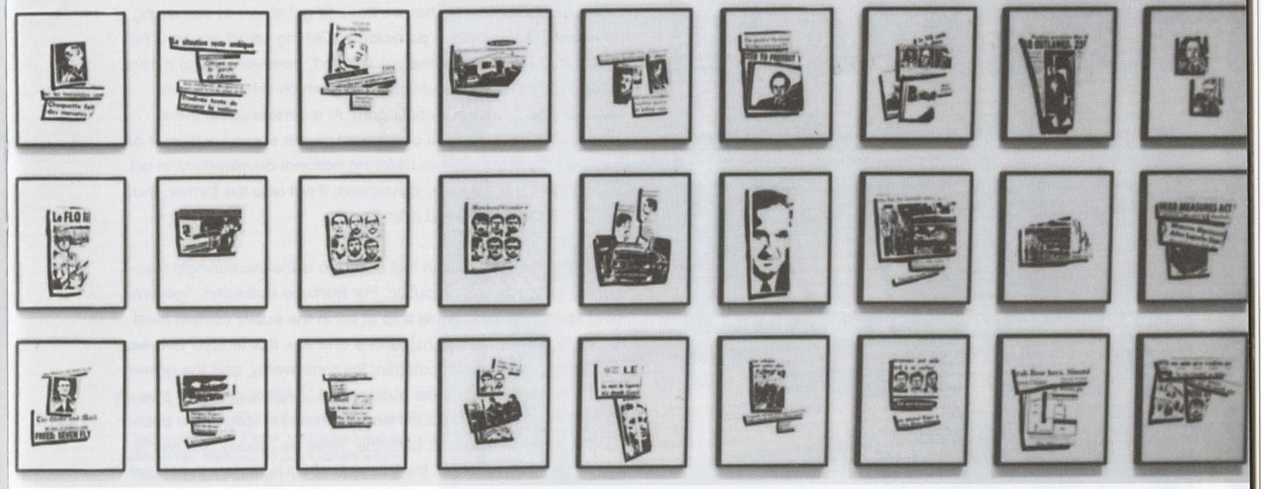
The artist manifesto *Refus global* challenged the dominance of the Roman Catholic church and Maurice Duplessis' government, marking the beginnings of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec. Signed on August 9, 1948, by Paul-Emile Borduas and fourteen other Quebec artists, who later became known as *les automatistes*, *Refus global* galvanized cultural resistance and changed the development of modernist art practices in Canada. As a result, Borduas was dismissed from his teaching position at École du meuble on September 4, 1948, later moving to New York in 1952 and to Paris in 1955, where he remained in exile until his death. (See Ray Ellenwood, *Egregore: A History of the Montreal Automatist Movement*, Toronto, Exile Editions, 1992, pp. 130-162.)

The *Refus global*, with cover watercolour by Jean-Paul Riopelle and last page showing names of signatories. Courtesy Ray Ellenwood.



Cover of *Strike*, vol. 2, no. 3, October 1978. Courtesy York University Archives and Special Collections. Branded as "cultural revolutionaries" and a "threat to humanist values," members of the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication (CEAC) faced a history of RCMP harassment and investigation, documented in this issue of *Strike*, because of their outspoken criticism of the relationship between Canadian art production and state-funded cultural bureaucracy. By July 1978, all government funding of the centre, located at 15 Duncan Street, Toronto, had been withdrawn in reaction to a *Strike* editorial (vol. 2, no. 2, May 1978). It declared CEAC's opposition to "the cultural, economical and political hegemony" of the Liberal state and CEAC's rhetorical appropriation of the Red Brigade's stance: "We support leg shooting/knee capping to accelerate the demise of the old system." (See Dot Tuer on CEAC, *C Magazine*, no. 11, 1986, pp. 22-37.)





La crise d'octobre/Chronology, Dennis Tourbin, 1990, 54 sections of framed ink on paper drawings, 182.9 x 944.9 cm. Collection: National Gallery of Canada. Photo courtesy Nadia Laham.

exhibition of works of art. In Canada, we have seen a proliferation of these agencies in the post–World War II period at all levels of government, starting with the creation of the federally funded Canada Council in 1957. The chief distinction between past and present is the distortion created by the influx of public money into what is essentially a realm of private expression. This in turn has had a profound effect on the character of protest, as it has shifted from consternation with the works of art themselves toward the circumstances under which it becomes possible to make those works. It is not so much that the art is obscene (although it is sometimes that as well), but the fact that it was made with public money, which is scandalous.

There are a number of reasons why the state has come to take up a significant role in cultural production in general. Modern (as distinct from modernist) art is essentially the creature of what we have come to call the bourgeoisie. With the coalescence of their political values in the form of nation-states, *they* sought to institutionalize culture in the public realm as a necessary component of individual development and as a prerequisite for participation as citizens in the democratic state. Thus were born museums in which national collections of works of art were made freely available for all, regardless of economic or social status. Exposure to culture in general, and works of art in particular, was thus seen as an essential dimension of national development, and therefore the state had a legitimate role in providing the resources necessary to ensure that citizens had the opportunity to ingest the civilizing values represented in works of art.

In Canada, the question of national prestige loomed as large as it did in other states. For instance, the condition of the national art collection was considered a scandal for much of this century, until it finally moved into the recently built National Gallery. More important was the absence of a significant amount of cultural production, notably in the visual arts. Also scandalous, then, was the lack of indigenous development in the arts, which suggested that Canada was underdeveloped as a whole. Historically, this has held true in virtually all areas of national life, and has spawned massive public sector expansion to overcome the impediments of the sheer size of Canada and its small population. It is no surprise that, as in the case of most areas of society, the arts too would come to be dependent on the public purse. Indeed, if the Massey Commission Report of 1951 is any indication, many were demanding that the state take up the task of providing the resources for national cultural production.

What is peculiar in all of this is the way in which the locus of the scandal, although still the Canadian state, has become inverted. For the first half of this century, the scandal was that the state was not involved in art and culture, with a consequent loss of national and international prestige. In the second half of this century, the scandal is that the state is involved in art and culture. It is curious that dispositions toward the social function of art should undergo such radical transformation. It is especially ominous in Canada where circumstances are such that art can only be successfully produced with the support of state agencies.

Historically, the character of public controversy has changed to the degree that the public itself participates directly in the production of the works they find offensive. Since World War II, successive governments in Canada have encouraged the production of art as a form of national development, utilizing the unique powers of redistribution of income available to them to accomplish this objective. To the degree that this involves forms of direct and indirect taxation, it can be argued that citizens pay for the works that they disdain. In the past, the avant-garde always sought solidarity with the exceptional, that is, through the formation of a narrow public to which it could appeal. However, as the state now takes a central role in underwriting the cost of production, distribution and exhibition of works of art, that narrow public widens to include virtually all citizens. The question that arises, not surprisingly, is why should they, or we, pay for things we don't like?

One of the conventional responses to this question would make a case for the benefits that accrue to a polis through the production of the very things that point to human values that reside outside of economic activities. Along the lines of what I suggested above, the importance of culture as the repository of these values is such that the state, on behalf of its citizens, is willing to compensate for what economists call market failure. In a situation of market failure, where there is insufficient private demand for certain goods, some items—called merit goods—are considered to be of enough value to the public as a whole that the state is willing to bear their costs. This has been true, in Canada at least, with regard to the production of works of art. A weak domestic market, coupled with national strategic objectives, has led to state intervention in this area.

The problem is that engaging with the products of non-economic, non-productive labour (works of art, that is) seems increasingly difficult, since it is our own productive labour which makes this possible under present conditions. In other words, we work to produce time as a surplus that others consume in the production, and contemplation, of works of art. At root then, the scandal is not so much with the problem the works themselves represent, but rather what they represent in terms of the social system and the production of time. With a market society, non-productive time is only possible as a surplus, and of course it is no surprise that culture has become the domain of the bourgeois, in the classic sense of owners of capital, whose surplus value can be realised in the power to purchase time. It is surplus value, as time, which makes modern culture possible.

With respect to the idea of time, artists thus hold a privileged position in society, especially when everyone else is asked to pay for it. There is a fragile social bond in place that has, up until now, secured that position for artists on the basis of a net benefit that outweighed the extra costs imposed on society as a whole. The evidence of the fragility of that bond is contained in the persistent attacks that have been made upon it. The increase in the frequency of scandal, coupled with recent neo-liberal tendencies in government, have put tremendous strain on that arrangement. In turn, converting *gold into shit* (instead of the other way around) is bound to raise the ante in a provocative way.

This is not, however, an argument against the public funding of art, nor does it suggest a retreat from controversial practices. Rather, I wish to point to the peculiar and historically contingent conditions under which much art, especially in Canada, is made. And it is to remind ourselves that making art does involve risks. This is especially the case with public funding, which is neither a right nor an entitlement. Appeals to threats to free speech or censorship as the outcomes of the withdrawal of public monies, as we have seen in many recent cases, are weak arguments. The price of autonomy, as the avant-gardes realized, would be paid for by a complete severing of the relationship between work and world; that is precisely what they were

La crise d'octobre/Chronology (detail), Dennis Tourbin, 1990.
Photo courtesy Nadia Laham.

protesting against. It would be better, in my mind, to see scandal as an indicator of the effect art can have on everyday life, and accept that the price of controversy will be social criticism.

It is clear, however, that such social criticism cannot be countered with the discourses of art itself. As Rosalyn Deutsche points out, "traditional art-historical paradigms cannot explicate the social functions of public art—past or present—since they remain committed to idealist assumptions that work to obscure those functions"; aesthetic discourses "are generally formulated with an inadequate knowledge of urban politics."[1] The answer to that, as Sue Ditta has recently written, is that we have to get smart at managing the press and ambitious politicians.[2] Getting smart requires not simply that we reiterate the value of art, however; it also means recognizing that the conditions under which art is made are mutable and historically contingent. At a certain point, there appeared to be a general agreement on the social function of art and the role of the state in fostering national development in art and culture. It is the latter consensus, if not also the former, that seems to have unravelled over time.

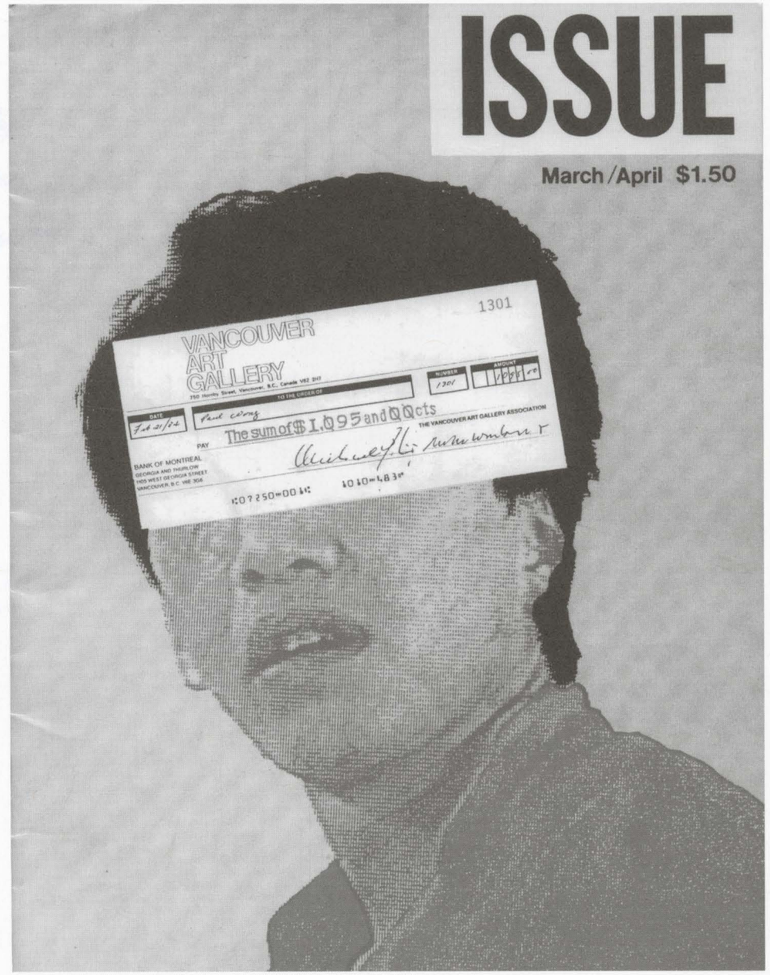
Particularly problematic in this scenario is the increasingly fragmented character of the public. For Barbara Hoffmann, "government sponsorship or ownership of art in the public context must reconcile, through state institutions and law, this tension between art's subjectivity with its potential for controversy, and the government's need to promote the public good."[3] Although this is true as far as it goes, it overlooks the way in which the idea of the public good is ever more difficult to define. What we quickly discover is that those who represent the interests of art have to compete with others in the public sphere for resources, as well as contend with the demand that art too be somehow productive and lead to some tangible material return on investment.

As we have seen in the recent shivers in the funding agencies, with their attempts to reconcile excellence with cultural diversity, the tension is increasingly palpable. This is the result of the double character of controversy: not only the problem with the work of art, but also with the fracturing of what constitutes the "public good." Cultural agencies, mediating between and serving government and their constituencies, are locked in a vise grip between competing interests marked by increasing fragmentation both above and below. The conditions are thus increasingly complex and cannot be met with simple calls for the reassertion of the autonomy of art, and by implication, the funding that assures that autonomy. Freedom of expression, as we know, is not the same as free access to the means of expression. It is not sufficient to assume that some sort of communicative rationality will prevail; the disjunction between the sphere of aesthetics and that of social values has so far prevented any communication at all. This is the byproduct of the persistent difficulty in effecting a transformation of aesthetics into politics, a relatively unsuccessful transition so far.

That the state has failed overall in restructuring its participation in the arts does not necessarily mean that the current strategies used to defend cultural subsidy can be considered effective. In Canada, the absence of private interests has compelled the state in the past to intervene in the interests of the nation; indeed, the emergence of Canadian culture is predicated on state structures organized to support the development and maintenance of culture. The erosion of the cultural funding and policy apparatus —which is symptomatic of the potential devolution of state participation in all areas of Canadian life—would precipitate a fundamental and profoundly alien reorganization of the relations between the Canadian state and its citizens. If Canada is a product of state-created infrastructures, the withering away of those infrastructures in the cultural sphere would imply the withering away of Canadian culture as well.

We cannot ignore the deep entwinement of politics and culture in Canada, and we require an equally politicized discourse of art, in which the loss of autonomy of the aesthetic realm is the price that must be paid for the creation of a discourse of art and culture that, rather than being committed to a set of weak idealist presumptions, is responsive to the exigencies of political and social situations. If the art is "dirty," so too must its accompanying aesthetic discourse be dirty in order to be effective in the political realm.

Kevin Dowler currently teaches in the communications studies program at York University.

