

FUSE

ART + CULTURE + POLITICS

VOLUME 34 NUMBER 3 SUMMER 2011

PERFORMING POLITICS FOR 35 YEARS

FROM THE ARCHIVES:

DEBORAH ROOT ON ART + MAGIC + CAPITALISM

AYANNA BLACK INTERVIEWS BELL HOOKS

SARA DIAMOND ON EXPO 86

PROJECTS BY KATHRYN WALTER & EDUARDO AQUINO,
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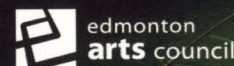
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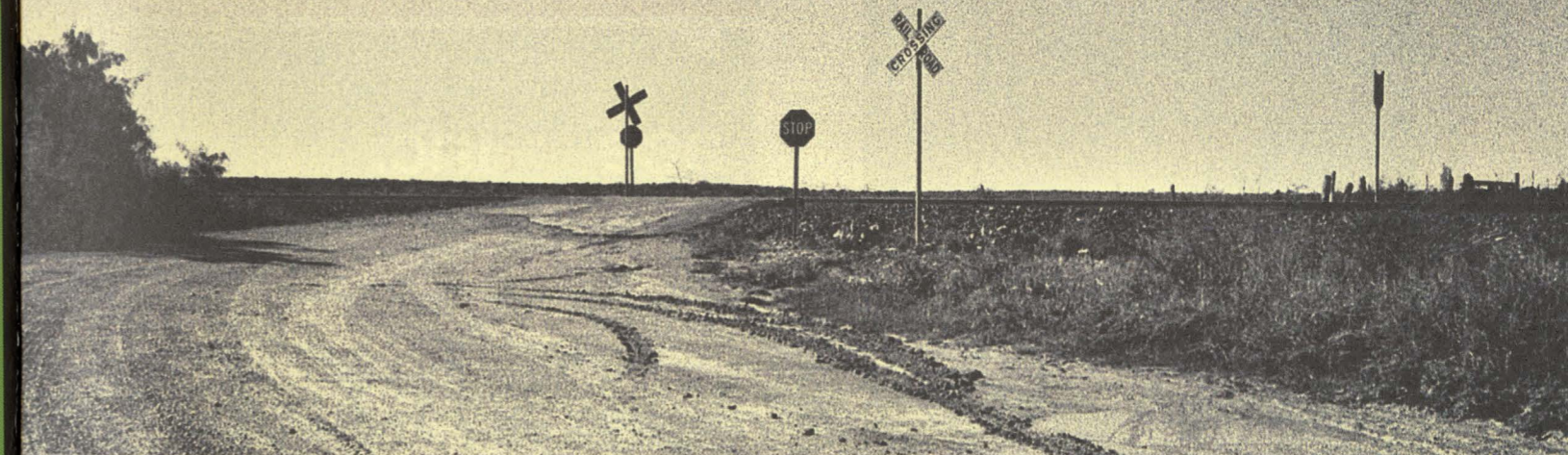


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COVER IMAGE: Ayanna Black (1939-2009) at Celafi Festival, 1997. Courtesy of the City
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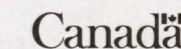
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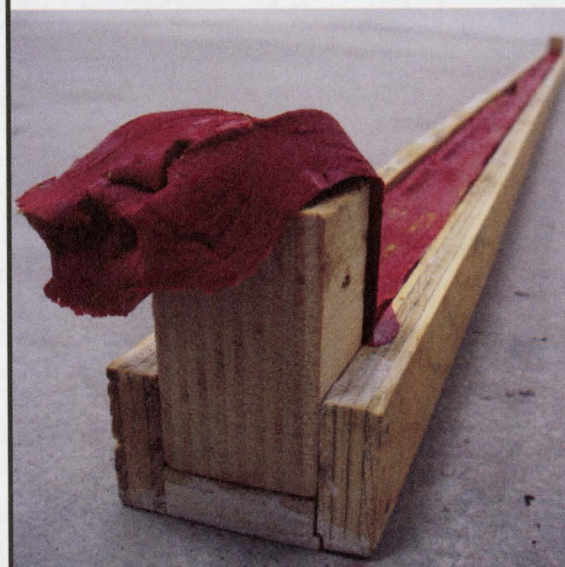


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Jamelie Hassan, detail from *Midnight's Children* (from *The Trilogy*), 1990 photo: John Tamblin

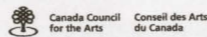
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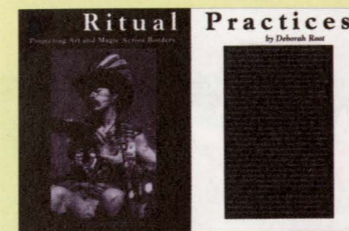
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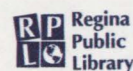
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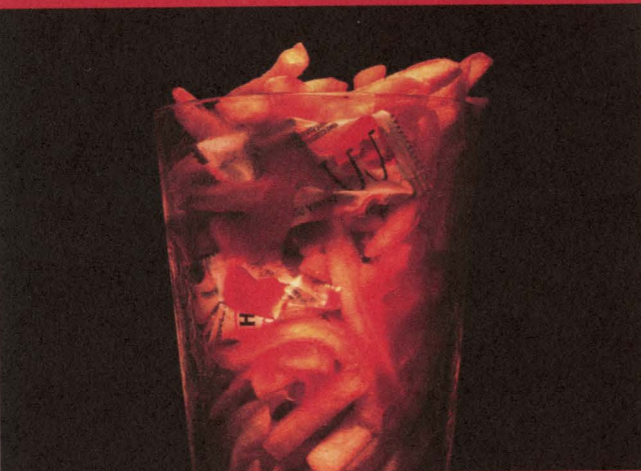
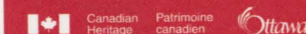


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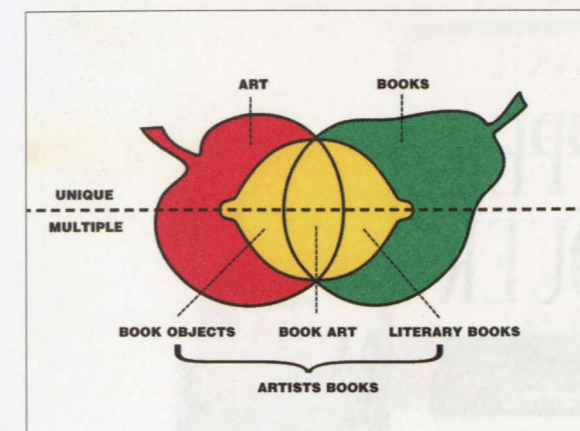
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EDITORIAL



Clive Phillpot, 1993.
Courtesy of the artist.

Arton's Cultural Affairs Society and Publishing has been producing a magazine since 1976, under the name *Centerfold* for the first two years, and *FUSE Magazine* ever since. That's 35 years of performing politics through art and culture. Throughout this history, Fuse has been consistently committed to enabling and evaluating the political contributions of cultural producers. Fuse is less interested in talking about political art, *per se*, than in actively engaging politics from the perspective of artists, writers, musicians, performers, researchers and educators.

As the new editorial director, my first order of business has been to familiarize myself with this admirable and

unflinchingly experimental history. This special summer issue brings you the results of my adventures in the archives: a total of eight features, interviews, and reports plus 6 artist's projects and cover art. These contributions are the work of seventeen outstanding thinkers and makers, spanning three decades. Taken as

a whole, the present collection is an exploration of the ways that solidarity enables political action.

In Ayanna Black's 1990 interview reprinted here, bell hooks connects the possibility of solidarity to the existence of a *community of interest*, which is to say, a political alliance that hinges on mutual investment. The phrase "Solidarity Not Charity," employed by the New Orleans non-profit organization Common Ground Relief, establishes the relationship between aid workers and those hit by disaster as marked by a shared demand for environmental justice. Likewise, the idea of a community of interest provides a compelling description of the relationship of artists and other creators to the political goals we hold dear. It allows us to exceed identity-based frameworks without abandoning them wholesale, and sketches a framework for timely goal-driven alliances.

If solidarity seems to imply a separation between artists and the social world—an implication we rally against with ever-greater conviction as our Prime Minister attempts to dismiss artists as elitist gala socialites unconnected to 'real life'—each piece in this issue will prove otherwise. Here, artists and writers demonstrate the complexity of

our relationships to the political projects to which we devote our working lives, admitting, if you will, our own complicity in their failures and successes. From the art worker concerned with the social conditions of her labour (Sara Diamond, 1986), to the vandal (Eduardo Aquino and Kathryn Walter, 1995), to the advocate for a critical disability arts network (Rachel Gorman, 2007), a range of solidarities are performed in these pages. While much has changed for these contributors since Fuse first published their pieces (you can read updated biographies on our website), they continue to speak to the commitments and challenges we're working with today.

Conspicuously absent from these pages are the artists who founded Fuse, Clive Robertson, Tom Sherman and Lisa Steele. This absence is not due to any lack of esteem, as their founding mandate—to publish unapologetically "ideological" material on, from, and for the margins of the art world—is still the guiding force of our efforts. Since the days the founders sat on the editorial committee, Fuse has occupied a special place in the landscape of Canadian magazines. Initially adorned with the tagline "An Artist's Magazine," Fuse was then a publication by artists for artists, like *FILE Magazine* (1972-89) or *Avalanche* (1970-76). As a portable, paper-based venue for the exhibition of art and ideas, Fuse is perhaps most at home in the distinctly Canadian network of artist-run centres. Still a publicly-funded, non-profit endeavor, Fuse continues to be primarily concerned with the performed politics of artists and the arts, committed to fierce critique or loving advocacy as the situation warrants.

The next three issues will be devoted to regional explorations of states of postcoloniality, looking at Egypt, Canada's North, and Lithuania. Drawing on the perspectives of diaspora and indigenous communities living in Canada, plus those of Canadian expats abroad, this diverse sampling of geographies will trace the contours of a politics of decolonization.

In the meantime, Fuse invites you to drop by for a visit during our public office hours, Tuesday-Thursday, 12-5PM. Come on over and peruse a back issue on 401 Richmond's rooftop garden or strike up a conversation with our new staff. We'd love to meet you!

- GINA BADGER

Sources:

Allen, Gwen. *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art*. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The MIT Press, 2011.

Kealey, Susan. "Introduction" to the Retrospective Anniversary Issue. *FUSE Magazine* 20.2 (1997): 13-17.