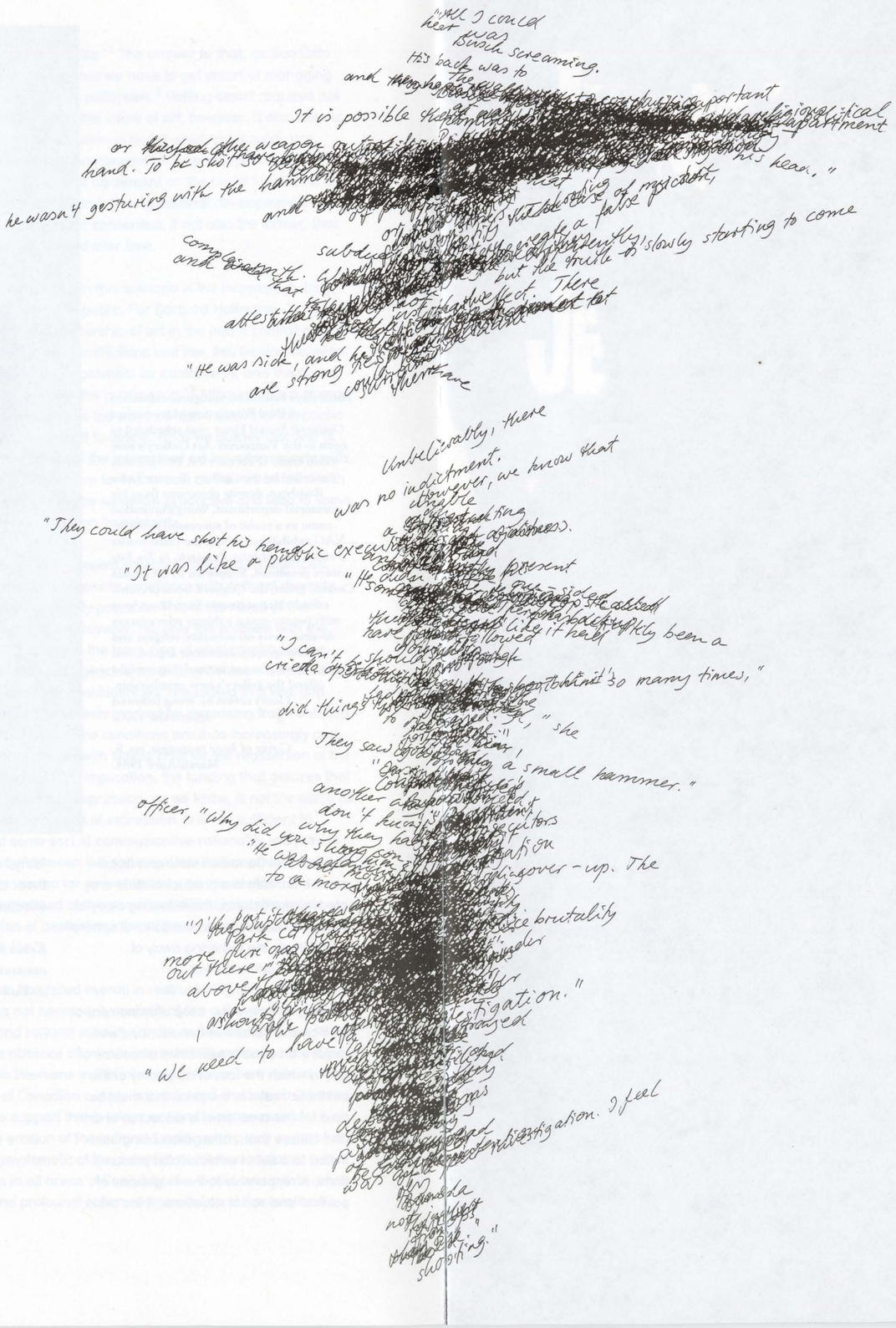


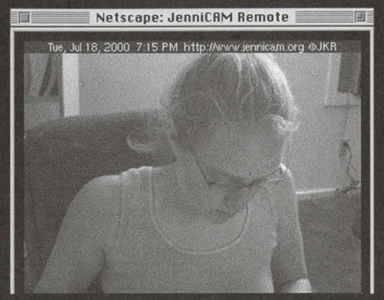
Three days before the inaugural exhibition of Paul Wong's new video project *Confused: Sexual Views* was scheduled to open in the Vancouver Art Gallery's new video space (February 24, 1984), it was cancelled by then gallery director Luke Rombout, despite objections from his curatorial department. Wong's invitation came as a result of successful previous VAG exhibitions, where the video works *Prime Cuts*, *Murder Research*, *In Ten Sity* were presented. Supported by a Canada Council grant, the *Confused* work presents edited video segments from interviews with twenty-seven subjects who express diverse views on sexuality, religion and pornography. Rombout argued that Wong's work was not art and that it might offend the gallery's new membership. Court action by Wong followed against the VAG.

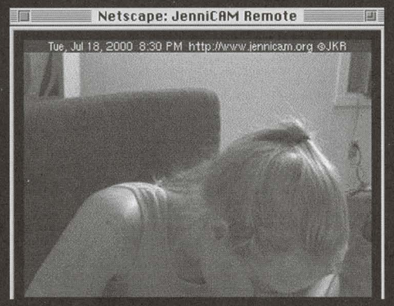
Cover of *Issue* magazine, no. 5, March/April 1984.

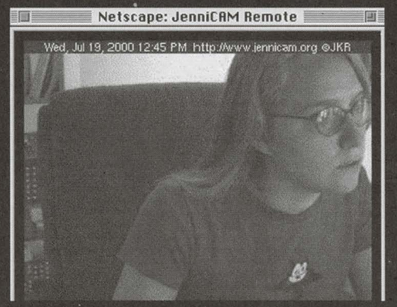
Notes

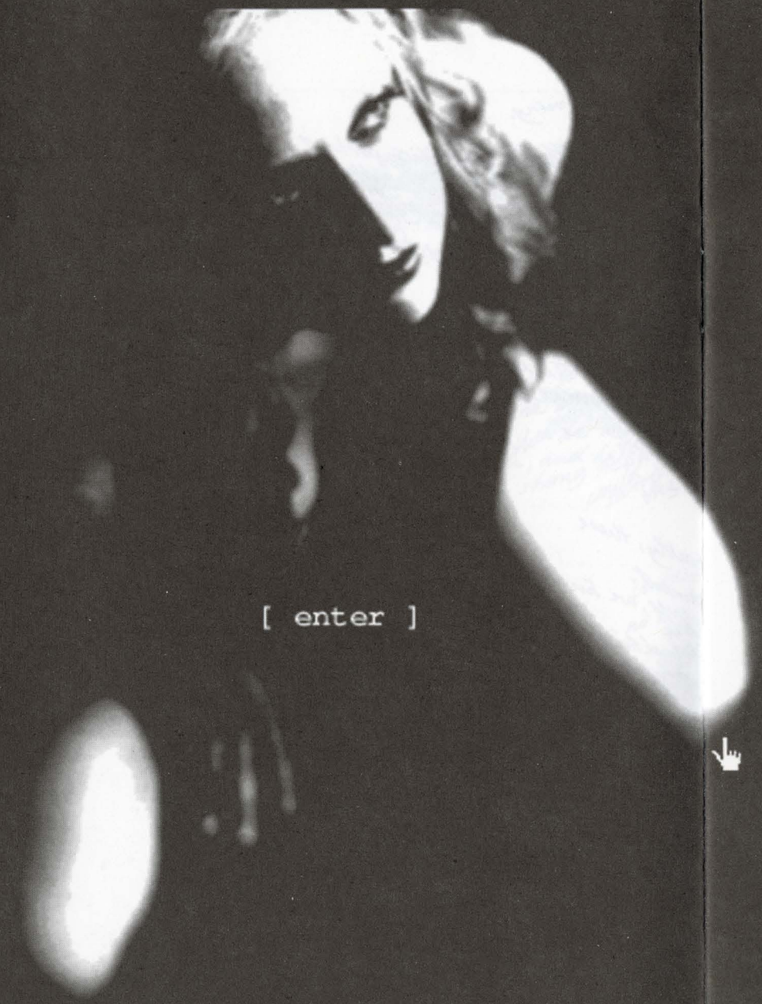
1. Rosalyn Deutsche, "Public Art and its Uses," in Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy, Harriet Senie and Sally Webster, eds. (New York: HarperCollins Books, 1992), p. 158.
2. Sue Ditta, "The Summer of the Suiciding Nuns," in *Arousing Sensation: A Case Study of Controversy Surrounding Art and the Erotic*, Sylvie Gilbert, ed. (Banff: Banff Centre Press, 1999), p. 113.
3. Barbara Hoffman, "Law for Art's Sake in the Public Realm," in *Art and the Public Sphere*, W.T.J. Mitchell, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), p. 113.











Since the advent of the Internet age, frequent techno-utopian creditings to a virtual kind of space have been made in technology media like *Wired* and *Mondo 2000*, using William Gibson's term, "cyberspace." This space has too often been considered to be free of both the physical and mental constrictions of Cartesian space. It is assumed, first, that the restrictive body would disappear in virtual space, and then, as technology advanced, that the virtual would become undifferentiated from the real.

Many other critics and theorists, however, have seen this new freedom as a ruse. Appropriately so. The Internet is not a free space; rather, it is one regulated by interests, primarily corporate, masculine and government. It is from this critical angle that it is best to consider art on the Internet, notably the Internet's graphic interface, the World Wide Web (WWW).

A noteworthy part of this interface from which to challenge notions of a utopian cyberspace is webcam technology. A webcam is a video camera that feeds live to the Internet. A picture from the video camera is captured by the computer and then displayed. Also, a live stream can be sent out. Because of this, people can see private or public places on web pages from a remote location.

by Earl Miller

JENNI'S WEB: JENNICAM, TECHNO-FILTERS, AND THE BOYS CLUB

The webcam, therefore, offers the promise of merging private and public space in what could be a critique of how capitalism has constructed boundaries between the two. But what problematizes this idealistic vision is the fact that the private space visible on the World Wide Web is not the private space of real life. Private space is altered when viewed through the filter of the Internet's intrinsic biases.

The first well-known webcam site, a zen-like live picture of an aquarium, appeared not too long after the advent of the World Wide Web. Then came skylines and, naturally, images of webcam users themselves.

Now numerous webcams are available. They may conveniently be grouped into three categories. First, there are commercial cams; these are primarily pornographic. While usually pay-per-view sites, they can be free if supported by advertisers. In addition to pornographic webcams, there are commercial webcam businesses that have set up for promotional purposes: a webcam of a bed and breakfast, for example. Finally, like the first webcams to come out, are webcams that are actually fascinating for their banality. They depict, say, one fish or a fixed view of Venice beach. Some of these dull images are deliberately made to be so; others that are not can have a cult status among net users fascinated with projecting onto them a post-Seinfeld sense of irony.

The true webcam revolution began in 1995, when Jennifer Ringley, a Pennsylvania art student attending Dickinson College, moved the notion of webcam beyond a basic still image, a type of image fascinating only

All JenniCam frame grabs and photographs of Jennifer Ringley from www.jennicam.org. Courtesy of JenniCam.

because one could see anything live at a distance on a computer. She instead offered JenniCam, an uncensored live feed from her student apartment, and later, from the bedroom/office of her New York City apartment. A real life precursor to those two predictable Hollywood narratives telling of media-controlled lives, "The Truman Show" and "Ed TV," Ringley offered a homespun, grassroots "drama" centering on a real person's life. "The concept of the cam is to show whatever is going on naturally," she says. "Essentially, the cam has been there long enough that now I ignore it."[1]

Having started the project with a few friends as her audience, she likely had little expectation of the celebrity status she would soon obtain. She in fact had become famous, not only on the Internet, becoming, as her fans called her, "The Queen of Cyberspace," but in the mainstream press and talk-show circuit. It didn't take long for her site to become astoundingly popular, reaching (in 1997) a total of twenty million hits a day. Jenni became a folk hero, an average person brought to celebrity, both a symbol of self-empowerment by way of the cyber order and Warhol's fifteen-minute superstar prediction.

The first of its kind and always having had solid fan support, the JenniCam site remains the best known of what are now numerous other "real life" cams. In both JenniCam and these other sites, guests and members of the respective Web sites can not only look in, but also get the sense they are "interacting" with someone's private life. Because the viewer cannot, of course, see the other observers of her life, an illusory feeling of one-to-one intimacy is constructed. Adding to the personal feeling, Ringley leaves short notes to her fans, saying, for instance, that she's gone out shopping.

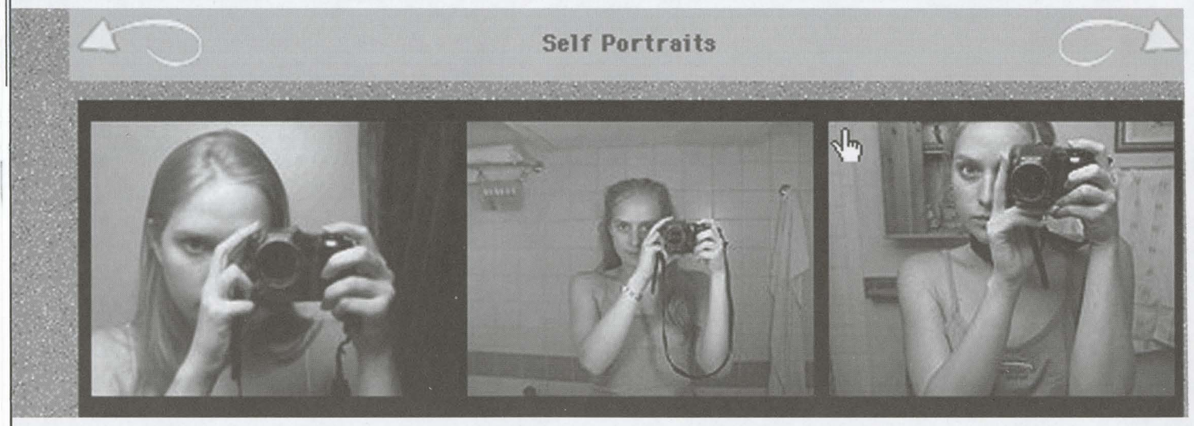
At most times, the photos are ordinary; pictures of Jenni working at her computer or lying on the couch are the norm. More important in keeping the viewer hooked than one-on-one interaction is this voyeuristic aspect of the cam. It overtakes and fetishizes the usually banal stream of imagery on JenniCam. However, Ringley, noting that nudity only occurs occasionally, makes it clear she does not think her site constitutes pornography.

Indeed, it takes considerable time and effort, hours and hours of being connected, to see sexual content. What instead transpires is an "ordinary life" narrative that can be addictive to some because it is driven by a rarely fulfilled hope for sexual imagery. For instance, Josh Wilner of Florida says that the "first night I saw her, she was sitting topless at the computer. That was, I guess, what had first hooked me on it."[2] Yet Jenni denies her site is framed by a sexual context; she says it is about reality:

> *Yes, my site contains nudity from time to time. Real life contains nudity. Yes, it contains sexual material from time to time. Real life contains sexual material. However, this is not a site about nudity and sexual material. It is a site about real life.*[3]

If, as Ringley believes, her site does indeed show real life, it seems the theoretical underpinnings of her project centre on a radical attempt to make private reality public. To some, she has demonstrated that individuals are able to regulate privacy, take it into their hands and redefine private space past bourgeois notions of autonomy and propriety. This is certainly commendable to those seeking a radical challenge to the capitalist privatization of space.

Her webcam appears to question the private ownership of space—on the surface. However, it is worth considering that of the approximately 5,500 people who are JenniCam "subscribers" or members, paying $15 per year (1997 figures) simply to receive updated images more often than

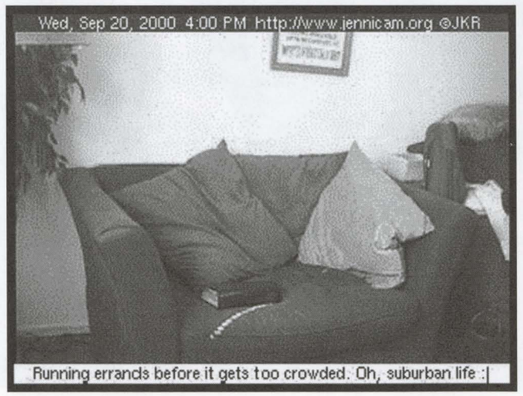


those making non-paying hits on the site, there are about 75 men for every woman. This imbalance makes it clear that her "project" is not about private reality made public but a public representation of it biased by a masculine framework.

Moreover, to break down the usual private/public split, the traditional notion of domestic privacy must change. Yet Ringley doesn't believe it has: "I don't feel I'm giving up my privacy. Just because people can see me doesn't mean it affects me—I'm still alone in my room, no matter what." Such a statement pleads for a clichéd media analysis noting how Generation X is so inundated by media culture they don't know the difference between private and public.

A more accurate explanation is that webcam is a particularly detached medium. It is easy for the subject of a live webcam to forget she actually is the subject, when those watching her, even if they number in the millions, cannot be seen. On the other hand, the subject of this cam is very clear to the viewer in front of the computer who imagines he (more likely than she) is involved with a stranger's life—a great fantasy if one is home alone, bored and perhaps masturbating.

If her private space has not been liberated, if instead her daily life has been brokered as a commodity for voyeurs, has Jennifer Ringley, despite this, managed to radicalize public space in a way not possible in pre-Internet days? If so, she will have redeemed herself as an innovator.



Cyberspace, however, remains separate from the real because, again, online "public" space is ruled by the economically private space of masculine, corporate and mass media interests. Due to pretenses of freedom and lawlessness, the Internet's filtering of public space is simply more invisible than more established forms of communication.

The web is still most commonly used to peddle the masculine-dominated world of porno. Adding to the pornography patriarchy is an encompassing and certainly sanitizing corporate takeover of the web due to the onslaught of e-commerce. This is equally unsettling.

Such controlling interests on the web problematize JenniCam as a liberator of public space, a democratizer of the Internet. Her life shown on the Internet is, first of all, a filtered reality, since her private space does not reach the public; it reaches the Internet. This electronic space that her private space is opening to is far from democratic and, therefore, is not truly public.

While Jenni is taking her own route autonomous of corporate interest, and, to many of her fans, empowering herself with technology by reaching celebrity status simply by being her plain, ordinary self, she is still doing this in the frame of big business and the media. Her webcam site performs no critical function other than simply not belonging to such private orders.

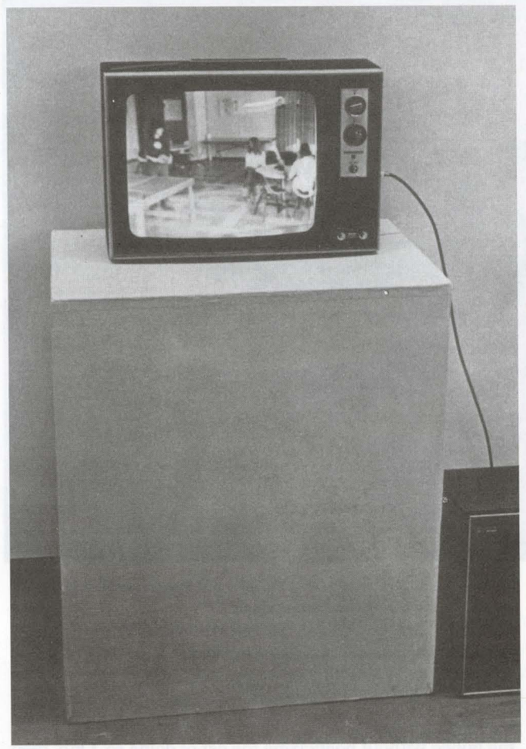
For this reason, her making the private public online does not involve progressive "politicizing of the personal," as went the rallying cry of 1960s and 1970s American feminism, but the regressive politicizing of Jenni's private space by surrounding "public" space. Consequently, webcam, despite offering nearly utopian redefinitions of the public/private boundary, has failed to actualize them.

But if this technological filter is pierced, opened, and cyberspace democratized, JenniCam could indeed merge art (representation) and life. However, claiming Internet technology as transparent is, to date, still utopian. Removing the barriers between life and representation is not just a failed goal of one "Internet Queen," but a utopian techno-dream that is the primary myth of cyberspace. This myth bases itself on the false assumption that as technology becomes more and more advanced, it simultaneously becomes more transparent. The hype echoing around virtual reality several years ago defines this inaccurate belief.

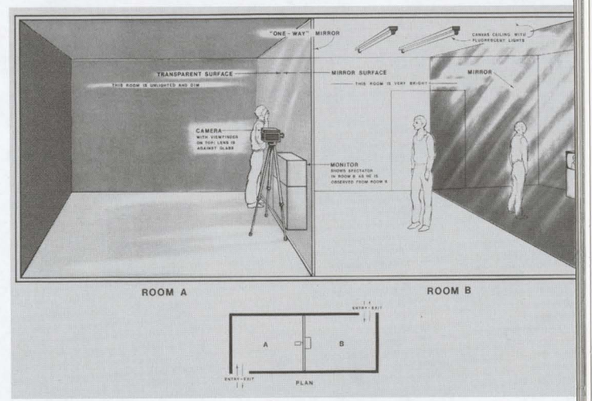
Such a utopia where the represented is equivalent to the real is, significantly, the same as the goal of the contemporary art of the twentieth century, beginning with Duchamp, that sought to break down the barrier between art and life. Indeed, when first hitting on it, the JenniCam site can easily recall much art of the seventies, the performance, film and video art of a conceptual bent that attempts to break down private/public boundaries, connecting the everyday and the real by process rather than product.

In light of webcam projects such as JenniCam, it is worth analyzing works of art that have acted as precursors to webcam, and that have been more successful in attaining the lofty ambitions of JenniCam. Since a plethora of work has attempted to bring art to reality, it is worth narrowing this field down by finding work sharing other similarities with Ringley's site.

It would be relevant to look at early video art to compare with current webcam projects. Firstly, webcam is a form of video; secondly, webcam projects such as JenniCam recall the kind of structuralist formalism in video of the early '70s. This formalism came as a result of video artists from this time responding to new technology (the Portapack), just as Jenni has to webcam. Further, both of these media have a certain appeal to artists because of their accessibility and possibility of distribution (even more so in the case of webcam, of course).



Monitor Display from the installation *Yesterday/today*, Dan Graham, 1975.
Courtesy: Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.



Installation schematic for *Two Viewing Rooms*, Dan Graham, 1975.
Courtesy: Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

To further narrow things down, it would be worthwhile to analyze video whose formal experimentation shares a similar (albeit comparatively low-technological) frame of reference to JenniCam, specifically a camera sent out to a remote location. Among the pieces best known for exploring the remote access possibilities of video to raise public/private issues are Dan Graham's installations from the early and mid-'70s. Two in particular, *Two Viewing Rooms* (1975) and *Yesterday/today* (1975), are most appropriate not only for comparison, since these cogently considered a public/private discourse, which is, of course, relevant to JenniCam, but also for the critical edge Graham's work has over Ringley's project.

The video installation *Two Viewing Rooms* demonstrates how surveillance technology can change privacy codes. The installation area comprises two rooms, the first containing a camera placed at eye level pointing to the second room, against and facing a transparent one-way glass window. Because of the one-way glass, the camera cannot be seen in the second room; a viewer in the first room may secretly watch gallery-goers in the second room not only through the glass but through the camera viewfinder. Here, Graham implies that video is capable of invading as opposed to liberating privacy, noting, "the widespread use of video surveillance cameras involves similar 'moral'/legal issues,"[4] to the ones actually raised in his piece. Since the time of this piece, however, video surveillance technology has been on the rise. With webcams and other new devices that have potential for surveillance and personal invasion, privacy has been further broken down. Society, in turn, has become out of necessity accustomed to such personal scrutiny. Similarly with JenniCam, the

webcam, although not hidden, is something Ringley is apparently no longer conscious of. It is as if she, becoming a naively willing participant, has adjusted to surveillance rather than liberated herself by opening up traditional private/public, home/society boundaries.

Graham further considers public/private matters in *Yesterday/today*, in which a video monitor in a public space displays a real-time view of a second, nearby room. A version of this installation was shown in the John Gibson Gallery, where the public exhibition area displayed a monitor showing the adjacent semi-private gallery director's office. The visual scene on the monitor is real time, but the audio is a playback of sounds recorded in the same office a day prior at exactly the same time of day. Viewers' sense of time is consequently altered, suggesting the video is not documentary, but footage subtly manipulated by the technological arena it is presented in. This cautionary note therefore acknowledges how technological filters can intervene in the representation of the real.

Student lounge used for surveillance video and sound recording in the installation *Yesterday/today*, Dan Graham, 1975.
Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, September-October, 1975.
Courtesy: Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

This office, where gallery business takes place, as opposed to the purely public exhibition space, where art exhibitions including Graham's video are displayed, is revealed. In doing so, Graham points out the distinction between what goes undisclosed in the public gallery space and the hidden economic structure underlying it.

Graham's piece demonstrates how new technology has made it possible to break down the public/private barrier by acknowledging how private space is actually corrupted and commodified by the economic context of the commercial gallery. Opening up space to raise awareness of this economic filter to the public is the first step to democratizing the space it surrounds and controls. A similarly serious as well as potentially democratizing critique of the World Wide Web by JenniCam could have occurred had it been acknowledged that the technological filter it is seen through is, like the gallery, commodified space. What is needed in efforts such as hers is, if not to temporarily reverse, to at least draw attention to online interference, acknowledging that electronic space is a closed-off space that does not equate to democracy.

Webcams will remain constrictive of privacy as long as those contributing to it continue to open up the private to the public without politicizing the act of doing so. Only then, by disclosing inequities on the Internet, may private space be liberated, untainted by the surrounding technological field. Then, the personal can indeed become politicized, as opposed to acting as an agent for the status quo. There are artists' works, certainly not as popular, well distributed or commercially viable as JenniCam, which employ webcam to present such discourses. An excellent example is Nell Tenhaaf's piece *Neonudism* (1997). (See FUSE 23, no. 1, pp. 31-32). *Neonudism* encourages viewer interaction in online voyeurism in a chatroom situation. The initial part of the piece is what Tenhaaf refers to as artistic teledelegation, which means that the screen delegates in a digital movie, which is also seen projected in the performance space. Three women—Gina, Gloria and Sue—talk intimately about how it would be desirable, a turn-on, to engage in exhibiting/watching on camera, consequently inviting viewers into online nudity. The screen then switches to the next part, a "CU-SeeMe session" where this actually occurs. The situation is an Internet adult chatroom configuration where strangers or near-strangers meet and type dirty while mutually masturbating, or as is much too often said, have cyber-sex. In this chatroom, CU-SeeMe technology is available, which means that *Neonudism* participants can see and be seen by those they are chatting with (unlike webcams, CU-SeeMe offers two-way viewing). Part of the reasoning behind the title of the piece becomes clear at this point.

Most chatters are men competing to converse with a minority of women. Yet the "delegates" in Tenhaaf's piece who initiate the interaction in the first place by discussing voyeurism are women.

Here, the problems visible in JenniCam are solved by the presentation of a positive, empowering opposite to the masculine, technological filter webcams are typically seen through. This strategy is in many ways comparable to the way artists such as Graham critiqued gallery space because it acknowledges the non-public, non-discrete nature of its domain.

It is especially important to keep in mind current artists such as Tenhaaf, who work in a society of fingerprint cards and retina scans that can easily be called post-private. In such a society artists and others must work at carving out small democratic spaces. If they don't, technological space will remain entirely in the hands of private interests.

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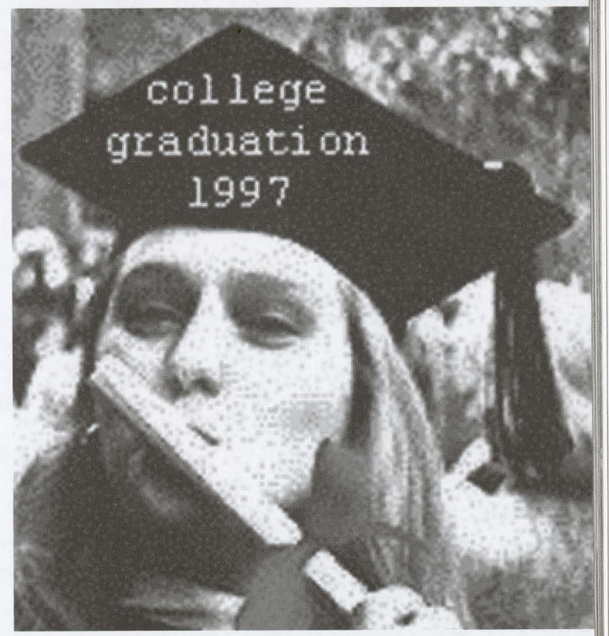
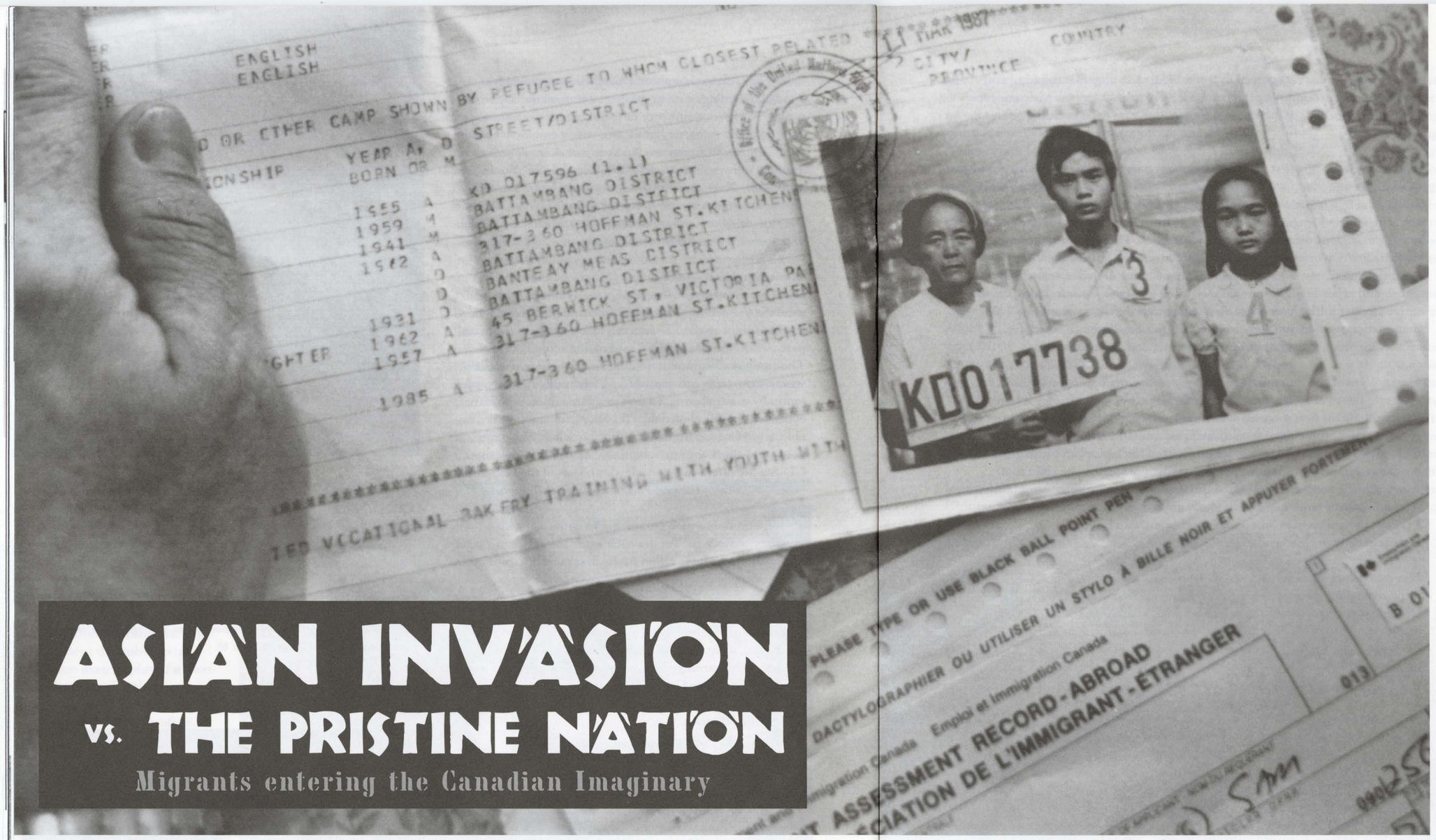


Notes

1. Jennifer Ringley. "Frequently Asked Questions," http://www.jennicam.org.
2. Josh Wilner, quoted in Barbara Hagenbaugh, "Woman puts herself and her apartment live on Internet," (Reuters Information Service, 1997), http://news.cnet.com.
3. Ringley, *op. cit.*
4. Dan Graham, *Video–Architecture–Television* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1979), p. 65.