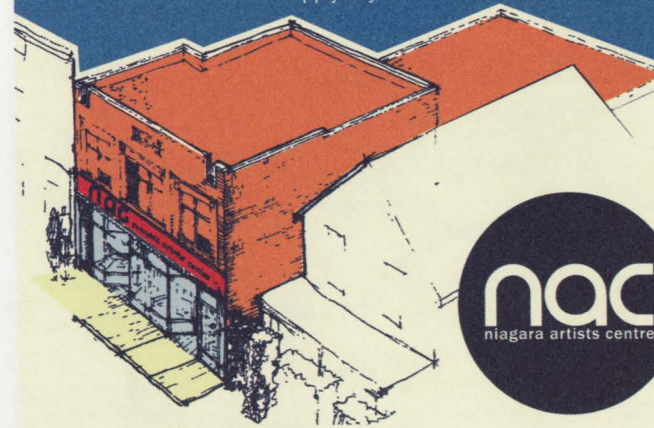
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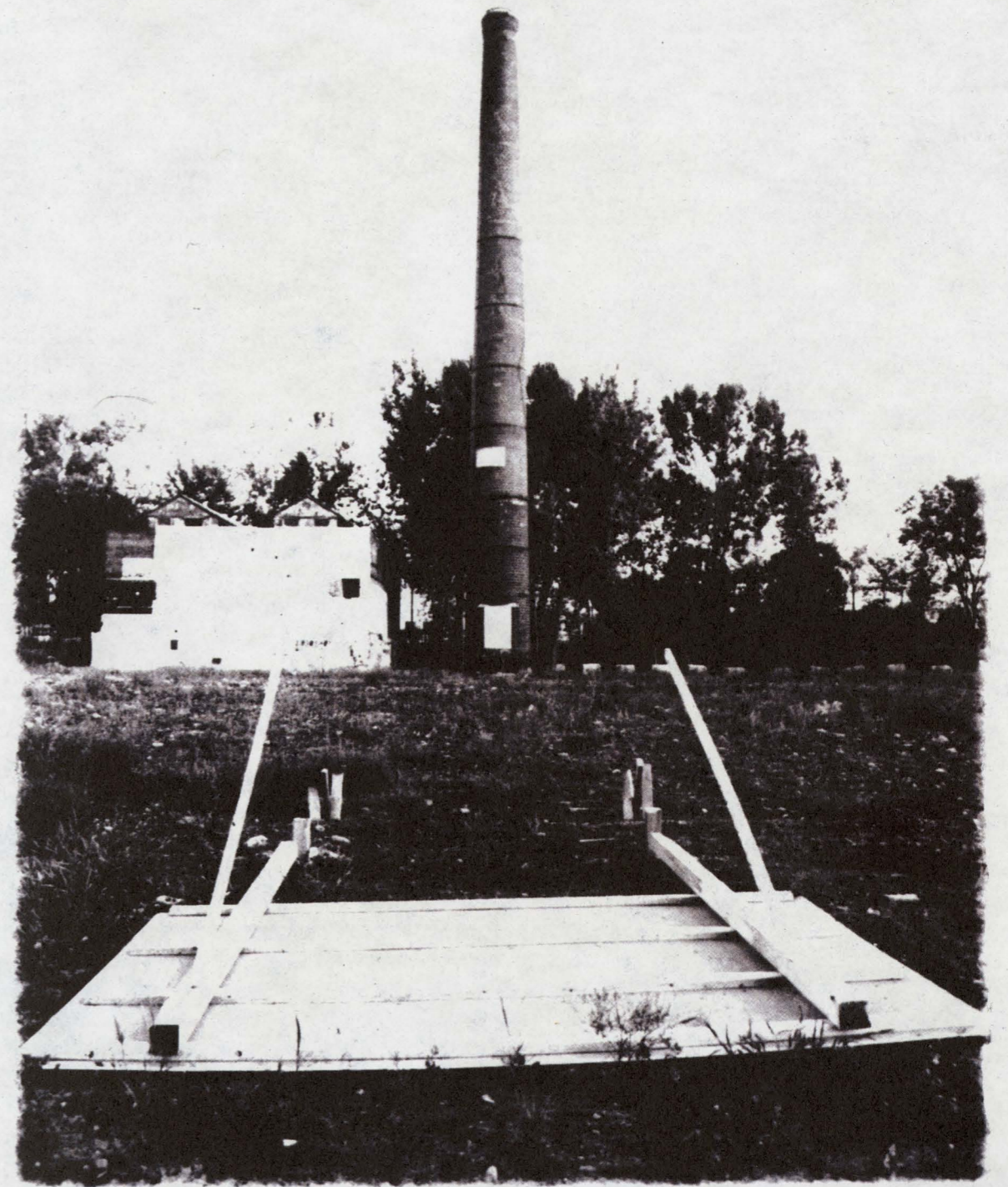
A SIGN OF VANDALISM?

Saint-Patrick Street, Montreal
Sunday, September 11, 1994

found object, handsaw
various dimensions



6:00 AM



6:04 AM

Ritual

Projecting Art and Magic Across Borders



Guillermo Gómez-Peña in the performance/installation work *The Temple of Confessions*, by Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes, 1996. Photo: Monica Naranjo.

Practices

by Deborah Root

Let's say I love you from afar, so I visit a magician who places our photographs in a bowl with (perhaps) pieces of paper with our names written on them and several spoonfuls of honey. Candles are lit, words are said, and it is done. You and I are together in a bowl, cemented with sticky sweetness. At the level of appearance, we *are* together, even if events in the world have yet to catch up with events in the bowl. In this sense the desired effect has already happened: the appearance of our union has been made to exist in the world and I have witnessed the materiality of the ritual that brought us together.

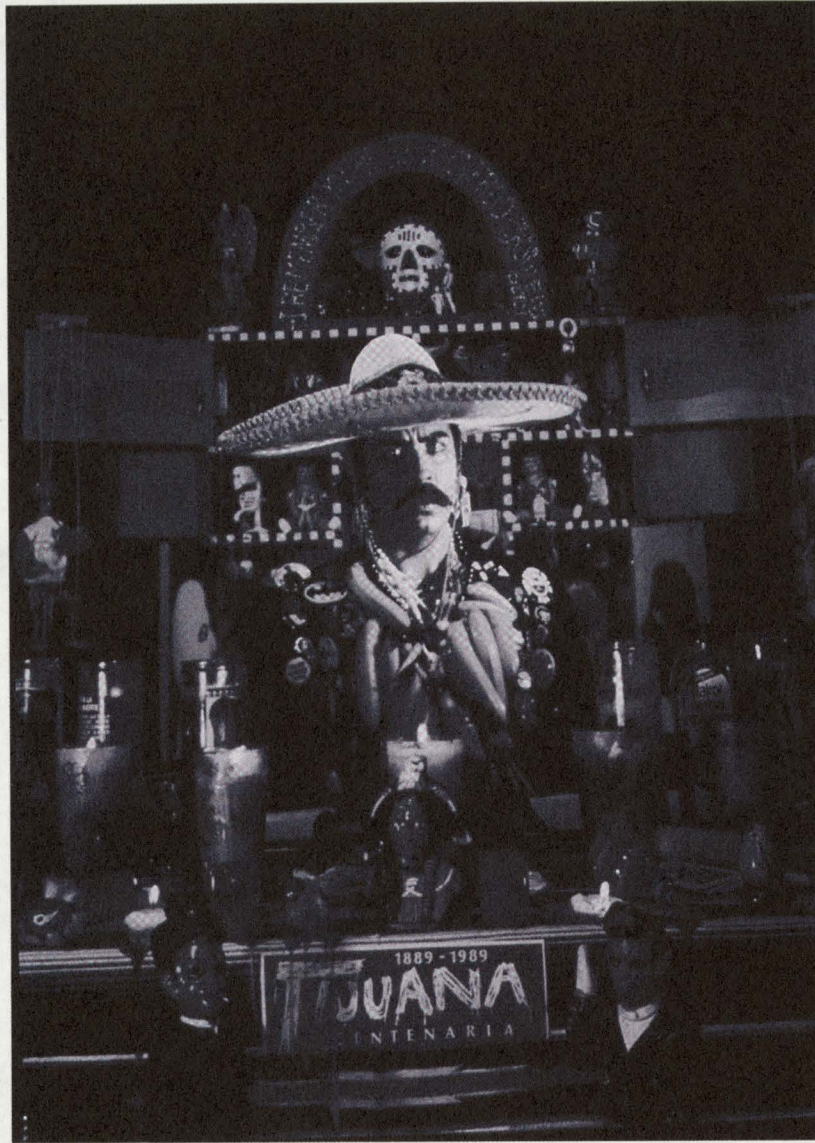
Or another scenario: let's say there's a bad political situation, and arts grants are being cut right and left. Bureaucrats gather together in a room, and certain names are written on a piece of paper and placed in a file. The names represent the people who will lose their funding. The same day, the government erects billboards with the image of its leader, and arranges rallies where its supporters can be photographed. Is this magic? Both the magician and the bad government are attempting to construct a map of real life, and both are manipulating appearances to create effects in the world. Both are ritualizing their actions, explicitly so in the first example. The difference is that government councils think that their actions only happen in this world, whereas by creating another world in the bowl the magician recognizes that different realities can coexist simultaneously. One system of thought is static, the other flexible.

Why turn to magic instead of dealing with power head on? Is magic, as is claimed in social science textbooks, the last refuge of the dispossessed, a consolation for people who can't make things happen in the real world?

I would argue that magic is about transformation, and if I were to generalize, I would say that magical practices are concerned with the permeability of borders, of collapsing the boundaries between fixed categories of "now" and "later," life and death, male and female, animal and human. Rather than insisting on a firm distinction between the real and the unreal (and where do you draw the line?), magic reminds us that there are different planes of the real, each of which produces its own effects, each of which has materiality. For example, ritual art tends to show how something is able to become something else, or is something other than it appears on the surface. This is based on a particular understanding of reality; the boundaries between phenomena exist for the sake of convenience, in that they make description easier, but they do break down once you look closely at things. What is powerful about magic is its ability to disrupt categories of thought.

Magic can make people uneasy because it utilizes what is for many an unfamiliar conceptual language. Accordingly, magic (or practices explicitly named as such) is not yet integrated into urban life in late-twentieth-century North America. We have art instead. In the performance piece *Border Brujo* (1991), Guillermo Gómez-Peña speaks of the border as the place where *brujos* become performance artists, but what is the border? He is referring to the border between the United States and Mexico, but also to the different histories and symbolic systems these entities

express. How come "they" got the magic and "we" got the art? It seems like a raw deal. Is it part of an operation of containment, a mechanism of capitalism that makes things that cannot be easily explained more manageable and, in the end, more saleable?



Guillermo Gómez-Peña in the video/performance work *Border Brujo*, Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Isaac Arstenstein, 1991, 52 min. Photo: Max Aguilera-Hellweg.

For many, magic is conflated with irrationality. Gómez-Peña's border between magic and art reminds us that the technological north has been designated as the space of reason and the south as disorder, violence, romance and, most importantly, irrationality. These are longstanding tropes of colonialism, but also have to do with how the West has imagined its own margins. Within the Western tradition, most of the books about magic written in the last two hundred years or so insist that magic is ultimately delusional, a refuge for the weak-minded and superstitious; many of the books written in the preceding centuries recognize its existence, but claim that it is the devil's work and must be rigorously suppressed. Although the Church clearly has its own ritual practices, institutionalized religion has been very careful to distinguish these from magic. This is the intellectual training many of us have inherited, and the weight of this

tradition makes it difficult to know how to approach magic. In everyday life, there are strict lines of cause and effect that we are supposed to acknowledge as "real," in which there is a denial that the manipulation of objects in a ritual context can produce concrete effects in the world. (It's true that magic doesn't always "work," but that doesn't mean it doesn't have effects. And science doesn't always "work" either). When scientific explanations of reality took over from the religious discourses of the Church, magic was increasingly displaced. Yet the suppression of magic by science shared many assumptions of earlier religious discourses: both insisted that it is not the community that will decide

what truth is, and both claimed that to reject the truths of experts is to manifest a profound and ultimately anti-social ignorance.

Something has happened at the end of the twentieth century to return us to magic. While various forms of organized religion have experienced a revival (for example, the charismatic evangelism of the New Right), in the cities of the north one can also find occult shops, botánicas, New Age seminars, and different kinds of curers and seers. At HMV and Tower records we can buy CDs of trance music; we can visit expensive shops to purchase magical healing candles from Vermont. To some extent, this is an outgrowth of the mixing of cultural traditions in an age of globalization: old borders are breaking down, and different peoples and cultural traditions are coming into contact with one another. The questioning of colonial histories and inclusion of different perspectives means that the possibility exists for approaching other traditions and realities more openly. But this does not explain why so many schooled in Western rationalism are turning to the supposedly "irrational" symbolic systems of magic. What do people want? It seems too simple to say that they are seeking "meaning", but people do seem to desire a world that makes sense. As Einstein's critiques of cause and effect seep into popular consciousness, and chaos theory appears in blockbuster films like *Jurassic Park*, old certainties have been called into question. I think the last straw has been the seemingly inevitable ecological disasters: increasing numbers of people in the West have ceased to trust the grand promises of science and progress. As the old maps seem less and less relevant to daily life, other approaches to the world become increasingly attractive.

Modernist Projections

Although most people in the North American art world tend not to explicitly engage in magical practices, today we can see traces of magic everywhere, one step removed: Santería altars are set up in art galleries, performance pieces are described as ritual, and bits of hair and bone turn up in installation work. The idea that the artist is a kind of magician runs through the twentieth century avant-garde from the Surrealists' fascination with dreams and sorcery to the shamanistic performance work of the 1970s. How did the magician become the artist or, to put it another way, how is magic transformed when it enters a market economy?

The rationalist legacy of the West insists on a distinction between art and ceremony. An assemblage of objects used in one context is art, in another ritual. At one level this is true: "art" is created to be looked at, ritual is created for a particular set of social and political purposes. Certainly, the distinction between art and ritual proved convenient when, for example, the ceremonial assemblages of other cultures were seized and brought to Western museums and renamed "art." The ritual qualities of the work tended to be ignored by formalist connoisseurs, or accorded the status of amusing stories. This has been the subject of considerable debate in recent years, particularly around the return of cultural objects to their original communities and the question of whether spiritual material should be in museums at all.

This is where we need to be very clear on the effects of colonialism. Although we can never escape our position in history, we can open our categories of analysis to question, and begin to understand how history structures our perception of art, culture, and magic. Western artists' fascination with magic

had in part to do with how the spiritual practices and cultural objects of colonized people came under the purview of Western art.

The modernist avant-garde did attempt to grapple with issues of spirituality, up to a point. Surrealist artists were very interested in the transformative qualities of spirituality; for instance, whereas the early avant-garde such as the Cubists saw masks and other ceremonial objects as constructing a transitory sense of the real, the Surrealists saw masks as a veil for the Freudian unconscious and as a way to access a more primordial knowledge that moved beyond the "real." For instance, André Breton said Oceanic and Northwest coast art abolished the dualism of perception and representation and manifested a return to original unity. Masks in particular were seen as a gateway to a reality that was privileged above Western rationality, and to a realm of intuition and dreams. Thus masks and other ceremonial objects became a kind of raw material for Western artists, a vehicle for locating an outside to reason.

The problem with their understanding of ritual was that after centuries of repression of Western magical traditions it was difficult for urban artists and writers to grasp the community base of indigenous magic, and the way this is linked to the practical concerns of the community, such as farming or medicine. It was also difficult for them to abandon the notion of the individual, who exists separately from the larger society and is equated with personal freedom and agency. This raises the question of where we are taught to locate margins, and with the idea that there is an outside that can be easily accessed and recognized in advance. Do we look for magic some place else, that is conveniently far, far away, or is it right here all along, if only we can look in the right way?

It is important to recognize the legacy of modernism as we in North America attempt to come to terms with magic today. The art world is only one site where magic is being integrated into understandings of reality, and despite claims that post-modernism has undermined old certainties, modernist conceptions of the relation between art and magic can continue to structure how magic is approached. Modernism has left us with two enormous blind spots: first, that magic is a practice that is abstracted from the community in which it is practised, and has

to do with individual power; second, that the magic of other cultures can be easily recognized by its apparent strangeness or exoticism. Both encourage us to think of magic as something separate from everyday life, that can be safely tamed by transformation into an art object, which is one reason that "magic" continues to be ensconced in art galleries.

Sorcery and Power: Another Side of the Problem

If we believe that magic is the province of fools and irrational cultures, something that takes place "there" and not "here", then we will be unable to see how capital and the state use sorcery to further its agendas in our everyday lives. Power itself is a kind of magic, in that it involves the manipulation of appearances. Societies that maintain magical practices understand the potential for magic to be usurped by structures of power, and tell cautionary tales of what can happen when any kind of power gets out of hand. There are differences between state magic and community ritual; both bring together specified objects and people and speak certain magical words, but the state tends to dress up the process with spectacle, which can dazzle and disguise unpleasant truths. For a long time the word "glamour" meant enchantment, and to "cast the glamour" was to perform a magical spell.

However, if we are willing to cross borders, it is possible to hear other stories, and other understandings of the relation of magic to community. For example, two Mexican films reflect the rethinking of history at the time of the 500-year anniversary of the European invasion of the Americas, but offer very different readings of magic and transformation. In one sense, these films reflect the battle lines that have been drawn around the question: was European domination a good thing or has it been a disaster? The answer has implications for how magic, especially indigenous forms of knowledge, can be approached. *Return to Aztlán* (Juan Mora Catlett, Mexico, 1990), shows how magic can be implicated in structures of state power and offers a cautionary tale about the ability of power to dazzle and enchant. *Cabeza de Vaca* (Nicolás Echevarría, Mexico, 1990) tells the story of a conquista-

dor who (supposedly) becomes a shaman, but frames his experience within a modernist narrative of the transformation of the individual through his encounter with another culture.

In *Return to Aztlán*, Juan Mora Catlett offers a twentieth-century reading of fifteenth-century Mexico in order to make a point about how the state usurps sorcery to further its ends. While First Nations spiritual traditions in Canada have been systematically suppressed, and erased in many non-Native discourses of national identity, indigenous knowledge is a site of contestation in Mexico. Large segments of the population remain connected to land-based symbolic systems, and most urban Mexicans tend to be familiar with indigenous spiritual and aesthetic systems. Although Mexican elites tend to look to Europe and the United States as sources of art and culture, the political party that has ruled Mexico since the 1920's has consistently privileged the imperial Aztecs as the exemplar of Mexican identity. In *Return to Aztlán* Catlett distinguishes between the community rituals of ordinary people subject to the agenda of the Aztec state (and by extension, the contemporary Mexican state) and the glamorous sorcery of imperial power.

Return to Aztlán tells the story of a great drought that occurred in Mexico about fifty years before the Spaniards arrived. The Aztec leadership became concerned that the common people were turning away from the kings and priests of the empire, and sent sorcerers to locate the place of origin and offer tribute to Coatlicue, the mother goddess. The film presents this as a power struggle between the sorcerer-priests and the imperial high command. But despite the internal squabbling, both the state and the sorcerers collude in their use of knowledge and spectacle to maintain control of the common people. In so doing, *Return to Aztlán* distinguishes between the ritual practices of the common people, who seek to transform the drought-ridden landscape into one of abundance, and the cynical practices of both the state and the sorcerer-priests. Because magic is about the manipulation of matter, it has always attracted people obsessed with power, from the jewel-encrusted Moctezuma I to the dark suited bureaucrats of today. This is why the state has always had its magicians, and why if magic is separated from a community practice, it has the potential to function as a tool of oppression.

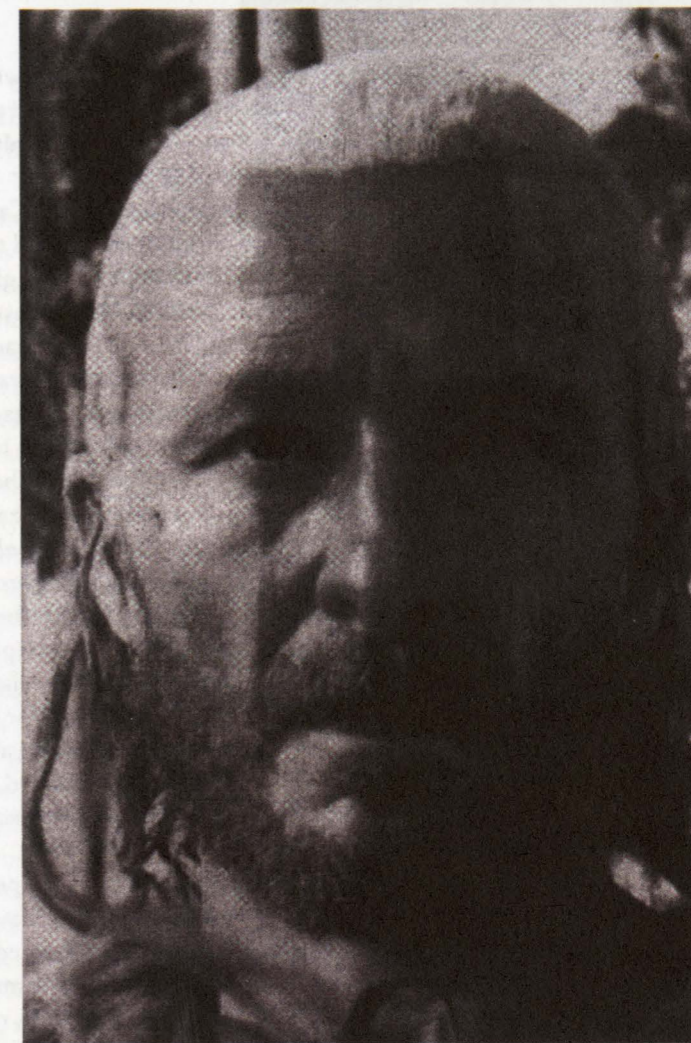
In the film the sorcerers of the Aztec state have the interesting clothes, the music, the elaborate ritual, as they move through the land seizing people and property at will. The common people can become momentarily distracted by the glittering displays that confront them and demand their attention, but this does not mean that they don't understand the way the sorcery of power contributes to their own oppression. The fine clothes and other accoutrements of Moctezuma's emissaries manipulate the appearance of glamour in order to make it look like it is the sorcerers who have the power, whether they actually do or not. Just as corporate images are designed to incite desire, the elaborate imagery of the state causes us to trust authority in advance, and to privilege the enticing displays that authority offers us.

While *Return to Aztlán* addresses the issue of state power, Nicolás Echevarría's film *Cabeza de Vaca* frames magic as a question of individual will and individual power. *Cabeza de Vaca* is a good example of how both modernist tropes and colonial histories are reworked to produce a personal story of transformation, framed within the modernist dream of high adventure in colonized space. The film is based on a "true" story. Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca was a Spanish conquistador who was shipwrecked off Florida

in 1527. After nearly dying of starvation, Cabeza de Vaca and three other survivors wandered through the American southwest for eight years before returning to Mexico City in 1536. During their sojourn, the survivors lived among several different nations and experienced different roles, from slave to merchant to healer. Cabeza eventually became governor of Paraguay and finished his days on a royal pension in Spain.

Cabeza de Vaca wrote about his experiences in *Naufragios* (first published in 1542), which took the form of a personal letter to the king of Spain, as required of commanders by Spanish law. Although Cabeza de Vaca was both slave and healer, the film centres on his role as a healer, and suggests that he underwent a transformation in which he discovered himself to be a shaman: his encounter with another culture allowed him to come into his magical power. Cabeza de Vaca's power as a magician comes from some mysterious place that is never clear to the viewer; his will was not involved, and in the film the quivering hands that represent his power seem completely beyond his control. At the same time his access to magic is totally individualized, not part of any community practice or shared symbolic system.

Cabeza de Vaca implies that the European can be transformed from a conquistador to a shaman by undergoing hardship in a strange place and, by extension, that the Americas had the potential to change European culture. But why make a conquistador into a sign of transformation and shamanism at all? The film is not the only place where this occurs; most critical work on *Naufragios* approvingly views Cabeza de Vaca as a sign of cultural transformation, a "good European" who called into question the certainties of his own culture. Many



Still from *Cabeza de Vaca*, Nicolás Echevarría, Mexico, 1990, 35mm, 112 min. Courtesy the Toronto International Film Festival, Film Reference Library.

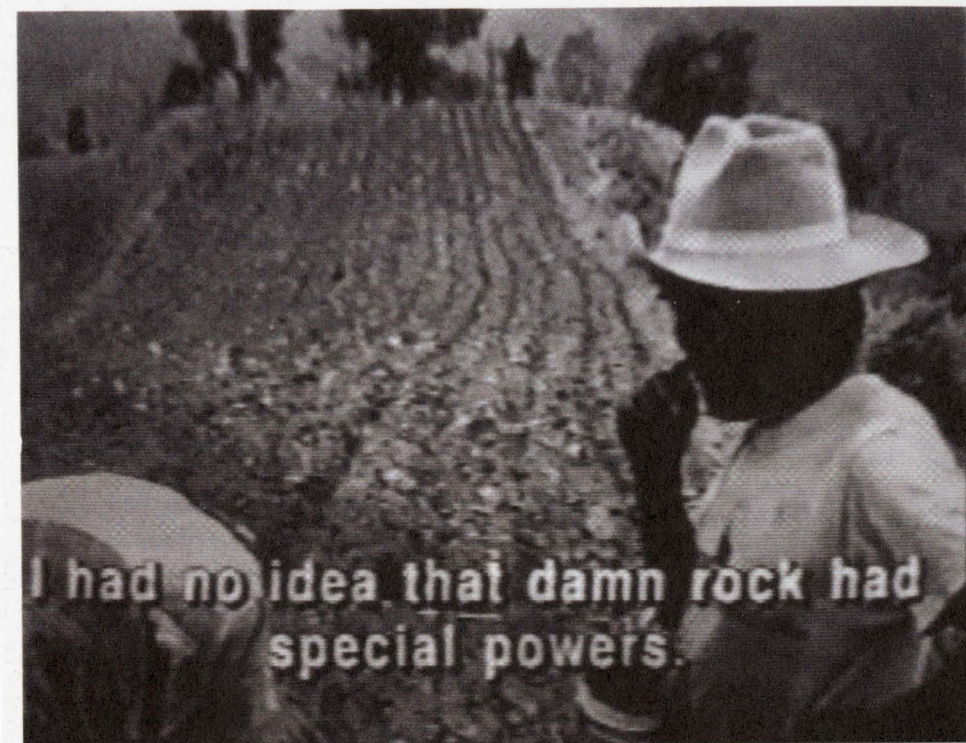
people seem to continue to want it both ways: the European remains in charge, the colonial project is not seriously challenged, but the Western individual can access another reality through an encounter with another culture.