ASIAN INVASION vs. THE PRISTINE NATION

Migrants entering the Canadian Imaginary



Still from *Who Gets In?*, Barry Greenwald, 1989, 16mm, 52:22 min.
Courtesy National Film Board of Canada.

THE DARE FORUM

In response to the arrival of the migrants and in response to government, media and public racism, a group called DARE—Direct Action against Refugee Exploitation—formed last fall. While it concerns itself with many issues surrounding the arrival of the migrants and the mainstream backlash, DARE is specifically focused on the needs and concerns of the women. Another organization, the Vancouver Association of Chinese Canadians, which has been in existence for eight years, has also taken up the issue and concerns itself with the problems of men and women migrants, as well as focusing on media response. Two of the larger public actions taken by DARE suggest an alternative analysis of the situation to that provided by the mainstream media.

BY LARISSA LAI

The first of these actions was a public forum that took place on October 20, 1999, at the Heritage Hall on Vancouver's Main Street. At the time that this forum took place, the most pressing issues for DARE were that the migrants were being detained on the basis of a group profile, and that their refugee cases were being auctioned off by the Legal Services Society of British Columbia in blocks of twenty-five to the lowest-bidding lawyers, rather than being taken up on a case-by-case basis with the interests of the migrants as a

Recent History

In the summer and fall of 1999, four boats from the Chinese province of Fujian arrived off the coast of British Columbia carrying approximately 600 people. While their arrival is part of an ongoing migration history that has existed for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years, this arrival was framed with remarkable hysteria by the Canadian government and mainstream media, fuelled by conservatively constructed public opinion. Some of the worst and most persistent fantasies of race that have existed since the advent of colonialism surfaced within this context. None of them were new or interesting. In fact much of the media coverage was strikingly similar in its positioning to that which took place earlier this century around the influx of Chinese labour to construct the railroads. The white fantasy of yellow hordes invading a pristine Canadian landscape appeared with little variation from its turn of the century version, and with tremendous virulence. It has not left us.

In the case of these migrants and many others, racist perceptions have very real consequences. All the Chinese migrants, except some who arrived on the first boat, were immediately incarcerated. The initial rationale on the part of Canadian immigration officials was that they were without documents. Once documents began to come in from China their detention was extended on the illogical and racist basis that they were Chinese and that they had arrived by boat having paid a sum of money to get here. The Immigration Review Board used these factors as a basis for assuming that all who fit this description would likely fall into the hands of the so-called snakeheads (people smugglers), abandoning their refugee claims if released. No consideration has been given to the fact that each migrant is an individual with individual

circumstances and individual reasons for wanting to be here. Nor was there any acknowledgment at a public level that imprisonment is a highly irregular method of protecting people from perceived dangers, or any questioning of the morality of imprisoning those who come to Canadian shores seeking asylum. At present more than 400 remain in prisons in Burnaby, Maple Ridge, Surrey and Prince George. The children and youth are being held in group facilities or foster care in Vancouver and Victoria. All are being pushed through an accelerated refugee process with the expressed intention of removing them from Canada as quickly as possible.

Sculpture by Eldon Garnet, Toronto (1989)
photo: Pete Dako.

In the meantime, women in prison remain separated from their children. They receive inadequate support services despite being under extreme duress. They are taken to their detention review and refugee hearings at the Immigration and Refugee Board in handcuffs. For their detention review hearings they often appear without legal counsel to represent them. Their refugee claims are jeopardized because their incarceration limits their ability to access documents, lawyers, interpreters and community support services. Many do not know what is happening with their refugee cases. Some who have had their refugee cases rejected are under the impression that their claims are under appeal, but Canadian immigration officials say they are not.

opposite: Still from *Who Gets In?*, Barry Greenwald, 1989, 16mm, 52:22 min.
Courtesy National Film Board of Canada.

priority. DARE also recognized that a radical shift in public thinking and public voicing around the very framework of the issues was necessary to counter the media's desperate adherence to the myth of invading yellow hordes.

The turnout for this first public DARE event was tremendous. More than 250 people attended. An inspired Fatima Jaffer, in the October/November 1999 issue of *Kinesis* wrote: "for the first time in a very long time, people from the myriad fragmented movements in Vancouver came together to engage in serious discussion across issue lines. There were representatives from the women's movement, lesbians, social justice activists, environmental activists, anti-poverty workers, labour activists, transition house and crisis-line workers, immigration settlement workers, representatives from multicultural organizations, government employees, academics, artists, writers and other cultural producers, migrant workers, students, elders, First Nations peoples and people of colour."

Cease Wyss of the Squamish Nation welcomed the audience to the event with an ancestral song she had been given permission to use by its owner, Syexwalia. This first moment was important, not only because it respected the protocols of the Coast Salish on whose territory the forum took place, but also because it acknowledged the history of those most rooted in this place and those who have the most legitimate right to it. Implicitly, the song acknowledged the question of migration as fundamentally an issue of land, questioning how any government, particularly such a recent arrival as the Canadian government, can have complete control over who lives and does not live on this land.

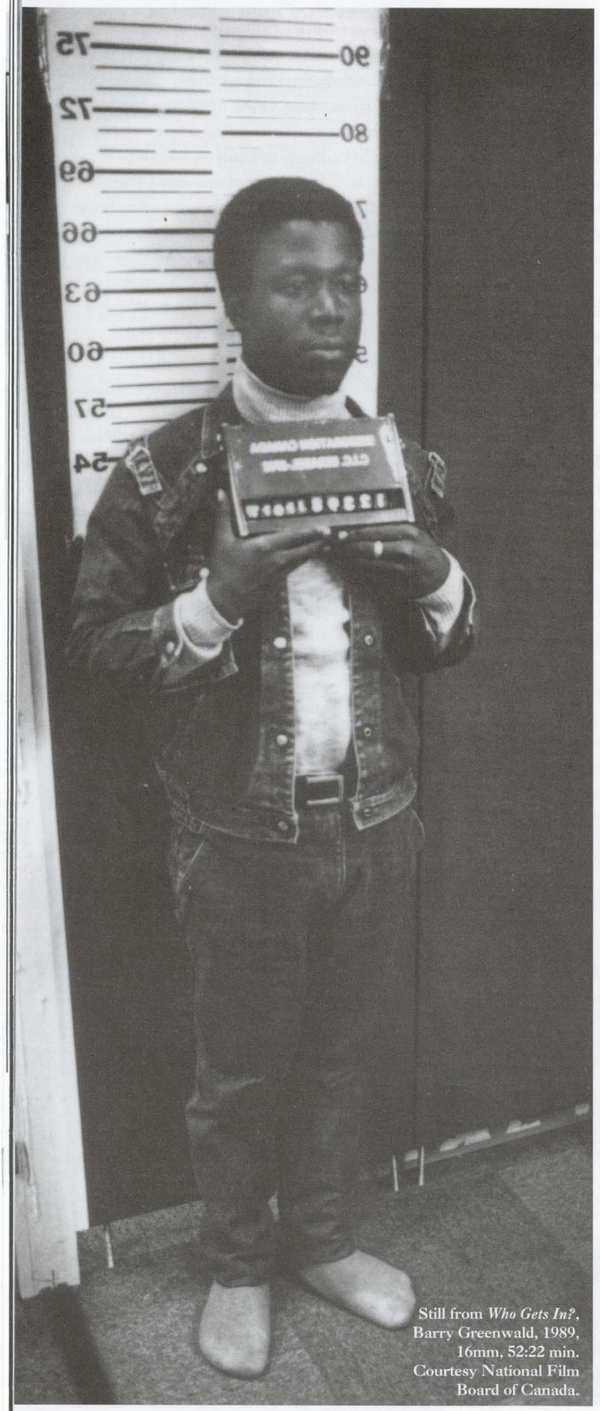
Nandita Sharma, a member of DARE since its inception, was unequivocal in tracing the source of the problem to the Canadian government itself, to Canadian employers, to globalization and to trade liberalization. These, she claimed, are the "real snakeheads." She argued that privatization, deregulation and mega-development projects—precisely the kinds of things Canada lobbies the Chinese government to enact in order to facilitate trade with Canada—are what drive working people into such dire conditions that they are forced to leave their homes. She called for a widening of the term "refugee" to include those whose lives are devastated by the everyday acts of brutality perpetuated by governments and corporations. She was particularly critical of the delegitimization of the "economic refugee," arguing that these are the very people Canadian employers and governments exploit the most, by rendering them vulnerable and without rights. They become a cheap, docile and exploitable work force.

Sunera Thobani added that the effects of globalization that we are seeing now originated 500 years ago with the advent of contemporary colonialism. She noted that the Chinese migrants who have become the focus of such a media furor are effectively being scapegoated for real anxieties that people in this country are experiencing, including unemployment and poverty. The migrants provide a focus for blame, even though their need to come here is driven by the very forces whose effects they are being fingered for. She added that, in spite of the media's claims that Canada is being swamped by refugees, the numbers that have entered over the last ten years are well below targets set by Citizenship and Immigration Canada itself. According to the Citizenship and Immigration website, the maximum number of refugees Canada will accept in a year is 30,000. In 1998, the most recent date for which data are available, only 22,644 were accepted.

Finally, Thobani expressed concern that many immigrant communities, especially in Vancouver, have provided some of the most virulent cries of "Send them back!" She suggested that this reaction is a means for those who can afford it to distance themselves from the most recent arrivals, diverting racist attacks from themselves by guiding them in the direction of those without defense. "What makes it alright for us to buy a t-shirt on the streets of Vancouver for $3, which was made in China, then stand up all outraged as Canadian citizens when the woman who made that t-shirt tries to come here and live with us on a basis of equality?"

Victor Yukman Wong from the Vancouver Association of Chinese Canadians spoke passionately about the migrants in detention, reiterating how unjust it is to imprison those who come to this country seeking refuge. Wong has been an active spokesperson on their behalf, often providing the only dissenting voice on news items slanted to suggest that the migrants are a drain on Canadian resources while having nothing to offer in return. He argued that the Canadian government should not be punishing the victims of global trafficking in indentured labourers, but should instead punish the traffickers themselves, the so-called snakeheads. In the wake of Sharma's speech tracing responsibility for the current brutality back to the Canadian government itself, Wong's arguments came across as less strong than they might have in a more conservative context.

Later, audience member Georgina Farrah remarked that without the assistance of so-called snakeheads or traffickers, many persecuted people would not be able to leave devastating situations in their home countries. However, the gap in the two analyses of the situation is not so easily closed by saying Sharma's position is correct and Wong's is not. Wong's deeply concerned engagement with the migrants' plight and his passionate and very public critique of white racism in this situation demonstrates a deep commitment to the struggle for equality. His arguments



Still from *Who Gets In?*, Barry Greenwald, 1989, 16mm, 52:22 min. Courtesy National Film Board of Canada.

call for a need to work with the system, while Sharma's call for a recognition that the system is fundamentally flawed and must be abandoned.

Zool Suleman, an immigration lawyer who has also been involved with the migrants and media coverage, spoke of the racism inherent in the imprisonment of the migrants on the basis of a group profile, and of the injustice of auctioning off their refugee cases to the lowest-bidding lawyers. He argued that each case should be taken up separately and that lawyers should be hired on the basis of how well they represent their clients. While Suleman works within the system, he is aware of its fundamental flaws. Later in the evening he spoke particularly about the accusations of "queue-jumping." Jaffer quotes him in this regard: "The queue is getting longer, the queue is getting more expensive, the queue is becoming unfair, and people are then jumping the queue. We're under-staffing our embassies, there's bribery going on, there are people buying visitor visas." The Canadian government deals with this by increasing its security apparatus in order to control the flow of people into Canada.

The final speaker, Rita Wong, one of the founders of DARE, spoke from a position of her own journey in attempting to understand the issue and also what actions she perceived as possible and just. She called for a widening of the definition of "refugee" to include those who suffer as a result of economic policies; for the Canadian government to sign the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families, something Canada has been reluctant to do because big business disapproves; and for recognition that globalization occurs in two streams—a masculinized one that includes high-tech, finance, production and technology and a feminized one that includes sexualized, racialized service, specifically domestic work and the sex trade. Wong encouraged people to educate themselves, their friends and their family about the issues. Wong also stressed the importance of writing to newspapers and politicians and of lobbying against reactionary legislative changes.

EXPOSURE

Four months later, on February 10, 2000, DARE and Video In staged a second large public event. "Exposure" was billed as an evening of experimental videos on land, migration and borders, but in many ways it was much more than that.

As a public event, its precursors in the most linear sense were a September 1999 demonstration in front of the Immigration Review Board to protest the prison detention of the migrants on the basis of a group profile, a November demonstration and press conference at Burnaby

Correctional Centre for Women to protest the ongoing unjust incarceration of seventy-five migrant women then on hunger strike, a press conference at Simon Fraser University Harbour Centre to protest the manner in which the migrant refugee cases were being auctioned off to the lowest-bidding lawyers in blocks of twenty-five, and the original public forum at the Heritage Hall on Main Street late last summer at the height of the media backlash. In another sense, precursors for "Exposure" included other screenings at Video In that have taken place in support of other issues and other communities. This duality is the value of these kinds of co-productions, and ultimately what keeps Vancouver's grassroots communities alive. Minding the door at that event, I was moved and delighted to see how many people from various communities, with various political and artistic interests, came to the event and made generous donations to show their support. Given the monolithic and virulently racist media coverage of the migrants' situation, it was reassuring to see that there are many Vancouverites who just don't buy it.

The program included a screening of the National Film Board documentary *Who Gets In?* by Barry Greenwald, *The Shirt* by First Nations videographer Dana Claxton, *Unmapping Desire* by Sheila James, two public service announcements funded by the Canada Race Relations Foundation called *I am a Refugee* and *Prisoner's Lament* by Vancouver multi-media artist Paul Wong, a series of news clips on the migrant issue from CBC and CTV, as well as discussion by Gaik Cheng Khoo, an active member of DARE and Yang Yue-qing, a local video artist best known for her documentary *Nu Shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China*. Agnes Huang was the MC and Cease Wyss, a singer, videographer and herbalist of the Squamish Nation sang an opening song by way of welcome.

It was a long evening, and somewhat anarchic in structure, which I think was a disappointment to some of the organizers. However, the lack of focus wasn't a bad thing, or necessarily the result of poor organization, but rather an indication of how pressing and very much in-the-moment this issue is, encompassing not only the migrants and DARE activists, but the Canadian public from across the political spectrum. The fact of the matter is that there is no single way to look at the global movements of people, currently or historically. The present moment, in all its chaos, reflects that.

The NFB documentary *Who Gets In?*(1989), is disturbing in its frankness. It unfolds like a good grade-school essay, and is easily summed up in its parting words: "It doesn't matter how desperate, worried or unhappy you are. If you don't have something Canada wants, you will have to stay where you are." The voice-over takes that disturbingly ironic tone I have encountered in too many disgruntled Canadian university professors and civil servants who see the system for what it is and yet know they have to tow the line. On the one hand they wish they were braver, and on the other they know themselves to be the beneficiaries of precisely the injustices the system they long to critique perpetuates. The film follows the activities in Nairobi of Mike Molloy, one of three Canadian immigration officers who work in Africa. Case by case, we watch him and his minions turn down potential new Canadians.

Many are turned down just on the basis of a "paper screening," the first in a series of steps that might, but most likely won't, lead to Canadian citizenship. These take a matter of about three seconds each, and are mostly to do with the fact that Canada apparently does not need people of certain occupational backgrounds ranging from independent housewife to mechanical engineer. There is a longer segment on an ex-military man from Zaire who is now on the run because he released fifteen political prisoners sentenced to death for attempting to form an official opposition party in their country. There is a Kenyan student who is wanted for being involved in a student movement to start an opposition party in a country that considers such actions treason. Molloy's office is in Kenya. He does not want to jeopardize his position there, so the student is turned down. One couple from Namibia is accepted by Mike Molloy, but then later turned down because CSIS discovers that the man had taken up arms to fight against apartheid in South Africa ten years previously.