The insistence that Cabeza de Vaca questioned the constraints of his culture becomes even stranger when we read what he actually had to say about his magical abilities. In *Naufragios* he writes:

The islanders wanted to make physicians of us without examination or a review of diplomas. Their method of cure is to blow on the sick, the breath and the laying on of hands supposedly casting out the infirmity. They insisted we should do this too and be of some use to them ... they withheld food from us until we complied.... Our method, however, was to bless the sick, breathe upon them, recite a *Pater noster* and *Ave Maria*, and pray earnestly to God our Lord for their recovery. When we concluded with the sign of

From *Retorno a Aztlán*, Juan Mora Catlett, 1990, Mexico, 35mm, 90 min.





Stills from *Viko Ndute* [Water Celebration],
Emigdio Julián Caballero, Mexico, 1995, video, 21 min.
Stills courtesy of A Space.

could control whatever the inhabitants cherished." This sentence suggests that the colonial "magic" embodied by the *Pater noster* will win the Spaniards the goods and territories they covet.

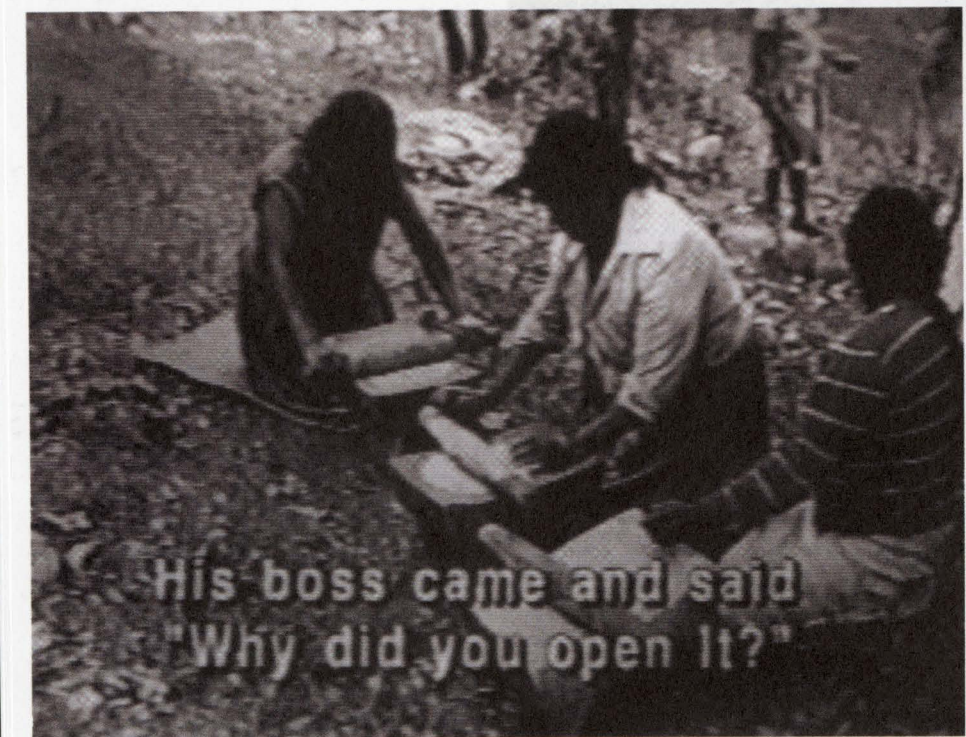
There is no way of knowing what really happened with the historical Cabeza de Vaca, but what is interesting is the way he has been celebrated as a shaman whose skills are completely individualized. Echoing the narratives of Western modernism, Native cultures in *Cabeza de Vaca* function as raw material, backdrop and vehicle for the conquistador's personal story. In every instance European magic is presented as being more powerful than Native magic, and Cabeza de Vaca appears as a much better healer than Native medicine people. The community disappears, the long training of medicine people disappears, and what is reinforced is the twentieth-century idea that magic is a matter of individual power and individual transformation.

Where Brujos Become Performance Artists

As I prepare to go out, I spill coffee all over my clean clothes. Running out the door, I just miss the streetcar. By reading these signs, I recognize that today will not be a good day. We all read omens as individuals, whether we name it as such or not. Everyone has personal rituals: a friend of mine places all rejection letters in the cat litter box; another wears the same pair of earrings each time she gives a talk. In explicitly

the cross, He willed that our patients should directly spread the news that they had been restored to health.¹

The fact is, Cabeza de Vaca had a real problem. He had to explain what he had been doing in those eight years he was outside the purview of the institutional authority of Christian Spain, and he had to be extremely clear that in no way had he gone over to the other side. Apostasy was a capital offence. The healing practices he describes are wholly articulated within orthodox Christian doctrine, something Cabeza de Vaca would have had to negotiate extremely carefully to allay any suspicion of heterodoxy or idolatry. Except for the sentence in the long quotation above, there is no description of Native healing practices. Moreover, later in the text he sheds light on his motives for healing: "now this cure so inflated our fame all over the region that we

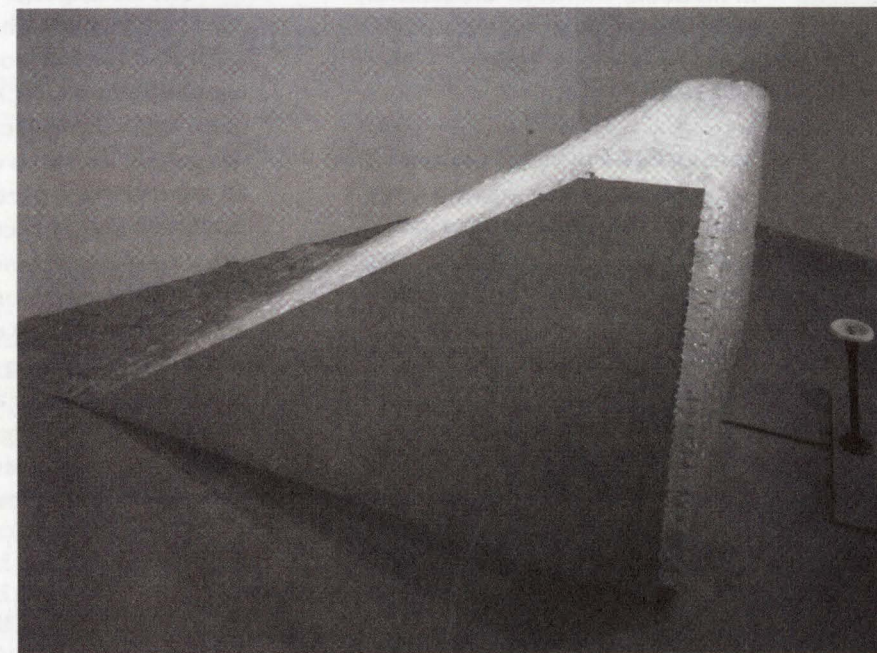


magical thought, the "text" of omens and ritual is expanded, and we read not just what affects us personally, but the path of a bird's flight, or the seemingly random arrangement of stones encountered during a walk, events that affect the community as a whole. The vocabulary tends to have to do with the natural world, but the problem is the same: how to read signs and omens, and how to connect these to events occurring in the world.

In cultures that affirm the existence of magical realities, signs and omens are linked to rituals that are in turn linked to the earth and the community. Viewing Emigdio Julián Caballero's videotape from Oaxaca, *Viko Ndute* (1995)² at a recent exhibition at A Space gallery, I was struck by the way magical practices are embedded in the community of San Antonio Huitepec. A farmer had a problem with a magical rock in his field, and had to figure out what to do about it, in other words, how to read the signs that the rock offers to him personally and to the community as a whole. He consults a friend, who has had a dream about a solution to the problem, and various members of the farming community act together to perform a ritual that will make the rock happy. An accident caused by lightning was the event that set things into motion, and this event is understood to be connected to dreams, ancestor stories and community rituals, all of which refer to the natural world. Like everyday life itself, magic can present us with annoying demands: the farmer says: "I had no idea that damn rock had special powers." (Watching a tape like this in Toronto can illustrate the prejudices of the north; when the farmers sacrificed a goat to feed the earth, the people sitting next to me flinched and murmured disapprovingly). The point is that magic and ritual exist simultaneously in this world and in another world, and to recognize this entails responsibilities that at times are onerous.

For the farmers of San Antonio Huitepec, magic is part of everyday life. However, with the meeting of cultures it is also possible to be a witness to the intersection of art, magic, and the everyday here. We encounter a different kind of everyday in Rebecca Belmore's installation work on view at the Power Plant, *Temple*,³ we encounter that basic substance of life: water. Belmore has brought together water in different forms, first in plastic bags stacked against a pyramid-like structure. This shows us that even the most natural elements of life can be subject to the forces of power and spectacle. Water then appears in the form of a public drinking fountain, which reminds us that civil society mediates our access to the natural world. Finally, the spectator climbs a staircase to view Lake Ontario through a periscope. The natural world is out there, and our task is to recognize the extent to which our perception of it is veiled by the culture in which we live. Although *Temple* does not explicitly address spirituality, by combining the different appearances of a natural element in such a way to make us question the everyday reality we inhabit, Belmore has created ritual space and offered us a map through the mediations that many of us take for granted. In effect, Belmore reads the signs and omens of a dying earth and, like the magician, brings different elements together to show us the path to another world.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *Border Brujo* (Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Isaac Arstenstein, 1991) constructs a space where magical possibilities can be imagined, and returns us to the politicized, community



Temple, Rebecca Belmore, 1996, detail. Photo: Cheryl O'Brian, courtesy The Power Plant.

base of ceremonial practices. If one of the legacies of modernism is a desire for the exotic, Gómez-Peña shows us the error in how many of us look for difference by calling the glamour of the exotic into question.

Gómez-Peña disrupts the rigidity of stereotypical images of the shaman by manipulating the objects that represent Mexican "irrationality." In *Border Brujo* he lights candles in front of a magical altar, but the artist's body itself becomes a kind of altar, loaded down with the ritual objects of the colonial imaginary, including a banana necklace, pearl necklace, skeleton earrings, bandanna, sombrero, sunglasses, bullet bandolier, and a boa made of pink ostrich feathers. This reminds us that the magician's body is marked by colonial history, and that to encounter magical reality requires a willingness to confront the everyday lived experience of this history. By using objects that represent commodified images of Mexican spirituality, he is able both to undermine the power of these stereotypes, and to expose the yearning for magical reality experienced by so many alienated intellectuals in the twentieth century. For Gómez-Peña, the problem is not the fact that many living in the

cities of the technological north long for magic, but the way this need has been commodified in a neo-colonial market economy. Gómez-Peña makes this explicit when he tells his audience: "I need dollars, you need magic: a perfect transaction."