These African stories are disturbingly juxtaposed against a number of stories based in pre-1997 Hong Kong, which seems, for purely material reasons, to have more of "what Canada wants." Historical reasons for this are not discussed, but there is another parody at play here, if you are willing to take up the signs. Accepted as business-class immigrants in this segment are an ad exec with a terrible perm, a man who wants to switch from making snakeskin wallets in Hong Kong to making salmon skin ones in BC, and several individuals who, at $8,000 a pop have hired and flown in a Canadian immigration lawyer to represent them in their interviews. One need not be a foaming at the mouth radical to notice the racial lines being drawn here. An audience member later remarked how disturbing it was that the tired exercise of white folks pitting Asians against Africans was again playing itself out in this piece. While the documentary included interviews with two Vietnamese refugees from the Chi Ma Wan refugee camp in Hong Kong and two Philippine domestic workers, the presence of these people did nothing to undermine the stereotype of the overachieving,

moneyed Hong-Konger or the desperate, politically suspect African. In fact, they fit neatly into other types still racially marked as "Asian," and what their presence makes clear is that Canadian immigration policy is based on the racialized typecasting of individuals to decide who gets in. When Mike Molloy, with his vast arsenal of discretionary power, tells the filmmaker that one of the criteria he uses is the question "Would you want this person living next door to your mother?" the brown-skinned viewer knows he does not mean her.

The White Shirt, by Hunkpapa First Nation video artist Dana Claxton, makes the absurdity of white immigration officials abroad deciding who comes here eminently clear. A white western style shirt washes ashore on a beach where there are already footprints. In the upper right hand corner of the screen, as though in the shirt's imagination, appears an image of a pristine beach, unmarked by any human presence. The shirt brings with it a few other items—a bead, a pocketwatch, a coin, a book, a crucifix. The coin turns out to be an "Indian Head" nickel, and the book, not the Bible as one might expect, but a copy of Marx's *Capital*, open to the chapter on capital accumulation. These represent, of course, money, time, Christianity, greed and by implication the separation of people from the land and the objectification and commodification of living things, including people. The shirt becomes progressively more transparent as these objects are revealed. The shirt clearly references the human body, if not in its corporeality then in its conception. But the body itself is absent in this piece, making it an interesting juxtaposition against *Who Gets In?*

In the latter piece we are constantly made aware of the supposed excess of humanity that motivates the very dehumanizing treatment of potential immigrants and refugees meted out by Canadian immigration officials. Claxton's video allows us to make the following connection: if white folks imagined North America unpopulated when they came, do they also imagine the so-called "Third World" as over-populated? On the one hand is the myth of the empty pristine nation awaiting discovery, and on the other the myth of teeming hordes of dark-skinned, black-haired immigrants clamouring to overrun it. In both cases, these mathematical (and economic) fantasies are used to justify terrible abuse and exploitation.

Sheila James' *Unmapping Desire* speaks to the artificiality of borders and immigration criteria. A South Asian woman's body is inscribed with lines and maps—borders literally drawn in dark pencil across her body. This woman falls in love with another South Asian woman, but they are separated by borders, pawns in a men's game of chess that is played, literally again, on their bodies. The woman is marked with the words "rejected," "visa denied," "no entry" and "undesirable." James poetically physicalizes the trauma by invoking the body in all its softness and sensuality. The literalization of borders as black pencil marks on skin draws the connection that Immigration Canada attempts, through distancing tactics and bureaucratic channels, to obfuscate. (We have witnessed these obfuscating, distancing techniques in the NFB documentary—an immigration official speaks through a telephone to immigration hopefuls on the other side of bulletproof glass; people are denied entry on the basis of paper pre-applications; the voice-over tells us how Mike Molloy cannot personally afford to get involved as there are always more people and more cases the next day.) In James' video, the lovers shower together in the rain, and the maps and labels wash away, leaving only a trace of their former presence—the word "desirable."

While both James and Claxton clearly articulate the absurdity and constructedness of nations and borders, and point to their terrible effects, Paul Wong's adrenalated public service announcements address the complexities of language around race, migration and borders. His work calls up the conflicting realities associated with various ways of thinking, with the intent, it seems, of generating discussion. He does not take a position per se on the issue. In some ways this ambivalent approach is frustrating. The two pieces shown at "Exposure" were short, and their pace extremely fast. As public service announcements they are meant to be viewed like advertising—repeatedly and with one's critical faculties shut off. They move so quickly that it is not possible to view them critically in one screening. Instead they work on the subconscious, the way much thinking on race in this country does.

The first piece, titled *I am a Refugee,* provides a rapid-fire series of numerous students of colour stating refugee status and country of origin. In the background there is news footage of some of the recent migrants at CFB Esquimalt where they were first held upon their arrival, always behind chainlink fence, handcuffed and being manhandled by burly white immigration officers in yellow jackets with the letters IMMIGRATION officiously inscribed across the backs. There are images of Asian faces in yellow school buses—the migrants being transported from one detention centre to another? Or students on their way to school? In the foreground an arsenal of loaded words is fired at us—"alcoholic," "tomboy," "poofter," "goy," "chug," "coolie," "coon." In the voice-over, students intone their dreams—"I want to be a chartered general accountant," "I want to be a famous dancer." The piece closes with an image of the governor general, Adrienne Clarkson, in a speech-giving moment, looking her elegant, successful best.

The second piece, *Prisoner's Lament*, uses a similar rapid-fire montage of words, voice-over and images — of migrants walking handcuffed down a gangplank, of a street person holding up a sign that says "Feed Our People First." But the bulk of the rear-screen images in this piece is footage shot by Yang Yue-qing and Teresa

Still from *Who Gets In?*, Barry Greenwald, 1989, 16mm, 52:22 min. Courtesy National Film Board of Canada.

Sculpture by Eldon Garnet,
sponsored by the Foundation to Commemorate the Chinese Railroad Workers in Canada and the City of Toronto, 1989.
Photo: Pete Dako

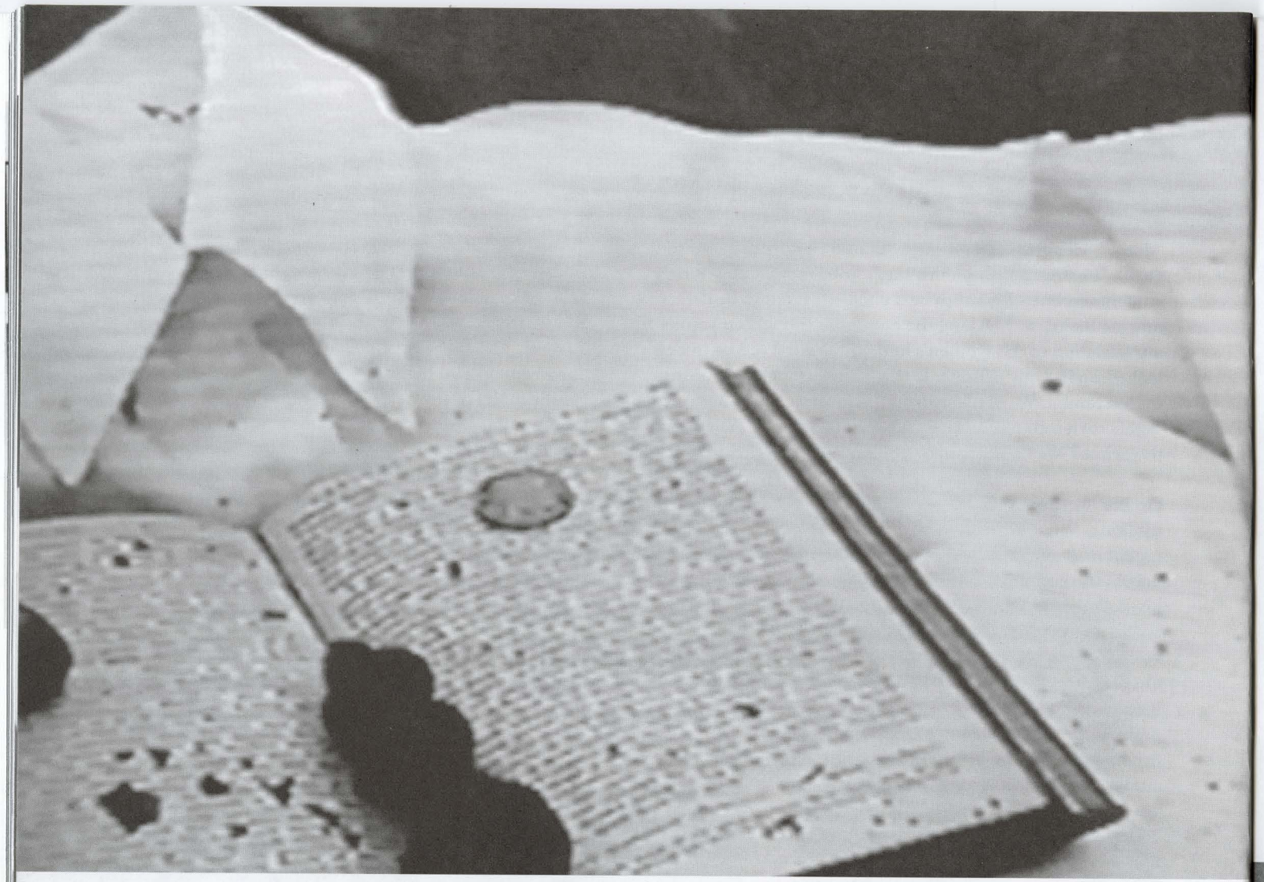
Marshall at the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women (BCCW) last year, of two migrant women singing a song they had composed to bemoan their fate. Only the backs of the women's heads appear, presumably to preserve their anonymity. A barrage of text is again volleyed—"deny," "deport," "dreaming," "ethnic cleansing," "smuggled," "hostage," "human rights," "job," while the young students intone "I want to be a chef," "I want to be a marine biologist..." Along the bottom of the screen scrolls a translation of the women's lament. "You saved us to be locked up in your prisons. Is this your justice? I do not understand.... We are shuffled here to there, days and nights turn into months. My tears never stop.... What is the crime? We do not understand...."

On the one hand, the barrage of text gets the viewer thinking. What is the context for the hostile reception the recent migrants have received in British Columbia and across the country? There is clearly a long history—Wong invokes the Komagata Maru incident, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Head Tax. The barrage of "bad words"—because it is a barrage, volleyed rapid-fire and out of context—tends, however, to bleach them of their meaning. Through the images and voices of well-adjusted, assimilated youth of colour, a kind of normalcy is produced that is itself disturbing because in spite of the students' claims (I am a refugee, I was born in Korea, I was born in Vietnam...) their difference has been contained. Or has it? Does the barrage of text come down to the barrage of human dilemmas that face Mike Molloy in his Nairobi post, a barrage that Immigration Canada, with its severely constricted imagination, can only reduce to the question "Do you have what Canada wants?"

The post-screening discussion suffered from a peculiar incongruence of distances from the issue. Dana Claxton, having just come from dinner with her family, related a few anecdotes about their takes on the situation. She was surprised to learn that many of her loved ones thought the migrants should be sent back. In response to her pointing out that her own grandmother was Chinese, one family member remarked, "Well, if it weren't for her, you'd be a fullblood." Claxton, amused and puzzled, remarked that she didn't realize how progressive she was, within the context of her family, to think otherwise. Gaik Cheng Khoo gave a close reading on some of the tropes emerging from *Who Gets In?* While her analysis was interesting, it was in some ways a misfire—too close to the text and too far from the immediate issue to draw the audience in. Yang Yue-qing, a film/videographer best known for her documentary *Nu Shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China*, and a frequent visitor to the BCCW, spoke about her frustrations with the prison, the terrible effects of long-term incarceration of the women, and her exasperation at being limited to videotaping only the backs of the women's heads after the bureaucratic logistics of bringing video equipment into the prison were finally worked out. She spoke at length of her fury with a recent *Georgia Straight* article that compared the prison to a university campus. The reviewer had written that one of the imprisoned women told him how comfortable she was at BCCW. He mistook what was clearly mere politeness on her part for an authoritative confirmation that the women's imprisonment was not disagreeable to them. Yang's discussion was frank and passionate, but in many ways too close to the situation to make sense to audience members not directly involved with DARE.

Still from *Unmapping Desire*, Sheila James, 1999, video.
Distributor: Video Out

In general, the discussions were long and, except for Claxton's breezy words, lacking in focus. Audience members were tired. I have heard both Khoo and Yang at other moments speak eloquently to the issue—Khoo outside the Refugee and Immigration Board last fall, and Yang in front of the BCCW on a first DARE visit to the prison—so I do not think the fault was in them as speakers. Rather, I think that at a community level, the discussion is still a nascent one, and a publicly agreed upon vocabulary around it has not yet settled. This moment, four months after the public forum at the Heritage Hall, had the vantage point of some months during which speakers and audience alike could think about and discuss the issue. However, as most of the migrants remain in prison and there is little activity at the level of the mainstream media, it seemed harder in this moment



Still from *The Shirt*, Dana Claxton, 1994, video. Distributor: Video Out.

for those involved to grasp onto a particular narrative or framework of thinking. Knowledge that the migrants' refugee cases are being accelerated to facilitate speedier deportation is available; however, the mainstream media is providing little coverage of this aspect.

The chaos of this evening event was exciting in that it was full of the promise and possibility for new ways of looking at migration. However, it also showed the difficulty of creating an oppositional politic in the face of a mainstream that uses media furor and media silence as part of a strategy to keep certain people—the poor and the brown—out. Perhaps the moment does not call for an oppositional politic at all, but a community building one. As Nandita Sharma suggested at the October forum, perhaps it is time to imagine a world without borders, in which people can move freely as need requires. If a laissez-faire attitude eventually produces overcrowding in urban centres, is this any worse than the situation that already exists? Worse for whom? The crisis of this moment is one of legitimacy. Who ought to have the right to say who comes and goes? Those who were here first—aboriginal peoples? Those who planted a British flag on this soil? Or those who have been moving for centuries and continue to do so? Perhaps a little chaos is necessary in order to explore the answers to these questions.

For those directly involved on the front line the situation is getting more heated, more desperate and more devastating as is it clear that after the deportations are complete that many jail sentences in China, with their attendant rapes and beatings, will soon follow. What is also clear is that the women, some still imprisoned at the BCCW, some moved to a correctional facility for both women and men in Prince George, understand their position without the benefit of media pundits, academic discussions or activist rallies. "What is to be my fate?" they sing. "Judge, oh, judge, please give me my freedom."

Thanks to Ashok Mathur and Rita Wong for their support and feedback on this piece. Thanks also to Fatima Jaffer, Nandita Sharma and Sunera Thobani, whose texts in the November 1999 issue of Kinesis *I drew from.*

Money Lures

Richard Mock

"The Works" Arts Festival
Scotia Bank, Main Floor, Edmonton Alberta, June 25–July 7, 1999

Review by Allan Antliff

I have long admired New York–based Richard Mock for his outspoken commitment to anarchism and his clear-sighted attacks on contemporary injustices. Consequently I was delighted when I learned that Edmonton's "Works" Arts Festival was mounting an installation of his sculptures, in a bank lobby no less. But then Mock has a way of getting what he wants: this exhibit has graced several banks in the United States and Germany (hesitating bank managers get a free lure, Mock tells me).

The exhibit featured about 100 of the money-lure sculptures dangling from wires strung in a row along a marble wall of the Scotia Bank. Each lure has a nasty hook arching out in the vicinity of its shiny head and was decorated with brightly coloured beads and wires. Bits of human bone protruded from some, and every one of them bristled with money. The money, I should add, is real. Mock buys it pre-shredded from a scientific supply house.

The lures take aim at the capitalist political economy by playing up money's role in our alienation from nature, encapsulated in a hostile technology that pre-dates the invention of capital itself. I'm talking about *fish lures*, those ugly human imitations of bugs and worms, with barbed hooks that lodge in the mouth of a fish, ripping and tearing the creature as it struggles to escape.

Money Lures, installation view, Richard Mock, 1999. Shown on main floor, Scotia Bank, Edmonton.

Money is capitalism's update on the fish lure, a life-negating weapon now firmly lodged in the fabric of the planet because we're all hooked on it. Mock's money lures point to capitalism's origins in a general contempt for all living beings while bringing us up to date on just how destructive that stance has become. After all, the only creatures on this planet attracted to money are humans. Money is the goal in the great round of capitalist exchange, which only knows how to sustain life by killing it. Strip mine the earth and leach it with cyanide for gold, cast drift-nets and empty the ocean for pet food, spew ozone-depleting CFCs into the stratosphere for air conditioning, but above all else pray to your gods for profits, because the "health" of the economy depends on it.

Looking at the lures I was reminded of Lawrence H. Summers, former chief economist for the World Bank and vice-president for development economics; now treasury under-secretary in the Clinton administration. Summers first gained notoriety in 1992 for circulating a memo to six top-echelon World Bank administrators on the topic of industries polluting wealthy nations. He wrote:

> *Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [less developed countries]? The measurement of the costs of health impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be in the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.*

Money works magic. It whisks industrial toxins from the lowly environmental realm to the high peaks of economics, where titans like Summers number-crunch the figures to conclude that yes, rich people's cancers cost more than poor people's cancers. Hence the impeccable logic of polluting the planet to maintain a healthy global economy "on the cheap."

But I digress. The hundred or so lures trying to hook me in the Scotia Bank lobby were just a playful ruse for the real thing, namely the dehumanizing reward-and-punishment economics of capital waiting within. As Mock puts it, "acquiring money is a cultural obsession" that "takes over other areas that could have been emotionally rewarding. Money itself has no emotion connected to it. To value it as you would a life companion is absurd." And yet people do value money over their capacity to be human, day in and day out, each time they rush past a street person on the way to the bank. Which is to say that our current state of affairs is not only unsustainable: it is soul-crushing as well.

Money Lures, detail, Richard Mock, 30.5 x 7.6 x 10.2 cm, 1998.

Allan Antliff is assistant professor of art history at the University of Alberta. His book, Anarchist Modernism: The Making of the First American Avant-Garde, *is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press in the fall of 2000.*

Shadow States

Carol Laing

The Red Head Gallery, Toronto, November 3-27, 1999

Review by Janice Andreae

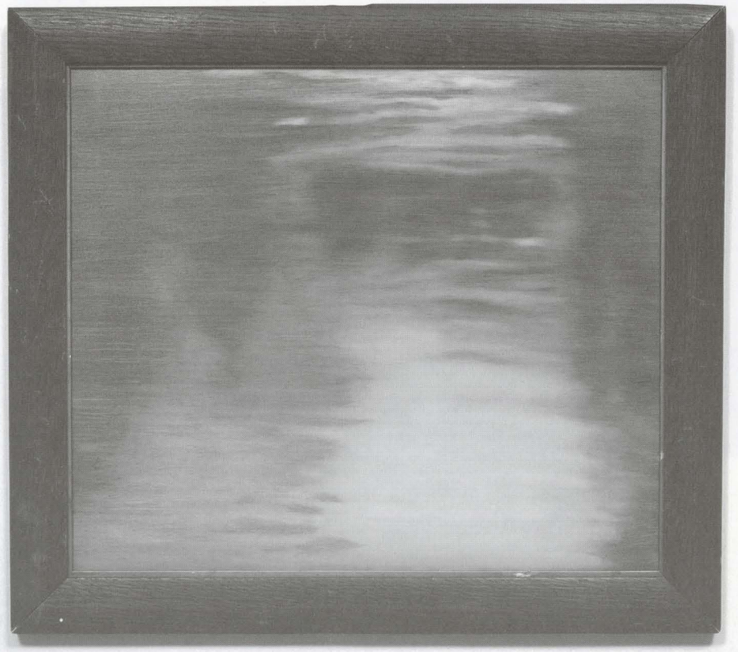
"For the facts that make up the world need the non-factual as a vantage point from which to be perceived."

—Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Franza Case*

The surfaces of two small parallel paintings, *Same, and Different* (1998), act as an index to reading the other four surfaces of Carol Laing's installation site. One is cotton canvas stretched tautly over a wooden frame; the other, damask linen, its alternating weave of flat and twisted thread, reflected by the light. To both surfaces she has applied the same *terra verde* oil pigment, but the effect of each is entirely different. The formal monochromatic canvas, with the *same* even matte surface, suggests the social context of the public museum. However, the *different* damask surface is vulnerable, responds to contact, and recalls private, domestic, decorative traditions. For me, the damask surface signifies the cherished space of my grandmother's bedroom; it marks that intimate connection and loss.

The south wall carries fourteen barely legible graphite drawings on Mylar, placed in a narrative line, level with the viewer's gaze. Running parallel, on the north wall, fourteen small oil paintings of various sizes, on paper and Mylar, are arranged in the manner of a nineteenth-century salon, using the whole wall surface. Though exhibiting characteristic economy of material means, these drawings and paintings are a departure from Laing's previous site-specific installations and interests in text, stencil and decorative wall surfaces, although such elements are deployed on the remaining two wall surfaces. On the west wall, beside the *Same, and Different* canvases, is a large white space occupied by a silver text listing fourteen of the eighteen named lakes on the moon, in parallel columns, carefully positioned according to syllabic and letter count. Opposite, the east wall holds a flat mural, abstracted from a lunar site detail of the *Sea of Tranquillity*, which has been hand stenciled using a powder-filled damask bag of graphite on to a monochromatic, warm mid-grey wall surface. Laing employs labour-intensive activity, but the gallery site is stripped of distraction, bare and minimalist. She locates her viewer in a precisely constructed space, where the four wall surfaces operate simultaneously.

An eclectic found-art collection of dark hand-made wooden frames, culled from collectors near her South Bay home, houses the *Flood Paintings (Arno Series)* (1999). Laing notes that these paintings (in oil on Mylar or paper, and resembling da Vinci's water studies) were improvised from scanned photographic images of the 1966 flood of the Arno River in Florence.



One of fourteen framed paintings from the *Flood Paintings (Arno Series)*, Carol Laing, oil on Mylar, 1999. Photo: Peter MacCallum.

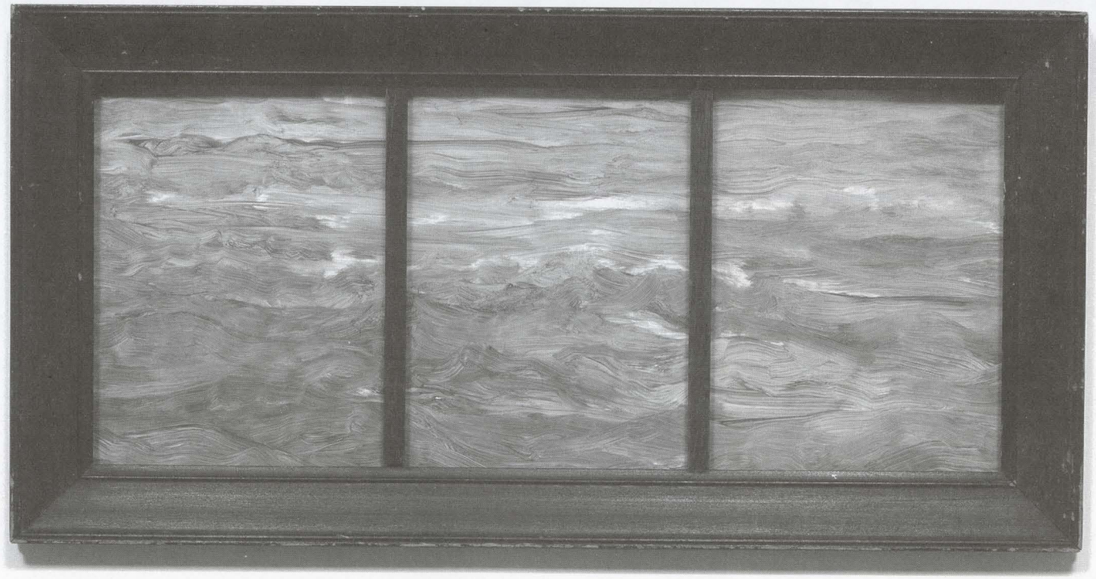
The flood paintings cue the ghost drawings by subtly prompting me to shift my gaze to their parallel location on the south wall. This performed, I read across the material, historical and cultural contexts of these images, in a short-circuited, non-linear way. Visual signifiers slip into visual play and "float free of the contexts that first shaped them."[1]

With the *Ghost Drawings (Bachmann Series)* (1999), Laing sets in motion a process of looking for Ingeborg Bachmann, a post–World War II Austrian woman writer and poet born in 1926, who died in a fire at the age of 47. By deliberately overlapping and blurring the borders between image and wall surface, Laing prevents her viewer from deciphering the figure of Bachmann, who literally disappears into the material surface of the wall. The translucent Mylar is a material veil that hides the specificity of Laing's photographic sources of Bachmann's life. In the same way the material surface of the wall hides the nameless female protagonist who disappears into the wall in *Malina*, a novel and a fragment of the *Todesarten* (*Ways of Dying*) project left uncompleted at Bachmann's death. Laing draws attention to the temporal and geographical gaps separating Bachmann's own existence from her presence here recollected through processes of tracing and braiding signifiers of Bachmann's life that have been altered through various technologies of photographic and digital reproduction, as well as manually tracing technically inverted (positive to negative) images.

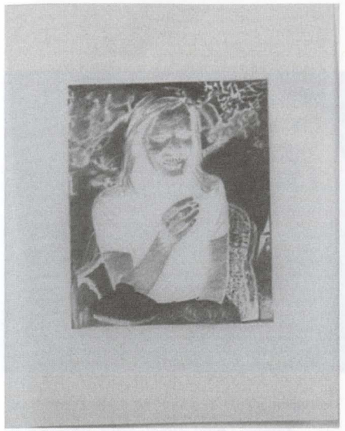
The graphite traces make the minimal statement of Bachmann's presence visible. Instead of reading these images as a combination of referents to an idea of her identity located in an historical context, I read what is visible of her on the surface before me. For it is the difficult task of seeing and reading clearly that Laing deliberately makes problematic for her viewers: looking at the paper without relying upon the traditional systems of representation that inform the construction of knowledge and identity. Made simply, using graphite pencil on Mylar, the ghost drawings at first appear to be abstract areas of light and dark, smudges and spaces without reference outside their borders. Devoid of the pictorial detail of their photographic sources, these surfaces can not be deciphered as representational in any traditional way, despite their paradoxical order in what appears to be a biographical narrative. There is no verbal text, nothing that aids observation and conclusion. Such a fictional dilemma also figures in Bachmann's *Three Paths to the Lake* (originally published as *Simultan* in 1972) and suggests a fragmented way of reading these surfaces, disrupting and complicating the seemingly temporal linearity of narrative.

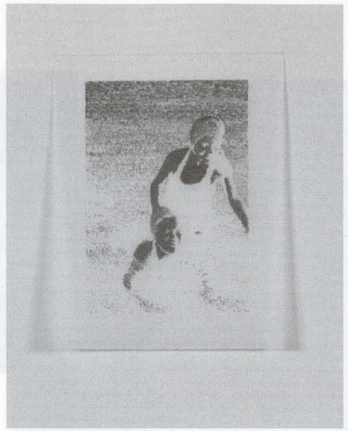
By challenging conventions of pictorial representation, portraiture and biography, Laing proposes a fictional reading of these systems for representing reality, one that undermines Western reason. She continues Bachmann's project of querying representational systems employed to construct knowledge, characterized as binary, categorical and controlling, "invented not so much to enable us to get closer to reality as for the purpose of warding it off, of protecting against it."[2] Laing draws attention to, and breaks with, conventional representational practices by manipulating the angle of viewing and regulating apparent distance, proximity and image resolution. She thereby draws her viewer closer to these fictionalized surfaces where, as she observed in her curatorial essay for *Picture Theory*, "identity is also internally fractured and externally multiple."[3] The indeterminacy of the shadowy images of Bachmann's life and their indeterminate connection with each other and the other wall surfaces repositions the viewer's activity from seeing to looking at these surfaces as places for discovery, which in turn recalls her point that "the notion of identity is one of process and performance."[4] With this in mind, Laing crisscrosses temporal and spatial boundaries to effect a process of response-making in her viewing subject.

Laing argues that the viewer's subject position can become "a complex spatial metaphor" where "the ways in which identity and location can be pictured must be imagined and produced."[5] Accordingly, *Shadow States* stages a simultaneous play of surfaces where the picture making both refers to and disrupts traditions of cross-disciplinary representational practices. It draws together fragments of concrete images, abstract and minimalist representational practices, and text: the names of lunar lakes (joy, sorrow, solitude, death...) recorded in the gazetteer of the *1997 NASA Atlas of the Solar System*. Laing confronts the limitations of language, breaks with institutionalized ways of seeing and pictures the currents and tides of human existence: images of water are repeated and varied throughout this exhibition. In the shadowy interplay of traces and connections, frayed, disrupted and lost, Laing pictures the possibility of recovering, in Bachmann's poetic words from "Nachtflug," "unsres Herzens vergessene Sprache."[6]



opposite: One of fourteen framed paintings from the *Flood Paintings (Arno Series)*, Carol Laing, oil on Mylar, 1999. Photo: Peter MacCallum.





Ghost Drawings (Bachmann Series) (details from a series of fourteen), Carol Laing, graphite on Mylar, 1999. Photos: Peter MacCallum.

Janice Andreae is a visual artist and writer living in Toronto.

Notes

1. In "The Tracing of an Image is the Effacing of an Image" Carol Laing re-proposes the detail as visual category resulting from a viewing (body) process that "plays with visual slippages and the capacity of the visual to 'picture' ambiguities." She states: "representation has proved itself to be a remarkably elastic, even an eccentric, place of/for practice. More open than closed, complex and overfull of phantasmic sites, its residues track the body's traversals across histories and cultures." See *Picture Theory*, the book-work/catalogue for the exhibition of the same title Laing curated at YYZ Artists' Outlet, Toronto, March 22–April 15, 1995, pp. 32-33.
2. Christa Wolf on Bachmann, "A Letter" in *Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. Gisela Ecker (London: The Women's Press, 1985), p. 106.
3. Here I am literally employing Laing's own words in her essay "Locating the Crisscrossed Subject" from *Picture Theory*, *op. cit.*, p.10.
4. *Ibid*
5. *Ibid.*
6. I translate this line from Bachmann's poem "Nachtflug" ("Night Soaring") as "our heart's forgotten language."

Container

Paul Perchal

Video In, Vancouver, December 4, 1999–January 14, 2000

Review by Francisco Ibañez-Carrasco

AIDS commemoration has turned into slick protease inhibitor advertisements in magazines like *POZ* or *The Advocate*. Our collective skin has exfoliated its AIDS lesions: gay characters in the media dispense witty family-oriented repartee and many of us engage in celebratory barebacking, now that we all bask in the post-AIDS glee/hangover. In the background, Cher digitally yodels "Do you believe in life after love?" counterpointing a grim question Leo Bersani posed a decade ago:
"Is the rectum a grave?"

So it is almost threatening to one's "gay" disposition to walk into Paul Perchal's installation, *Container*, at Video In artist centre in Vancouver. What! No rave atmosphere? No explicit adult sex depicted on these premises? Instead, the atmosphere created by this installation is that of menace.

Three doors lead nowhere fast—two of them mere projections on panels, one peephole in the middle door and one exhaust-breathing vent, a phantasmal eye projected on the bare wall at my back. Suddenly, I am not inside it, I am in "it." This "it," appropriately titled *Container*, is a simple representational apparatus which sets out to contain with vengeful precision. Soundless, with chilled-to-the-bone colours and contours, *Container* feels like, and stands for, the most hideous corner in any institutional building. Perchal invokes the terrifying Foucauldian panopticon. And when I entered and saw the other newcomers, other figures in the dark, standing there, not knowing what to do, disconcerted, I think I understood. *Container* depicts closeted recesses of one's mind where years of control, of care not to offend, of passing, of trying not to be too flaming or too loud or too infected, are stowed away. I felt flat, silenced by my surroundings. The ubiquitous small plastic glass of wine served at art openings didn't help one bit to make me feel any better—I was effectively contained.