In his book, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, Gómez-Peña speaks of his encounters with shamans and medicine people:

Far from being austere and contemplative, they were courageously engaged in social reality, and their ritual practices took place in specific political contexts, such as the struggles for land or human rights. They were also rowdy, quite theatrical, and didn't regard mass culture as a threat to their "authenticity."⁴

If one of the errors of the modernist understanding of magic is to look for it in the strange and exotic, this passage reminds us that magic isn't about individual transformation and individual power, or the strange and grotesque. It doesn't occur some place else. For magic to be more than an alluring abstraction, it must be part of our lives, including our social and political experiences. By abandoning expectations of strangeness, we can see the magical possibilities in art that transforms appearances in order to offer us access to another reality and tell us something unexpected about our everyday relation to the natural world. Contemporary work such as that of Gómez-Peña and Belmore can reveal to us the links between magic, art, and history, but it is up to us to find the path out of the isolation and despair that is the consequence of an absence of spiritual practice. Belmore's *Temple* was successful precisely because it did not call itself magic, yet as a work of art it did many of the things that magical ritual does. Similarly, Gómez-Peña recognizes that magic is a political practice linked to everyday life, and refuses to claim an equivalence between art and magic.

In Belmore and Gómez-Peña's work, art and magic are constituted in relation to everyday reality. At the same time, it is important to remember that the art gallery does not precisely constitute this "everyday reality," but exists as a privileged space that is part of the market economy and is linked to what can be a cynical and unpleasant scale of values. The point of art would seem

to be to express something that cannot quite be said in language, to generate another way of looking at things, another reality, but it is not quite ritual, most importantly because it is abstracted from a community that shares both culture and a magical symbolic system.

The art language deployed by Belmore and Gómez-Peña makes their work accessible to the North American viewer, but because their understanding of culture is historically and politically grounded, they are able to create a space beyond static, commodified images of difference. A potential problem with explicitly magical art is that it can be a way of containing magic in the art gallery, and in so doing render it passive. For example, I can attend an art exhibition that utilizes images of, say, Haitian voodoo but chances are I lack the vocabulary and cultural context to make voodoo part of my everyday life. This means I will tend to have a passive relation to the magical reality embodied by the work, and there is a risk that such work will end up being a mere representation of another world rather than something that creates that world. In attempting to think through the relation between magic and art, works such as *Temple* and *Border Brujo* make it possible to open up conceptions of what magic is. That for many of us our only encounter with magic is in an urban art gallery does not negate the ability of both art and magic to construct another reality, but the gallery work should provide the viewer with a map of that reality, as does the work of Gómez-Peña and Belmore.

A Possible Ritual

I imagine another part of town, and a magician who gathers together objects that represent the meanspirited government under which we live, smashes them with a hammer and cuts them into small pieces and removes them from sight. She then takes objects that represent positive action and puts them on a table with flowers and food and images of people working together. We can see these objects, and we can see that it is done. Does this change anything? Does the government suddenly start funding artists? Probably not, but those of us viewing the objects are able to perceive in a very concrete way what a different configuration of power would look like, which has the effect of breaking the stasis of fear and hopelessness. We gaze at the assemblage of objects on the table and remember that it is always rigidity that works against the enemy. Political magic disrupts this rigidity, turns it against itself, and causes a shift, if only in the way we react to the inflexibility we face around us.

Deborah Root is the author of *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996). This project was completed with the support of the Ontario Arts Council Arts Writing Program.

Notes

1. Cabeza de Vaca, *Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America*, trans. Cyclone Covey (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), p. 64.
2. *Vikò Ndute* was part of the "New Video from Chiapas and Oaxaca" show at A Space gallery in Toronto (11–29 June, 1996), curated by Ian Reid.
3. *Temple* was part of the "Liaisons" show at The Power Plant Gallery in Toronto (19 April–16 June, 1996), curated by Louise Dompierre.
4. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika* (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1993), p. 18.

Indian and Northern Affairs / Affaires indiennes et du Nord

\$

400 Laurier Ave. W.
Ottawa, Ont. K1A 0M4

July 30, 1975

TO ALL REGIONAL DIRECTORS

CIRCULAR W-17

Your file / Votre référence

Our file / Notre référence

It has been brought to our attention that the number of dogs on Indian Reserves has been increasing at a rate far beyond the capacity of this Department or the Indians to administer them.

The Indian Reserve Dog Regulations are optional in nature, and though the last revision of these was on June 10, 1954, few reserves have put them into effect. It has therefore been found desirable, in concurrence with our general review of the Department's policies through the publication of program and policy guidelines, to establish a definitive statement of our position on this question.

In view of the apparent attachment of many Indians to their dogs, it can be expected that this Circular will meet with some opposition on the local level, but with proper moves on the Department's part to forestall any fears the Indians may have, there should be no real problems in the implementation of this policy.

It should be noted that this Circular is of a preliminary nature. Proposals for change should be directed to J. Wright, Director of Program Development, Local Government Program. It can be explained to the Bands in your districts that the Department's intention is not to do away with dogs altogether, but merely to ensure that they are properly administered, and that any improvement in dog administration will be to the advantage of all concerned in the long run. No program can function efficiently without some rules for its planning and its day-to-day operations, and surely this axiom applies to the Indian dog situation as well.

INDIAN BAND DOG GUIDELINES

POLICY CIRCULAR W-17

- 1.1 These guidelines govern all dogs on Indian reserves, whether they be male or female, old or young, and owned by residents of the reserve or by others, except that dogs owned or kept by employees of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs shall be exempted from the provisions of paragraphs 3 and 7 of these guidelines.
- 1.2 All dogs on Indian reserves shall be registered and placed on the Band Dog List for that Band. A copy of the Band Dog List shall be kept at the Regional Office and amendments, additions or deletions to the list shall be communicated to the Regional Office within one week after they are made at the Band level.
- 1.3 Where the sire of a litter of pups can be ascertained, the pups shall be entered under his Band Dog List number until such time as they receive names or reach the age of three months, whichever comes last.
- 1.4 Where the sire of the litter cannot be ascertained, the pups shall be listed under the Band Dog List number of the mother, except that where it is known that the sire is not a Dog resident on the reserve or belonging to a member of the Band, then the pups shall not be included in the Band Dog List.
- 1.5 Pups born to a Reserve Dog mother and a Non-Reserve dog sire shall be considered enfranchised and shall not be subject to the provisions of these guidelines.

- 2.1 Where a Reserve Dog that is registered on the Band Dog List has not, after three months have elapsed from its date of birth, been given a name, that Dog shall be known by the Band Dog List Number assigned to it. This provision does not apply to Dogs that are enfranchised or die within that three-month period.
- 2.2 Reserve Dogs shall not chase automobiles or other vehicles registered in the name of Her Majesty in right of Canada or to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.
- 2.3 Failure to comply with the provisions of 2.2 may result in action taken by the Regional Director to:
 - (a) remove the Dog's name from the Band Dog List.
 - (b) require that the dog be subject to co-management by the Department and the Indian or Indians the Band Dog List describes as its Owners.
 - (c) outright denial (as a last resort) of Core Funding to the Reserve with respect to all dogs.
- 3.1 It shall be the responsibility of the Chief and Council of the Band to ensure that all Dogs on the Reserve shall be of Good behaviour and shall not be vicious or engage in the excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages, drugs, or other intoxicants.

OTTAWA, Ontario K1A 0H4
July 20, 1976

Dear Sir;

Enclosed please find Band Dog List Number 02 for your District, covering those dogs registered at the Gull Bay Band Office, in conformity with the memorandum issued by Mr. Mc Gilp's office pursuant to Guideline Circular F-7 of May 30, 1975.

As this program appears to be progressing more slowly than was originally planned, as the acceptance of the underlying principles met with some resistance at the local band level, it is imperative that you take the appropriate action as soon as possible and practicable.

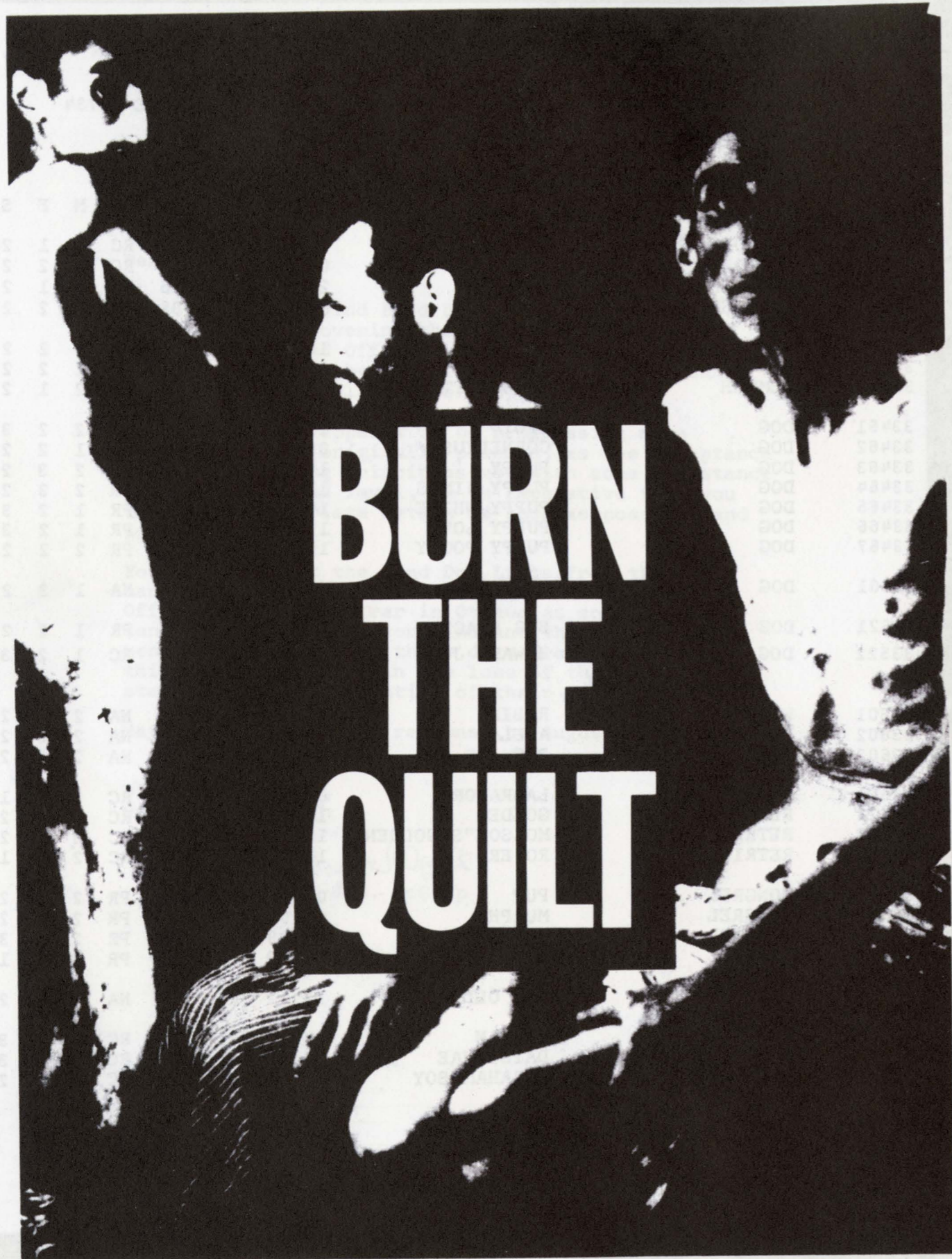
You will collect the Band Dog Lists from the other bands in your District and forward them to the Office of the Registrar in Ottawa as soon as you can: you will inform your Indians that the consequences of omission of their dogs from the lists at this time may result in the loss of the dogs' status or the cancellation of their dog program.

May I anticipate your response by August 20, please.