A gush of anger lapped me up when I read Perchal's artist's commentary, which makes connections between *Container* and public policy on HIV/AIDS. One more instance of appropriation of my oh-so-legitimate HIV experience, I quickly thought. Why do we need the artist's written statement? Why do we need hockey players to comment on the game? Maybe simply for the pleasure of seeing them sweat. Later, I reckoned that he wasn't trying to explain to me, to repackage as it were, my own AIDS experiences. Perchal had in fact designed a paradigmatic architectural space that can stand for many of the institutional spaces in which I am/we are contained. Such intramural spaces require written signs and rules so one is clearly reminded of their function and of one's place. This installation was not meant to be my refuge, like so much AIDS-related art attempts to be; this was meant to make me angry and to instill fear in others. We, the shadowy figures, the whispering demonic nuns, sisters of perpetual indulgence, out of the rain, cloaked in our winter coats, were still life embedded in the installation.

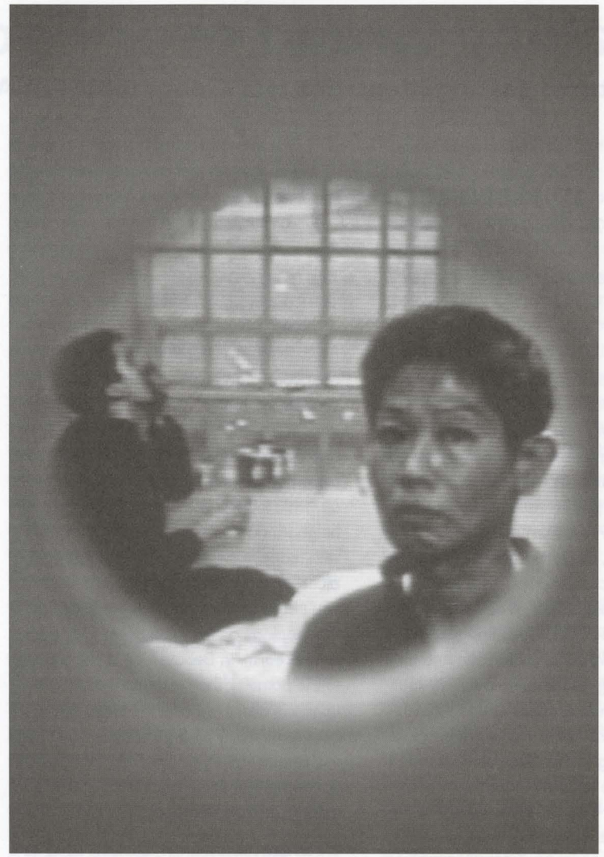
Wandering around this austere installation is to become enveloped in the container. Suddenly, exploding pop notions of gay sexuality, even the most straight-laced of heterosexualities seem friendly in comparison to the space that the artist gives me. For example, Perchal has re-camouflaged

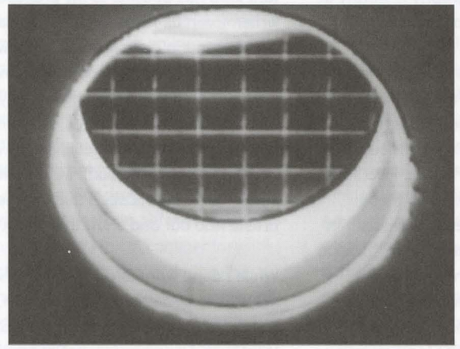
current gay-friendly stereotypes—armours of aroused muscles, piercings and tattoos—in regulation coveralls in a prison cell. Paradoxical as it is to see Perchal's own supple body give birth to such a Rosemary's baby, it is not surprising because in the midst of our newfound glory and liberation, we, Queers, still have to contain ourselves everyday.

Some days after I saw this installation, I had the chance to talk to Perchal. In doing so, I realized I had "missed" two elements of his work. First, every time I looked through the peephole of the main door of the installation, there was a camera recording my face, and whatever grimace it had on it, and then projecting it with a ten-second delay—through what I initially took to be a vent—on my back! Shit! The joke was on me! My own imprisoned image had been creeping up on my back without my knowing it. The gesture was intrusive, like the little digital cameras which I have had glided down my throat to detect internal KS lesions. It was one more way in which Perchal's work resisted providing me with comic relief. Second, Perchal told me that the two actors in the video feed were a man and a woman. I had thought they were two men. (Somebody else told Perchal they had thought they were two women.) I had wanted them to be two men: their androgyny seemed yet another bitter joke Perchal plays on us in order to let us know how contained we are.

But fortunately Perchal fails on one account. He fails to contain the provocation of his work, so that our interest in it remains long after our solemn walk through his sinister allegoric installation.

In his disquieting provincial life, Francisco Ibañez-Carrasco is a fiction/non-fiction writer in Vancouver, a procrustean social science researcher in the local and modest AIDS industry, plays a Ph.D. doctor in university classrooms where he shapes impressionable minds, and aspires to be a full HIV+ leather whore and be alive to tell all these stories.





Installation views of *Container*, Paul Perchal, 1999-2000.

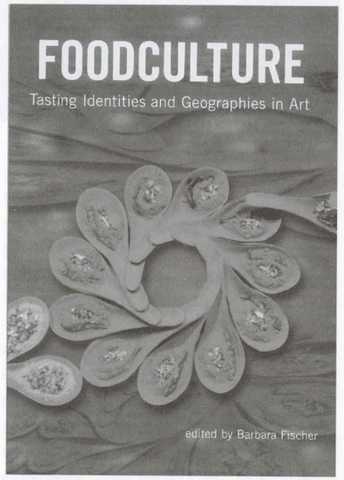
Breaking Bread over Foodculture

Foodculture: Tasting Identities and Geographies in Art

Edited by Barbara Fischer

YYZ Books, Toronto, 1999

Review essay by Renuka Sooknanan



The essays featured in Barbara Fischer's *Foodculture: Tasting Identities and Geographies in Art* are part of a growing body of writing on the relationship between food, culture and art. This collection helps to surface the problematic tensions involved in the representation of food in art. And while, as Barbara Fischer argues in her introduction to *Foodculture*, there is currently an "explosion" in all things related to food—from books, magazines and stores devoted to cookbooks and time-saving cooking gadgetry, to a twenty-four hour television food channel and "specialty" food sections in your local grocery—what is lacking in this "explosion" is an analysis of the politics of food. But not to worry, Fischer and company demonstrate through critical and thoughtful exposition that the politics of food and its multiple, complex relationships to art, shifting art practices and place/geography is worthy of examination in this time of "explosion."

On a recent family visit to Trinidad, I took a copy of *Foodculture* with me. Glancing at the book now and then on the plane to Trinidad, I began to recall the various foods, snack foods in particular, I would be enjoying once I got there. While these same snack foods are easily accessible in Toronto, something about being in Trinidad and eating these foods thoroughly engages the senses. There is a popular junction in a district of Trinidad called Debay. Anytime you hunger for the very best in local fast foods, chances are you will end up in Debay. I certainly did. Imagine this scenario: a busy main street, cars parked wherever there is space available, food stands one after the other, no seating, no tables, no utensils. You move from one stand to the other, trying any and everything you wish. Most of the foods offered at the stands are locally referred to as "fried food." From poulorri, doubles, beighani and saheena—all loaded down with mango or tamarind chutneys and ulcer-forming hot sauces—to cold drinks, you stand and eat and lick the juices of the toppings as they run down your hands and forearm. In Debay, food is not confined to the home or the restaurant, eating etiquette is disrupted and the street plays host to as many as it can safely hold. Food in this place not only provides for social encounters, it showcases local culinary artistry and performance.

a review, a café on Queen and art

I've become keenly aware of how important food has become to my practice as a writer. Even as I start this review, I am perched in the glass-fronted windows of Tequila Bookworm, a mouth-watering tuna sandwich in front of me amongst my various articles and magazines. I'm reminded of how many editorial meetings I've had here, how many revisions were attempted sitting here. But mostly, I think of the many artists who eat and show their work here.

While I don't want to suggest that the politics of art, food and place boil down, so to speak, to what's hanging on the wall at a local café, I do want to point out that there is a hierarchy in place that distinguishes a café from a gallery. This cultural hierarchy is in direct reference to the difficulty young artists experience in finding places to show their work. Frequenting local cafés that feature the work of artists is one way I engage with contemporary art. The idea of art on the wall of a café disrupts the formal culture of the gallery, nuancing the experience of art with the local and popular. In this sense food mediates between the politics of place (café, gallery, Trinidad) and art. These convergences and intersections are indicative of multiple and shifting art practices and politics, politics that the contributors to *Foodculture* deconstruct, narrate and make infinitely complex. From the coded particularities of cucumbers in European art to cookies found in Amsterdam, *Foodculture* examines the representation of food, its cultural significance and historical, colonial and diasporic relevance to art. Themes in *Foodculture* problematize identity, the body, sexuality, origins, technology and the plurality of senses which are called upon to make art, think art, taste art.

For the first time, as suggested by the title of this book, food and culture come together, fused into one word: foodculture. This fusion is interesting on two accounts.

Firstly, food has long been associated with culture in ways that have been problematic. In Canadian cultural representation with its limited and limiting federal multicultural policy, "encounters" between "ethnic" groups who are mostly marginalized, diasporic and always "from somewhere else," fulfill stereotypically flawed and racist representations of communities in Canada. Food, dress, language and customs become part of an extended "caravan" that mediates everyday activities and material conditions between and among these communities.

What happens when food and culture are fused in racist cultures is an analytical imperative. For example, food tempers the way inclusionary/exclusionary practices are carried out. If in racist cultures we read food and culture as fused, what persists at an everyday level is discrimination based on difference. Difference that is celebrated and framed simplistically by our multicultural policy is incommensurable, to say the least, with the "new cultural politics of difference"[1] which contests the limited field of representational possibilities being called for by those who have been, and continue to be, othered. It is why foods most associated with "we others" will always be referred to as "ethnic," as having "exotic" flavours and aromas. Thus Roland Barthes argued that "all food serves as a sign among the members of a given society."[2]

In *Foodculture* however, the coming together of the two words is more like a strategy that aims to make political the processes that otherize and occlude. Tuning in to the Cooking Channel, it is virtually impossible to miss the blending, tossing and seasonings that unsteady the ways we have traditionally cooked. There is a need, I think, to mix extraordinary culinary and olfactory experiences with those aesthetic practices that challenge and interrupt as they narrate personal histories, attend to global and local phenomena and bring new analysis to previously untouchable work. In this respect, art, land, food and culture become conversant rather than remain rigidly-defined, exclusive realms.

In fact, tradition is what is being tested as cooks explore the various ways fusion plays in food, rejecting the normative ways ritualistic preparation and certain "expertise" have come to limit flavour, colour, smells. Also at stake here is the way tradition becomes a way of authorizing exclusionary practices. Attempts at positioning new cooking methods and techniques is a matter of questioning "pure" or standard ways of attending to food. What *Foodculture* signals is the onset of cultural creolization.

diaspora, difference and erasure

The concept of "tasting identities" referred to in *Foodculture*'s subtitle is a richly complex way to think about what identity might mean to oral sensibilities when art, food and culture collide. If we think about the act of tasting and at the same time understand that identity is the shared sense of ourselves, how then is the act of oral consumption like deconstructing the processes of identity and identification? Tasting, an activity of differentiation, concerns pleasure and displeasure. When identity is factored into this dichotomy, tasting shifts to perform an acute function for marking difference. "Tasting identities" speaks to the interplay and tension between similitude and alterity in contemporary cultural politics. In a sense, *Foodculture* is a kind of epistemological demand between the production of art and ethical commentary. That art practitioners are exploring the relations of identity and difference through the medium of food indicates a need to link historical legacy (colonialism, imperialism) to everyday struggles. Here I am thinking of the contributions of Fred Wha, Yau Ching, Millie Chen, Ping-Kwan Leung and Jamelie Hassan to this book.

The politics of difference and erasure are thematized in essays by Yau Ching and Deborah Root that wage analytical battles of identity and disidentification by way of examining the essentialized and authentic desires expressed in Chinese fast foods and President's Choice cuisine. While Ching articulates the perils of diaspora and difference, Root focuses on the global availability of food and shows that the world has become a very small place when our desires are anticipated by food entrepreneurs like Dave Nichols. It is Ching and Root's common contemplation of how food performs certain erasures that is poignant, but it is their unapologetic analysis that is in the end poetic.

Both Ching and Root reveal the ease with which the erasure of identity is achieved. For Ching, erasure occurs when Chinese food becomes first "Asianized" then finally relegated to the realm of "ethnic" cuisine. Food, identity and diaspora become intertwined when Chinese food is "unified" under this one recognizable category. Ching argues, "Chinese food becomes too visible; becomes a homogeneous signifier for difference"(152). So while Chinese food becomes "visible," Ching becomes invisible as a result of the same racist process.

In Root's personal narrative, returning to Canada after living in Amsterdam illustrated to her that the invisibility and erasure of place is simply a matter of finding cookies specific to the *avondverkoop*[3] experience on her grocery shelf. Amsterdam travels to her instead of she to Amsterdam. This story, Root reveals, is what happens when lived experience is substitutable; it is a story of the evil of globalization and a desire, a taste for "the Other," wrapped up in neat packaging with "President's Choice" written over it. Class and racism play out vividly in store-aisle scenarios as consumers of these products imagine and exoticize cuisine, difference and travel with deep colonial nostalgia while simultaneously placing discriminating

Bake Sale, Elaine Tin Nyo, performance, 1996. Photo: courtesy Deitch Projects, New York.

value on "knowing" the other. For me, Root's essay exposes colonial practices as ongoing because the act of consuming "President's Choice" is fundamentally one of conquest.

What I find intriguing about Ching and Root's work is its resonance with Fred Wah's "Mixed Grill" and "Famous Chinese Restaurant is the name of a." Wah's two short essays serve up a biting and sonorous critique of diaspora and what could be called, citing Homi Bhabha, a sense of hybridity. Between "authentic" colonial Chinese cuisine and today's fast food version, Wah manages to impress upon us the question of food's traces, origins and representation: what does an "improvised imitation of Empire cuisine" look like when it assumes a hyphenated quality, that of "Chinese-Canadian"? The doubleness in Wah's "Mixed Grill" demonstrates the making of another space in Chinese cuisine, one which moves away from its colonial legacy, tempered by experiences of living in western Canada and the forces of assimilation and class struggle.

Yet even as this movement takes place, displacement and desire continue to juxtapose each other. In "Famous Chinese Restaurant is the name of a" we are privy to the dichotomy between heritage/customs and "new world" experiences. This essay is a reading of the tensions at the site where East meets West and the negotiations that fester in relation to the process of naming, the longing for the homeland and the kind of racism that allows for exoticization to occur. When "Eastern" restaurants with names like "Elite" and "Diamond" shift to names like "Canadian Chinese Take-Out" and "All Stars" this phenomenon reeks of nationalist overtones and the struggle for identity.

The violence of racism, the loss of place and the pain and trauma inflicted by cowardly acts of hate is presented in Jamelie Hassan's *The Hong Kong, for Dave and Lucy*. Hassan's short text and photographic image detail the vandalizing and subsequent closing of a popular Szechwan restaurant, the "Hong Kong," which was owned and operated by Dave and Lucy Wong in London, Ontario. We are told that the thief who broke in and found no cash there started a fire and left racist graffiti, written in excrement, on the wall.

movements, traces, land

One of the most frightening messages about food, devastation and destruction comes from Anne Brydon's essay, "Cultivating Collapse." Brydon shows how food is able to trace and map incredible waste, consumption, and pillage. It shows our direct intervention in wealth and its unequal distribution, a process that has benefited a small percentage of the world's wealthiest people and accentuated dependency and inequality in developing nations. This essay makes us keenly aware that our continual quest for power has deforested, polluted, genetically modified the food chain and possibly halted the search for alternative health cures; it demonstrates the poverty of our choices, and the morally bankrupt relationship we have to life other than human. Brydon warns that "the majority of North Americans remain only dimly aware of the intricate linkages between political stability, environmental security and food supply"(105). She effectively details the nightmares we may face in the not-too-distant future if we continue to take for granted the destruction we have levelled at the land and sustenance it produces.

Andy Patton's contribution to *Foodculture* examines Ron Benner's *Trans/mission: Corn Vectors*. Benner's work deals mainly with food cultivation, questioning art practices and the role of food in the making of art. Benner's *Trans/mission* traces corn's historical passage from the New World to India, China, Vietnam and elsewhere, a passage Patton calls "counter-motion," opposing it to the route of trade during the reign of imperial production. When Patton takes up Boschaert's *Bouquet in A Niche*, Patton notes that "in this painting, precious things are brought to Holland from the farthest reaches of the earth, and in doing so, any sense of place is obliterated. The tulip from Turkey is brought together with dahlias from Mexico, and fritillaries from Persia and European roses"(131). In Patton's discussion of Benner and Boschaert's work, which he argues stand in opposition to each other, movement and stasis become issues. Boschaert's work presents a sense of movement "outstripping the limitations of the natural world"(132) and a sense of placelessness. In contrast, Benner's work is "rooted in the ground, sewn, planted, tended," illustrating its permanence. The comparative analysis makes us rethink the question of art as "made."

fringe art and film

Bill Arning calls food an "appropriate fringe art activity"(83). He references Ben Kinmont's *Waffles for an Opening*, a piece in which food marks a deliberate shift in the making of art. This artwork is dependent on participation by the audience in eating waffles with Kinmont. Through *Waffles*, meaning and the making of art become very involved projects. The audience shifts from mere spectator to active member of a living piece, creating along with the artist. This production of art remains fluid and changing, enabling, Arning notes, "better possibilities for art."

In Felix Gonzalez-Torres' work, Arning shows how memory informs the process of viewing art. By suggesting that "the experience of art most often takes place in memory," Arning complicates the purely visualist sense in art. While viewing art may be a singular moment, memory of an artwork is always available. Gonzalez-Torres' candy

Film still from *Babette's Feast*, dir. Gabriel Axel, 1987, 35mm, 102 min. Distributed by Orion Classics. Courtesy the Film Reference Library.

sculptures offer viewers the chance to eat the candy sculpture. But for Arning, viewing while ingesting the sculpture shows that the effects of one piece of art "are still active in the mind when one has moved on to the next piece, so the candy must be understood as making manifest the art effects"(85).

Tasting and aromatic practices in art are the subjects of Jim Drobnick's essay. Fittingly, it carries on issues to which Arning draws our attention. Customarily assigned lower hierarchical status, taste and smells are enjoying a centric position in the contemporary work of artists. These extra-sensorial involvements activated at the site/sight of an artist's work are a corporeal affair: smells and tastes enter into the body, and they consume us as we consume them. While the act of viewing is stimulating, it remains rather one-dimensional when compared to the plural ingestive possibilities of alternative art-making practices. Drobnick suggests that "the action of breathing in and swallowing collapses rigid dichotomies of viewer and object, self and other, even inside and outside"(76). This provides us with a real sense of resisting traditional norms which have been perpetuated through containing the audience's participation in art to viewing. The viewer is empowered by her activity rather than offered a structured passivity.

In Bridget Elliott and Anthony Purdy's "Feasting on Film," food is an important cultural signifier which is explored in three films: *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*; *Big Night* and *Babette's Feast*. Food has been used in film to tell particular stories about social issues, sexuality, gender, eros, class and race. Elliot and Purdy's review of these films raises questions of food's taboos and transgressions, its narrative ability to investigate "ethics and aesthetics of restraint and excess in our culture"(89). Modernity and community, power, immigrant culture and desire all revolve around the artistry of food. The feast in *Big Night* is a tale of the struggle between Primo's mad search for the essential rapture of food and his brother's desire for financial success in America. This kind of internal, psychic drama in film does more than just present the audience with lovely snippets of filmic food; it addresses the complexity of art and of an artist's relationship to medium and audience.

cucumbers and taste in art

Jennifer Fisher alerts us to the double meaning of "taste" in her essay, "Performing Taste." Taste is not only a bodily function, nor simply an oral affair. Taste is also a matter of "visualist habits of separation," a judgement, an informed point of view. And it is with the latter definition of taste that the issue and problematic of difference arises. Fisher is vigilant to say that "what is needed are ... more fluid ways of moving across and between identities constituted in difference"(33). Thoroughly advocating for a "deferent sensory politics," Fisher destabilizes the occularcentricity of taste asking her reader, "to think about not only how connections are "formed," but "performed" through experiences of flavour, incorporation, digestion and visceral reaction in relation to art"(38). She argues that taste's "closures of judgement" do not keep us open to "the performative aspect of the aesthetic that occurs in the spaces between judgments"(44).

Corinne Mandell's discussion of the representation of cucumbers in art is one of the more intriguing essays in this book! I loved it! I now know more about the cucurbit's place in art than...well, maybe I wanted to know. In addition, Mandell presents us with a host of other fruits and veggies that made their way onto the palates and canvases of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Cucumbers were considered a sign of fruitfulness, pomegranates were thought to concern semen, chastity and marriage; grapes depicted drunkenness; and the quince symbolized life after death. While Mandell recounts the various and shifting symbolic form fruit took on, she also carefully chronicled the moral era in which these paintings existed. Its close association with the religious was one of the main reasons cucumbers appeared on the canvas. And the highly sexualized content of these fruit is indeed food for thought!

Not the last word on food

Here is an interesting twist. Food has moved out of the kitchen to become ripe with possibility for social commentary. Because food is so explosively "of the moment," it is important to consider the gendered realities of food. Does food lose its gendered association, its attachment to the kitchen, cooking and the work of women when it becomes part of the making of art? Or, do we take the opportunity to disturb the gendered implications of food as it takes a significant place in a particular narrative of art? "Explosion" or implosion?

Renuka Sooknanan lives in Toronto and is working on her dissertation.

Woman Eating, Duane Hanson, 1971. Courtesy the National Gallery of Canada. Photo: Jennifer Fisher.

Notes

1. See Cornell West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in John Rajchman, ed., *The Identity in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
2. Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," in Carole Couniham and Penny Van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture* (New York, Routledge, 1997), p. 21.
3. Root describes the *avondverkoop* as an all-night delicatessen which carries French champagne, cheeses, cold cuts, out-of-season fruits, chocolates and pastries (p. 139).

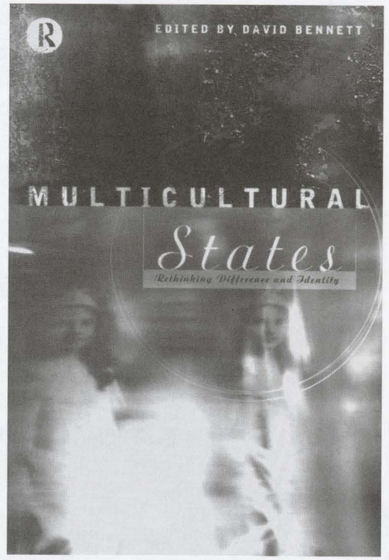
Multicultural States

Rethinking Difference and Identity

Edited by David Bennett

Published by Routledge, London & New York, 1998

Review by Carmela Murdocca



"Multiculturalism" has served variously as code of assimilationism and cultural separatism; campus Marxism and ethnic nationalism; transnational corporate marketing strategies and minority competition for state resources; radical democracy and cosmetic adjustments to the liberal status-quo.

Without question, the term "multiculturalism" has been variously contested. *Multicultural States* intends to chart a trajectory of global and local, personal and political relevance, reflected in the historical and political "multicultural" transfigurations across five continents. "Multiculturalism," whether in the form of formal state policy, governmental rhetoric or "oppositional minority-driven" campaigns, often functions as a present-day paradigm that reveals the more systemic and discursive attempts at forging a unified national identity. The seventeen essays in this collection are divided into three broad areas that include: The limits of pluralism; Multiculturalism and the nation: histories, policies, practices; and Positionings.

In the first section, Homi Bhabha advocates both in his essay and subsequent interview that a decidedly "'multiculturalist' stance must grapple with the 'irrationality' of xenophobia, racism and sexism as social practices that constitute 'discriminated' minority identities." Bhabha's contributions offer a glimpse into our own racialized, violent present. (We do not have to look much further than to our own racist media frenzy concerning the Chinese migrants in British Columbia to witness this). Maria Koundoura extends Bhabha's analysis and suggests that formal multicultural policy and a multicultural platform "run the risk of becoming another transformation of liberal democracy's crisis-management of representation." Importantly, the first section asks whether multicultural policies and/or a multicultural worldview function as a political tool of collective cultural alienation or collective cultural inclusion?

The second section, "Multiculturalism and the nation: histories, policies, practices" interrogates more discursive manipulations of multicultural policy and reveals the way in which the notion of the "nation" is utilized as an ideological force central to the creation of a "multicultural imaginary." Instances and cases in point include those from India, South Africa, El Salvadoran refugees in multicultural states, New Zealand, the United States, Ireland, Australia and Canada. Here, notions of the "multicultural" are articulated as transnational critical spaces that include identity formations, language, educational policies, the rhetoric of the law, religiosity, class conflict, and ethnicity in the construction of a "national identity" and a "national culture." For instance, Smaro Kamboureli's "The Technology of Ethnicity: Canadian multiculturalism and the language of the law" utilizes the Canadian Multiculturalism Act/Loi sur le multiculturalisme canadien, to examine language, translation, "multiculturalist" law and education in the context of ethnic identity versus "national culture."

In the final section, entitled "Positionings," the essays come together in an interrogation of personal fragmentation and political vision within transhistorical communities differently affected by the notion of the "multicultural." Mediated by a continually relational, geographical and temporally specific agenda, a distinct politics of location emerges within these contributions. Meaghan Morris interrogates her own personal and political identifications as "citizen, feminist intellectual, Aboriginal sovereignty advocate, white middle-class Anglo-Celtic (and) loyal labour voter" in the context of "'mass-mediated' debates about Australian republicanism as a nation-building project." In "Riding Multiculturalism," Gargi Bhattacharya incorporates the intersections of racism, heterosexism, class, and homophobia in her exploration of the "multicultural" agenda in Birmingham's working class culture and local governmental policies. In my opinion, "Positionings" proves to be the most exciting section of the book not only because it is where the interplay of the global and local, personal and political is fully realized, but it is where we are able to recognize that the politicized appropriation of such dominant codes and discursive practices offered by "multiculturalism" reveals the most fascinating battles towards the struggle of empowerment by marginalized groups.

Multicultural States intends to challenge notions and practices of multiculturalism beyond that of a celebratory "multicultural landscape" to a more politically critical and complicated project of both local and global proportions. To the extent that *Multicultural States* includes emerging voices to these ongoing and timely debates, cultural theorists *par excellence* such as Homi Bhabha still dominate its "theory" section. Ultimately, *Multicultural States* fits into a larger conceptual framework of both cultural and political significance that relates to the construction of a "multicultural imaginary." It is an important contribution to ongoing debates in that it disrupts notions of fixed national boundaries in an effort to form transnational alliances based upon various multicultural formations.

Carmela Murdocca is a writer living in Toronto.

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Morrisseau before he'd recognize him as an Indian. But nobody painted like Morrisseau until Morrisseau invented the so-called "Woodlands School" in the 1960s, so why does he get to be an Indian while Jim doesn't? The answer is simple: racism.

The result of this Tory nonsense will be one less publicly funded institution showing the work of living artists. The McMichael will be turned into a joke among Canadian art institutions and the only people who won't get it will be the McMichaels themselves.

(Much of the information above is derived from Ray Conologue's thoughtful article in The Globe & Mail, *Tuesday, June 27, 2000.)*

Richard William Hill is an artist, critic and curator. He is a member of the FUSE board of directors and the Visual Arts Committee of the Toronto Arts Council.

short FUSE

Indian Givers:

The McMichaels' Revenge on Contemporary Art

by Richard William Hill

There must be an 800 number directly to Queen's Park for disgruntled millionaires. How else to explain the decision of the Harris Tories to give the McMichaels what they couldn't achieve through the courts: the return of control over the collection they donated to the public thirty-five years ago? I can imagine the telephone conversation reading something like the Watergate transcripts (with Harris every bit as foul-mouthed as Nixon):

The scene: Harris' office. A bright red telephone rings. Lights flash. A siren sounds.

"Oh [expletive deleted]!" says Mike, "A millionaire's in trouble!"

He picks up the phone. "Millionaire hotline, Harris speaking. How can we help you?"

A brief pause, "Oh, Mr. McMichael, how are you?"

Another pause, longer. "What!" says Harris, "you're telling me that those [expletive deleted] bums won't let you control your own art collection? And they're showing contemporary art in your museum? That stuff makes me want to [expletive deleted] puke! Haven't my cuts and appointments to the Ontario Arts Council taught those [expletive deleted] artists a lesson? Well, I say [expletive deleted] them! You should take your art back!"

Another pause, "Oh, you mean you donated it thirty-five years ago? Why the [expletive deleted] would you do something like that? Why not just keep it for yourself and run it like a business? You some sort of commie back then, or what? Well, I understand. Trudeau mania [expletive deleted] up a lot of people."

Another pause, "Oh, they gave you a tax receipt for $815,515? And the province bought you a $300,000 house with a complimentary car and housekeeper? And gave you a four-year salary totaling $400,000?"

"Well, that's a relief. Still, it's not much for—what have they got up there—about 6,000 pieces of art?"

Another pause. "Oh, you only donated 194 paintings? The rest have been purchased by the gallery with public money since? And you'd like to sell off about half of them; all the contemporary ones?"

"You're gonna downsize 'em, eh?"

Yes! believe it or not, if the Harris government's bill passes, the province will be in the business of running a public art gallery. The McMichaels will be lifetime members of the acquisition committee, which will be autonomous from the board of directors and with expanded powers to include selling work and mounting exhibitions. Frankly, I find it impossible to imagine how such a weird administrative structure could function in a public institution.

Here are a few simple reasons why we ought to be suspicious about this situation:

1) Never trust a group of urban intellectuals—modernist painters to boot—when they tell you they are getting back to nature. All they find in the woods are the ideas they brought with them.

2) Never, ever, trust millionaires who build rustic log palaces for themselves. Ask them who they're trying to fool. Probably themselves. They don't want to take responsibility for the world they've created; the one we still have to live in.

3) Never, ever, ever, trust a provincial government that hides behind a corny, nostalgic view of nationalism while its policies destroy everything decent this country has developed over the past century.

Not that the McMichael gallery hasn't always been somewhat problematic in conception. The limitations in the institution's conception have meant that the curators have had their work cut out for them. At their best they've tried to bring new, critical perspectives to bear on the collection, particularly those that reflect the cultural diversity of Canada. The implicit racism of the McMichaels' desire to cling to a view of Canadian culture purged of non-white immigrants is the most insidious aspect of their conservatism. Not only does this misrepresent the influence of non-white immigrants at the time of the Group, it suggests that a contemporary institution calling itself the "McMichael Canadian Collection" can retain the fiction that "Canadian" means only white Canadians. I saw this kind of thinking in action when I visited the McMichael this Canada Day. The gallery hired a group of Chinese Lion Dancers to perform. My friends and I overheard the following gems from the crowd: "What do Lion Dances have to do with Canada Day?" And, from some confused woman who has taken the Bering Strait theory too far: "Why are those Natives always so loud?"

The status of First Nations art is especially bizarre. I'm sure the McMichaels will be happy to keep their Norval Morrisseau paintings, which they see as innocuous enough, but they don't want more explicitly contemporary works by First Nations artists. I remember a criticism that someone had written in a comment book during a show of Native artist Jim Logan. It denigrated the work and urged the gallery to return to showing only Group of Seven and Indian art. Obviously this genius wanted Jim to paint like

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short FUSE

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