Director General,
Operations Branch

J.G. McGilp
J.G. McGilp

RESP/ CENTRE- 492 LAKEHEAD DISTRICT			BAND-02 GULL BAY					
AMNO	SURNAME	GIVEN NAMES	BIRTH DATE	PR	RL	M	F	S
33451	NEMOOSH	RIN TIN TIN	22 04 971	05	RC	3	1	2
33452	NEMOOSH	LASSIE	05 12 972	05	RC	4	2	2
33453	NEMOOSH	BLACKIE	21 08 953	05	RC	3	1	2
33454	NEMOOSH	FIDO	05 05 976	05	RC	4	2	2
33455	NEMUSH	ARFER	13 09 969	05	RC	3	2	2
33456	NEMUSH	HOUND	05 11 970	05	RC	1	2	2
33457	NEMUSH	MISS MUTT	17 03 972	05	RC	2	1	2
33461	DOG	SPOT	21 02 972	05	PR	2	2	3
33462	DOG	CORNELIUS	06 06 972	05	PR	1	2	2
33463	DOG	PUPPY	19 05 976	05	PR	2	3	2
33464	DOG	PUPPY JIM'S	19 05 976	05	PR	2	3	2
33465	DOG	PUPPY WHITE	19 05 976	05	PR	1	2	3
33466	DOG	PUPPY LOVE	19 05 976	05	PR	1	2	3
33467	DOG	PUPPY POOPY	19 05 976	05	PR	2	2	2
33501	DOG	MEAN OLD	31 03 960	05	NA	1	3	2
33521	DOG	BIG BLACK	20 12 970	05	PR	1	2	2
33522	DOG	HOWARD JOHN	04 11 971	05	RC	1	2	3
33601	WOLF	RABID	19 11 969	04	NA	2	2	2
33602	WOLF	AKELA	23 09 973	05	NA	2	3	2
33603	WOLF	BIG BAD	30 11 975	05	NA	2	3	2
33621	RETREIVER	LABRADOR	04 04 970	05	RC	3	2	1
33622	RETREIVER	GOLDEN	13 06 971	05	RC	3	2	2
33623	RETREIVER	MOLSON'S GOLDEN	13 06 971	05	RC	3	2	2
33623	RETRIEVRE	ROVER	13 06 971	05	RC	2	2	1
33631	MONGREL	PUP	07 10 974	05	PR	2	2	2
33632	MONGREL	MURPHY	24 08 975	05	PR	2	1	2
33633	MONGREL	MC GILP	24 08 975	05	PR	2	22	3
33634	MONGREL	JUDD	24 08 975	05	PR	3	2	1
33641	MONGREL	FAT OLD	13 12 968	05	NA	2	2	2
33651	WAGOOSH	HERMAN	24 02 971	05	RC	2	1	3
33652	WAGOOSH	DAISY MAE	20 07 971	05	RC	3	2	3
33652	WAGOOSH	ABRAHAMABOY	14 12 974	05	RC	3	3	2



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FUSE

THE
CONSTITUTION:
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MUSIC SUPPLEMENT

Fuse Magazine

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FSE 051

Black Music in Toronto (Norman Richmond)
Women's Music Industry (Susan Sturman)
Industrial Records (Clive Robertson)

Plus Sex Pistols, Inuit Throat Singing, The
Raincoats, DAF, The Government,
and The Slits

Sounding the Border:

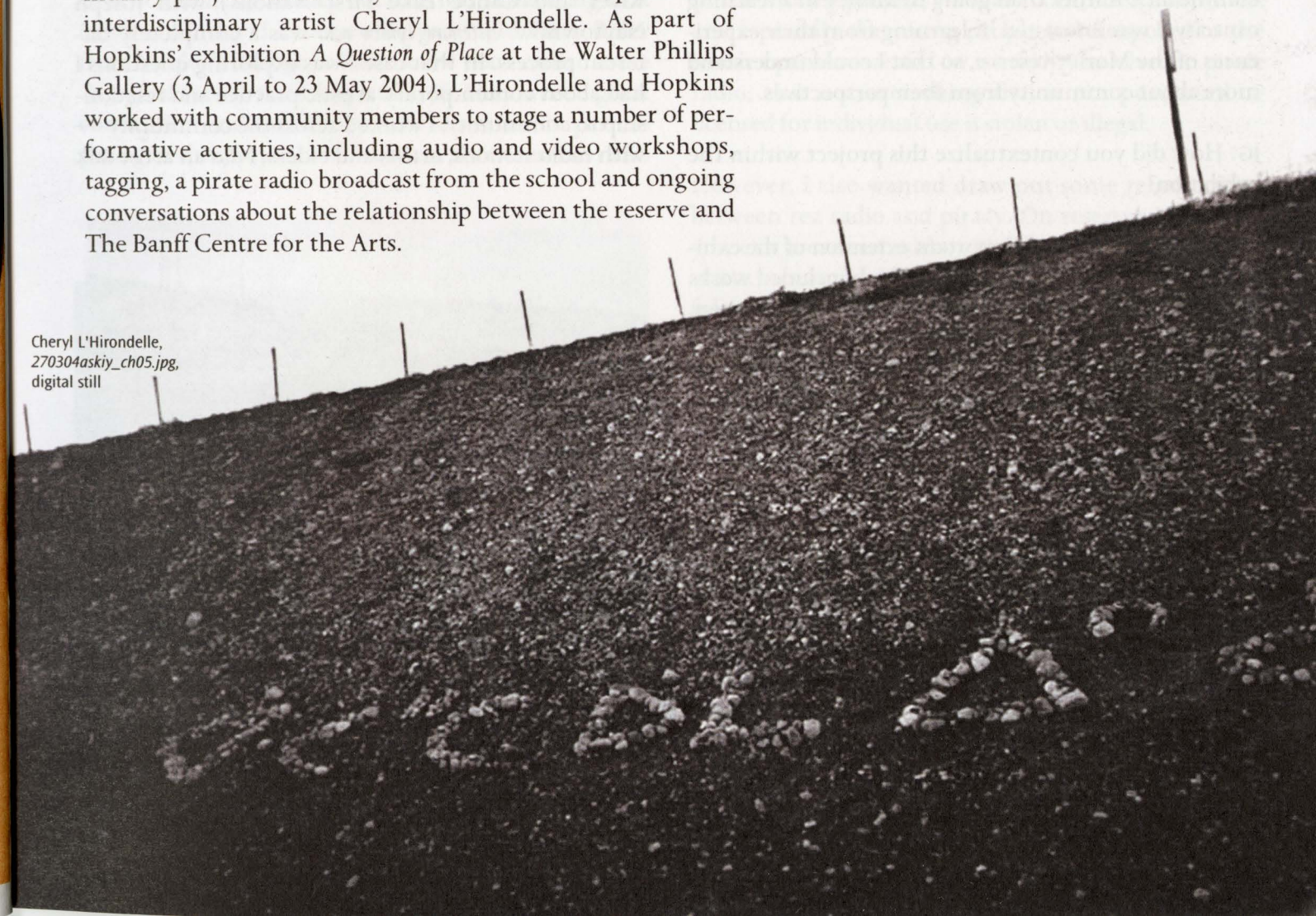
Echoes and
Transmissions
from the Morley
Reserve

It is a cold but sunny March afternoon and artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle is on the side of the TransCanada highway on the Morley reserve between Banff and Calgary. She is placing rocks in patterns that tag the phrase "pimiyonakwan iskonikan askiy" ("look at this leftover land") in Cree syllabics. A trucker honks. She turns and waves. Two miles away, at the Morley school, a group of high-school students are rapping, break-dancing, mixing and broadcasting radio at ten watts — a pirate transmission according to Canadian regulations.

Janna Graham in conversation with
Cheryl L'Hirondelle and Candice
Hopkins about piracy, performance,
community process and autonomy

We are at the apex of *Echoes and Transmissions*, an ongoing community project initiated by curator Candice Hopkins with interdisciplinary artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle. As part of Hopkins' exhibition *A Question of Place* at the Walter Phillips Gallery (3 April to 23 May 2004), L'Hirondelle and Hopkins worked with community members to stage a number of performative activities, including audio and video workshops, tagging, a pirate radio broadcast from the school and ongoing conversations about the relationship between the reserve and The Banff Centre for the Arts.

Cheryl L'Hirondelle,
270304askiy_ch05.jpg,
digital still



JANNA: (via speakerphone from an office in the Art Gallery of Ontario) Hi from Toronto!

CANDICE: (from the office of the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff) Hi there.

CHERYL: (with Candice) Hello. Do you mind if I ask the first question?

CANDICE AND JANNA: Not at all.

CLH: Candice, what was your interest in doing an outreach project at Morley?

CH: My initial interest was to try to engage with the local Native community. Over the years the Banff Centre has put on many Aboriginal exhibitions, performances and residencies. My question was: who would be the audience for these initiatives? As I was curating the exhibition *A Question of Place*, I wanted to make a bridge between the gallery space and the local community. Rather than going to Morley in a teaching capacity, I was interested in learning from their experiences of the Morley reserve, so that I could understand more about community from their perspectives.

JG: How did you contextualize this project within the exhibition?

CH: The project was an important extension of the exhibition as a whole. The exhibition, which included works by Jimmie Durham, Zacharias Kunuk, Brian Jungen, Truman Lowe, Faye HeavyShield along with Cheryl L'Hirondelle, was an attempt to investigate ideas of place and community from Aboriginal perspectives. The works in the exhibition addressed this theme in diverse ways — something I intended from the start. Jimmie Durham's film "The Pursuit of Happiness," for example, speaks to a degree about his place as a Cherokee artist in exile from the United States and how this position — living in voluntary exile — is, in a sense, a Cherokee tradition. It didn't make sense to have an exhibition on this theme and not incorporate the voice of the local in some way.

JG: Cheryl, the projects that you undertook and are continuing to develop at Morley seem to draw from earlier process and performance-based work that you have undertaken with communities. These were projects that you developed on your own initiative, such as *cistemaw iyiniw ohci* (for the tobacco being). How did you approach this kind of work in the context of an exhibition and an institutional initiative?

CLH: I tried to forget about the institutions and instead, concentrated on the people inside them. I am more interested in relationships.

While *cistemaw iyiniw ohci* (for the tobacco being) did not take place in an institution, it was institutionally supported. It was sponsored by Tribe Inc. and was also supported by Meadow Lake Tribal Council. It was the last project I did as part of a two-year co-storyteller-in-residence at Meadow Lake First Nations (including Flying Dust, Makwa Sahgaiehcan, Island Lake, Waterhen Lake, Buffalo River, Birch Narrows, Clearwater River, English River and Canoe Lake First Nations) with Joseph Naytowhow. *cistemaw iyiniw ochi* was a completely different process. In that case I was exploring questions I had about contemporary artistic practice and relationship to community. I worked across the community — with radio stations, artists and elders. I did an artist talk



Cheryl L'Hirondelle, 270304askiy_jg08.jpg, digital still

for the high-school students. Their willingness to listen and give feedback on how they wanted to engage made me realize just how much the community wanted to participate and collaborate in a very direct way. These encounters ultimately manifested themselves in a performance in which I ran across the reserve while traditional stories related to the performance were broadcast on radio and a website.

Echoes and Transmissions was like condensing all of those different ways of working. Instead of being regimented, we maintained fluidity, so that we could respond to what was going on at the school and in the community. We were learning as we went along; exploring process and media, but definitely not focused on fixed ends.

CH: Across these two projects and others in which you have worked with community, you have used radio. What draws you to this medium, as opposed to other traditional visual formats?

CLH: Radio fit in Morley because it is something that exists at Morley. I had met Margaret and Terry Rider from Morley's Siktoge Ja Radio a few years earlier at the *Aboriginal Streams* workshop at Banff. They were a great connection and thankfully were interested in participating in this project. What I know about reserve radio



Cheryl L'Hirondelle, iamcdn.jpg, digital still

from my time in northern Saskatchewan is that everyone uses it, everyone knows it, everyone honours it. Margaret and Terry run Siktoge Ja as a business, but also as a service for the people. Because my work is process based — more about exploration, collaboration and site specificity and less about visual representation — I like to use what is already there.

I also see this as being about expressing points of view. I often use the analogy of a bird on a branch expressing itself. While that mental image might lead to a visual representation quite easily, for me it is the voice that frames my perspective. Radio is like that bird's song — those who have radio have the ability to voice their point of view. Because I was being asked to think about place, I was thinking about the beautiful valley at Morley and the kinds of echoes that might emanate from there. I was interested in what kinds of transmissions one would make to the land there. Radio was the bridge between what I do and what exists on the reserve.

In the Morley project, I wanted community members and especially the young people to be exposed to the whole open-source and DIY mentality involved in pirate radio; that not everything that is not purchased or licensed for individual use is stolen or illegal.

However, I also wanted draw out some relationships between rez radio and piracy. On reserves in Canada you can broadcast without a license up to about fifty watts, so you do not need to have a CRTC license. This follows from a logic that is present within many Indian communities: the air was not mentioned in treaties so there is no need for it to be the jurisdiction or domain of a Canadian governing body. No one can own the air. So on reserves people don't really think of this as pirate radio. Pirate has a more European connotation. To translate the concept of piracy in *Nehiyawewin* (Cree language) one could say, *naciyaw sikiwak* (to sneak up).

JG: Cheryl, in what you've described there is an obvious interest in moving beyond a visual notion of land (like those indications of jurisdiction and limit found on

maps) and toward the more ephemeral quality of radio that exceeds the reach of these boundaries. When you orchestrated the pirate broadcast from the Morley school, however, you simultaneously placed yourself on a perceived and visible border, on the side of the Trans-Canada highway, an edge of Stoney territory where you tagged messages in Cree syllabics. This political boundary was dissipated by the radio waves that reached beyond but it was also reconstituted by your presence. Was this intentional?

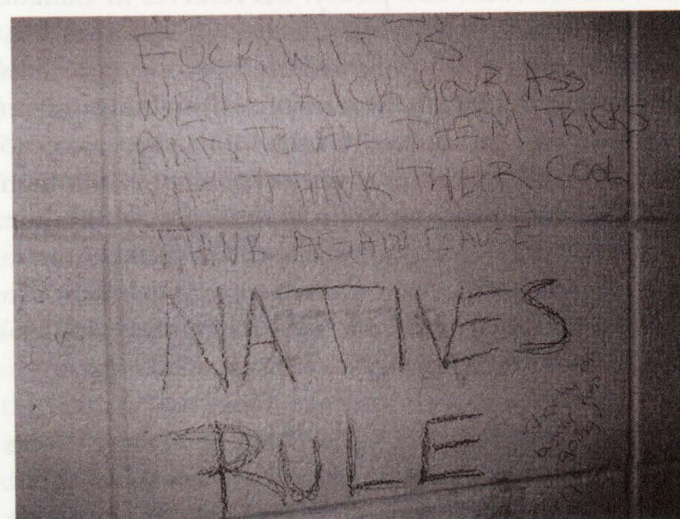
CLH: As Indian people this is our reality. We are partly within a Canadian paradigm, but so much of what we do falls outside of that domain. We are still exploring our freedom of movement, our different connections to land based on this mobility and new forms of communication. From my perspective, language is gauged by the land. For example, *Nehiyawewin*, or Cree language, means the “sounding” of the Cree worldview. This worldview is referenced to where one is situated. Cree dialects change as you move from shield to swamp to plains, from Quebec to BC. Values, lifestyle and point of view also change along the way.

The tagging again reflects my interest in unauthorized youth cultures and subversive activity, the intersections between Indigenous experiences and cultures like

hip-hop. Graffiti, tagging and bombing are meaningful forms of communication. I have been trying to relate this to the existence of pictographs, petroglyphs and early mark-making done by Aboriginal people on the Plains that I heard about from Connie Dieter Buffalo (a writer from Saskatchewan). She once related a story to me about how one of her relatives, her uncle I think, would go into Regina (when Indians were finally being let off reserves without passes) and make marks on buildings that were part English, part symbol, part syllabic. These were little glyphs outside of buildings to send each other messages like: “don’t go here,” “they’ll give you water here,” “you can go into this store,” or “good place to rest.” This was apparently a common practice among hobos, but, in using syllabics, legible only to other Native people in the city. It was a way of communicating with each other in the alienating constructs of the city. When kids are tagging they are also trying to make meaningful messages to each other. I wanted the young people we were working with to understand that tagging, or even the doodles in their notebooks, could operate within a non-authorized artistic space.

JG: And why the side of the highway?

CLH: Ha, ha — what seems like an edge is actually in



Cheryl L'Hirondelle, *nativesrule_tag.jpg*, digital still



Cheryl L'Hirondelle, *peacelove_tag.jpg*, digital still

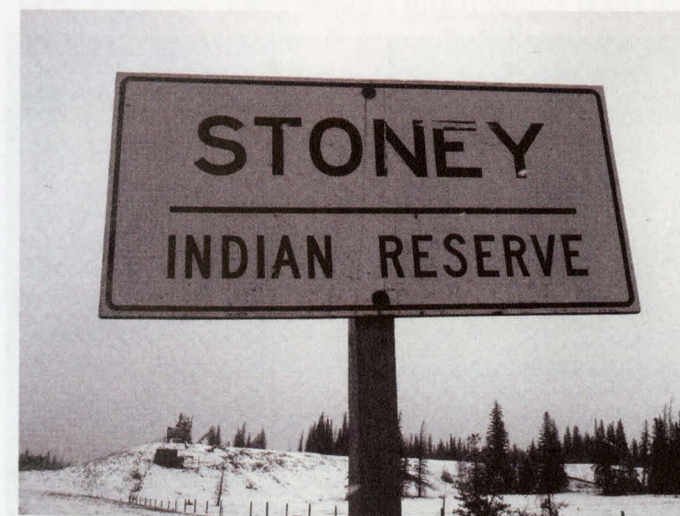
the middle of Stoney territory. I think many people aren't aware that they are going through reserves on highways all over the land now called Canada. It was fun to be doing performance activities and making marks using syllabics to draw attention to this fact. I have been thinking about the notion of random audiences, without any sense of hierarchy; witnesses who may or may not engage. On the side of the Trans-Canada, there have been these tags, but they are very touristy, messages like “I am Canadian,” and “Ben loves Amy.” Candice has spoken with the writer Maria Campbell in Saskatchewan about the road allowance people. Candice, why don't you talk about this ...

CH: There were times when Métis people were not living on reserves and didn't have the means or the right (or in some cases, the will) to purchase land. Groups of Métis people lived on what are called road allowances, the slim strips of land between the road and titled territories. It was essentially “no man's land.” The space is left in the event that the government wants to alter or expand the highway. I found the story fascinating because of the resilience of people who would build temporary structures that they could leave very quickly. In a sense the land on which they lived also signified their place in society, which was an unresolved border zone.

CLH: My mother was a road-allowance person. If they took script, which disenfranchised them from being Aboriginal, they were entitled to some of the same rights as settlers. But there were all of these stipulations on script. If you didn't clear the land that you purchased with script money in two years and if it didn't have a certain number of crops growing on it, you lost it. As a result, Métis people often became rock and root pickers, or tree-stump pickers on what would become pioneer land. They often had neither the money, equipment or lifestyle for farming.

The road allowances often had no roads in them. In many cases they were lands slated for road development, thin strips of land between authorized territories where frequent mobility was the norm. There were times these houses were burned out and would have to be rebuilt.

Occupying this space during the project really spoke to me about who I am. It seemed appropriate that the highway, which was the road allowance of the Morley reserve, was a place for me because of my background. But it was also important for me to acknowledge that I was not from Morley, that I needed to be aware of where I positioned myself. As an artist entering into the Morley community, I could not have prime real estate. I felt, and still feel, that I have to earn a place in the



Cheryl L'Hirondelle, *stoneyindianreserve.jpg*, digital still



Cheryl L'Hirondelle, *270304askiy_jg01.jpg*, digital still

community. I was honoured to be there. For me, the more derogatory notions — that we are “the good for nothing” living at the side of the road — were replaced with this honour; to be in a position where I was welcomed to make a contribution and a commentary.

JG: Speaking about the “inside” and “outside” places of the reserve and the gallery, I wondered if we could revisit the term outreach that you used at the beginning of the conversation, Cheryl. The way that you both have talked about playing with notions of audience, of community and of governed and autonomous ideas of space, it seems that the standard dichotomy — the inside of the gallery and the outside of the public — was remapped. Did your roles and the language that you used around the project change as a result?

CH: We saw all of our roles as equal. What we brought to the community and what they brought to us had equal value. Cheryl and I saw ourselves as collaborators, with one another and with the community. There wasn't a single author of the project. What I was interested in achieving was not to bring the institution “out” into the community, but to learn from members of the community and, by exhibiting student work within the larger exhibition, to weave their perspectives into the institution, from the inside.

JG: How did this reshape your roles as curator and artist/educator?

CLH: The way that I entered into this situation reminded me of when I was one of two storytellers in residence with the Tribal Council in northern Saskatchewan. I spent a lot of time with elders in the community. They told stories and I tried to figure out what to do with them. I started to realize different things that were going on in the community.

In the Morley project, there were many grey lines: between the piece on the side of the highway that would become net art and our interactions at the school working with kids, bringing in other artists who

could work with us. It got very blurry between the projects and between our roles. It became very relational. When things were discussed or decided upon they had to touch on all of these aspects of the work and we all had a role to play in this. The ability for us to work discursively and to continue to build relationships over a longer period of time, rather than being dropped in for a month, was really important to both of us.

CH: When we started working with community members, we tried to create a different dynamic. We weren't the “art experts,” we wanted to build longer lasting friendships. Since the exhibition has closed we've been invited to round-house dances and sweats. The people in the community don't see us only as representatives of an institution. This is an important point. I don't think that this project would have created lasting relationships if our roles had been defined within the strict terms of the gallery. We came as collaborators.

JG: This shifts the usual temporal parameters of gallery and museum outreach work, extending beyond the length of an exhibition or a set number of workshops negotiated with a teacher. This is very rare in the current neo-liberal climate that both arts and educational institutions operate in, at least in a Toronto context. Was there friction in doing so?



Cheryl L'Hirondelle, *uronndnland.jpg*, digital still

CH: Surprisingly there was not much friction in expanding the usual boundaries, time-based or otherwise. The Morley Community School is a unique environment because of the amount of freedom we had while working within the school and the freedom that we have in continuing this relationship. I think that this stems in part from the different ideologies that exist in the school, both in the way that the students are taught and the idea that culture and identity are at the forefront of the curriculum.

JG: The project's ability to exceed these kinds of institutional boundaries seems to address a critique made of “new genre public art” by people like Miwon Kwon — of artists parachuting into a perceived community to address a social issue over a very short period of time. Beyond the issues of time, you, Cheryl and the community are using a very different idea of public culture. How do you describe the notions of public and community that you and your collaborators on the reserve were working with?

CH: I believe that there is a different notion of community arts practice in Aboriginal communities. Art in Aboriginal communities hasn't been defined by terms like new genre public art (coined by Suzanne Lacy), because this kind of art practice isn't something that is new. We are working within a much longer trajectory, from which Cheryl's work generally follows. With this project I was interested in seeing if there was a new definition of community arts practices that might be presented from Aboriginal perspectives. I think that another difference with this project is that Cheryl and I didn't go into the community with the idea that we could solve a problem or would even have the capability — or right — to locate what the problems are. Reserves, as with any community, are very complex. I think that the idea of artist as social worker creates a very problematic relationship as it immediately sets up hierarchies between the artist, the curator, the community and the participants. This was exactly what we were trying to disrupt.

CLH: Years ago I noticed something in the difference between theatre and performance that might help to clarify this. In theatre, if you want people to look at certain gestures enacted on the stage, you use blocking to direct their attention to the right location. In performance it is much more acceptable to believe that, whatever your point of view, it is valid. The way that I could understand this was through my own family gatherings, where my relatives are all musicians: talented jiggers and fiddlers and guitar players. In this context it was just as important to see my uncle stamping his foot to the beat as it was to hear him singing or watch the smooth foot patterns of someone dancing — you saw and enjoyed what you saw. There was a sense of a fuller experience. So this idea in performance art was for me, already part of who I was.

Later I moved to northern Saskatchewan and there were no galleries or clubs for gigs. There were not venues for having a codified art experience, but you could create art and it was all around you. Amazing storytelling happened around kitchen tables, performance was part of everyday. As an artist, your practice becomes very different depending on who is witnessing or interacting with the piece. There, it was very apparent that art making was about building relationships, building a sense of trust. There is a belief that everyone has a gift to share and that you give and share what you have with a community.

CH: I don't want to generalize, but it seems that the modernist idea of a single author is not consistent with the kinds of creative processes that have existed in Aboriginal communities for so long. When art is being created, when stories are being told, it's not necessarily your story. The storyteller is not a singular voice, there are many who take on the story. It is kept alive by sharing and repetition, not necessarily through the celebration of ownership. Thinking about community art from this perspective is very interesting because the idea of collaboration, the loss of the author, is not considered to be avant-garde, but just the way that things are.

CLH: Yes! This was the moccasin telegraph, a sense of information being conveyed through the story, of sharing information rather than holding on to it or developing expertise.

CH: Non-linearity and an awareness of intertextuality are things that have always existed in Aboriginal communities.

JG: Was there a tension in trying to work with this non-authorial, non-linear framework (and across jurisdictions, definitions, community sectors, disciplines and factions), even if the roots of this kind of practice run deep within Aboriginal cultures?

CH: There is tension. In Morley things are becoming more and more divided into the three bands: Wesley, Chiniki and Bears paw. It was interesting to work at the school because it was the only place on the reserve where people from all three bands came together. There is no other community meeting-place. The markers dividing each community are very visible, there are signs indicating each band's territory and the divide is coming to a head. Wesley, Chiniki and Bears paw are each in the process of developing their own buildings, structures and infrastructures, like rodeo grounds and elder's houses. Working at the school was a way of working across those tensions, though we were very aware of them.

CLH: Yes, and it was very important to us not to privilege or sensationalize that story within the work and interactions with community. They live with this every day. As Aboriginal people, we live with our tensions and our legacy and we can't escape that. It was important for us to acknowledge this but to also enable experience beyond these tensions.

JG: Candice, your comment on the school as a community meeting-place is very interesting. In speaking with others on the reserve, it seems that there are multiple learning frameworks in place at the Morley school: those developed by elders, that of the Alberta Learning

curriculum and those arising from community happenings and celebrations. Did you sense this as a tension between values or an opportunity to work between them? The Alberta art curriculum, for example, places great emphasis on visual understanding and not on inter-disciplinary work.

CLH: There are tensions around the dominance of the visual in the curriculum. Instead of being oppositional, we worked around this tension. We used other means to look at and experience things.

The school is a space where there is a great deal going on and a lot of things coming together. In previous work I've looked for a narrative, and I did not want that story to be about the tensions. I wanted to do work about other ways of seeing.

By using pirate radio, there was a sense that our activity was meant to fly under the radar. We did not want to become part of the politics. We wanted the project to occupy and replicate the somewhat autonomous space of the school.

JG: This is a very interesting shift in the use of the idea of autonomous space — not just autonomous from the mainstream but also a space for creation and the formation of a meta-community across the individual communities. How will this work continue?

CLH: I think that language will be something that we explore at some point. I find it to be so amazing that the reserve is nestled between the mountain tourism of Banff and the city of Calgary and yet the Nakoda language has been so strongly retained. It's nice to know that this is something to build upon. I have been teasing the students about making some rhymes in Nakoda...

I'd like to end with a question to the two of you, if that's okay. Whether a school, an art gallery or a ministry curriculum — given both of your experiences — are there limits to doing this kind of work within an institutional framework? Can it actually provoke change?

JG: The Morley School seems to have a more flexible program that places values such as care, collaboration and community at the centre of learning. Your ability to weave your way through the school, to improvise curriculum, to involve the young people with whom you worked informally in community and gallery structures is very inspiring. Working in such a committed way within a community runs counter to the service-delivery model of the one-off class visit or exhibition-based outreach program that often happen in gallery-based education. It also speaks to the way in which professional designations and divisions in European-based institutions (for example, between that of curator, artist and educator) do not translate into an Aboriginal or, in fact, any viable community context. This is consistent with progressive thinking that has been happening around museum pedagogy in recent years by people like Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, Declan McGonagle and places like the Gardiner Museum in Toronto.

The Walter Phillips Gallery seems like an ideal place to experiment with this kind of work. In larger galleries the economic demands imposed as part of the steady push to privatize public culture often creates pressure for education departments to become economically self-sustaining or even revenue generating on behalf of the larger institution. This can limit the kinds of community interactions that are possible. In large school boards these kinds of programs are also extremely difficult to realize and even harder to sustain, given the funding pressures and government policy guidelines that are facing both the education and cultural sectors.

CH: I think to participate in these projects you have to always go in with the mindset that change is possible. The degree to which this happens might not be immediately visible. A strategy in this project was to find ways in which we could operate across the limits of an institution — something that you pointed to, Cheryl, in your thoughts on the use of radio in the school. Radio, as you rightly stated, can fly underneath the radar. In regards

to the exhibition, I believe that even exhibiting work by Aboriginal youth in the gallery was a subversive act. They are not artists that would ordinarily be considered within this context. There is so much potential in these communities just waiting to be given space and voice.

Candice Hopkins is the Aboriginal curator in residence at the Walter Phillips Gallery. Her recent curatorial project, Every Stone Tells a Story: The Performance Work of David Hammons and Jimmie Durham, opened at the Berrie Center Art Galleries, Ramapo College NJ in November 2004. Her writing is featured in the periodical <http://www.horizonzero.ca> and the anthology Transference, Tradition, Technology: Native New Media Exploring Visual and Digital Culture to be published by the Walter Phillips Gallery. Hopkins has lectured at the Tate Britain, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, UK, Dak'Art Lab, Senegal and in Canada at the Alberta College of Art and Design.

Cheryl L'Hirondelle (waynohtêw) (<http://www.ndnnrkey.net>) is an Alberta-born interdisciplinary artist. Since the early 1980s, she has worked as an arts programmer, cultural strategist/activist, arts consultant, producer and director — independently and with various artist-run centres, tribal councils and government agencies. Recently, she was guest creative consultant for horizon zero's (<http://www.horizonzero.ca>) edition 17: TELL devoted to aboriginal digital storytelling. Her net.art database project treatycard (<http://treatycard.banff.org>) is part of Walter Phillips Gallery's November 2004 Database Imaginary exhibition curated by Sarah Cook, Anthony Kiendl and Steve Dietz. Her project, awa ka-amaciwet piwapisko waciya/climbing the iron mountains was presented recently in Toronto in the 7a-11d performance festival.

Janna Graham develops projects in the education department at the Art Gallery of Ontario in collaboration with youth, artists and community organizations. These have included Decker: A Ballet on Skateboards, Audge's Place, an installation by De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group and Tauqsijit, a temporary media lab, exhibition and residency with artists from 7th Generation Image Makers, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-jig Theatre Group, YUMI, Qaggiq and Igloodik Isuma Productions. She has presented at numerous conferences and contributed writing to the Journal of Visual Culture, Feedback: New Curatorial Strategies and a recent book on Knut Asdam. Janna is on the editorial committee at Fuse.

talking b(1)ack

ayanna black speaks with **bell hooks**

Black theorist bell hooks was here. Yes. She was here in Toronto, last November, spreading, like a preacher, the new age of feminism. That is, Black feminism.

hooks's work is the most centred and humanitarian of all the feminist theorists. She is one of the most provocative and original thinkers of this decade. For me, she is like Simone de Beauvoir was in the early '70s, when *The Second Sex* was the bible for women wanting feminist consciousness. What makes hooks's work so powerful is her ability to transform existing dogma around issues concerning class, race and gender. Her work is not only intellectual exercise but consciously written for Black women, regardless of social class, and other people to comprehend.

As a critical thinker, hooks lectures and also writes a monthly column called "Sisters of the Yam" in *Zeta Magazine*, an alternative U.S. journal on politics and the arts. hooks's first book *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* was published in 1981 (South End Press). Her most recent book, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, was published in 1989 in Canada by Between The Lines. A new book, *Yearning*, will be published in the spring (Between the Lines). She has also published *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (South End Press). All of her books are testimonials to her life which, in turn, serve as food for the brain and spirit of Black women and other people who want this rejuvenating nourishment.

At the Euclid Theatre where she spoke, over 150 people of mixed race and cultures were unable to get in. She was overwhelmed and her voice echoed concern: "Exclusion is a very

sensitive issue for us Black people and it's not a very good feeling . . . For example, at the talk in Toronto many white people, I think, couldn't understand why Black people were upset that they couldn't get in. For many white people it was just another kind of event but, I think, there were Black women who came for food to nourish their spirits and to keep themselves going. I think a lot of Black women, in the end, are coming out because we are looking for answers to the crisis in our lives, some of the pain we are feeling in our communities and our gender relationships."

I spoke with hooks at her home in Boston in December, shortly after her speaking engagements in Toronto.

FUSE: The feminist movement evolved from white middle class women. In the feminist movement, do you feel that Black women and other women of colour see themselves as priorities; do white women see people of colour as partners?

hooks: I think that white women don't see us as equal partners in the movement and I think, especially, privileged white women don't see even lower class white women as partners. I think the fact is they see themselves as leading the movement. And that's been one of the big problems. We are constantly engaged in power struggles and I think that one of the reasons is that a lot of these white women question sexist hierarchy, but they don't really question class and race hierarchy. I don't think that white women can begin to address other people until they deal with

the politics of racism and white supremacy as well as class elitism. But, I feel it's crucial for Black women and people of colour to shift our attention away from a response to white women's conceptualization of feminism, and to begin to conceptualize a feminist movement that takes into account our particular struggles.

FUSE: How can Black women develop that particular concept or ideology of feminism?

hooks: I think Black women can develop it by really examining the way sexism operates in our lives, in our domestic relationships, in parenting, and looking at the ways institutionalized sexism affects us—as in the poverty of Black women. How can it be that many Black women are losing economic ground in the States? If you think, for example: 20 years ago when all these corporations weren't making Black hair products, frequently poor Black women were able to set up hairdressing parlours in their homes, on their kitchen tables, and make extra money, which they used to empower themselves and their families. And increasingly as that kind of economic base is taken out of Black communities and put into the hands of white corporations, Black women really suffer. We have to look at the gendered aspects of our oppression, and begin to develop feminist theory that addresses our concerns, as well as looking at how feminism impacts on Black liberation struggles.

FUSE: Do you think feminism or developing a Black feminist theory is important to Black women?

hooks: I think, globally, Black women are beginning to recognize the value of critiquing sexism in our lives. I don't think that necessarily correlates with an equal commitment to participate in the development of theory. I think that it's very important for us

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to nurture and cultivate young Black women who are students and who are struggling to develop themselves intellectually, to think in terms of feminist theory. One of the things that white women have been able to do very effectively in institutionalized Women's Studies programmes is produce scholars who will in fact be the new generation of thinkers, exploring issues of gender. And if we look at the women majoring in Women's Studies programmes in the U.S., we find very few Black women or women of colour. So, in that sense, we are not yet fully creating the base for these young women of colour to develop their intellectual directions in ways that will focus on gendered scholarship.

FUSE: Do you think Black women and other people of colour are afraid of the word "feminist?" And if so, do you think it's necessary for us to create a new word, for example, like Alice Walker's term "womanist?"

hooks: The problem I have with "womanist," which I have articulated in my work, is the way it's so divorced from a



bell hooks

political tradition and the sense of a political movement. I find that "womanist" has a way of personalizing and individualizing what I think has to be a collective struggle. Rather than, as Black women want to, throw off the term "feminism" because they often see it as associated with white people, I think we have to reclaim the term and re-work it so that it speaks directly to our lives.

FUSE: Any ideas as to how this can be done?

hooks: Well, I think that the first way that it's done is that we really look at how we define feminism. One of the definitions I keep trying to suggest to people is that if we define feminism as a movement to end sexism and sexist oppression—that's a very simple kind of definition—it doesn't privilege white women. Such a definition doesn't say women are the good guys or men are the bad guys. It basically says feminism does have a political agenda, that is, irradicating sexism, which means that each of us can then analyze how we play in achieving that political agenda. And therefore developing a feminist struggle out of the locations where we are. Black women looking at that political agenda might say, "I want to start with the institutions in my life—the church, or what have you—that are important to me."

FUSE: Do you think Black women associate feminism with lesbianism, and respond on the basis of homophobia?

hooks: I think one of the things that we have to see, while I think that the struggle for gay rights and sexual practice are central to feminist struggle, is that people understand that feminism and lesbianism are not one and the same thing. (Though certainly Alice Walker's and others' evocation, "womanist," leaves room for that type of analysis.) And rather than accepting that construct as a legitimate reason to reject feminism, I think we have to want to question that homophobia and talk about what can Black people gain from being homophobic. I don't think we gain anything. I think in fact we cut ourselves off from the many gay Black people who have something to offer our lives.

FUSE: In *Talking Back* you said, "To create a liberated voice, one must confront the issue of audience." Do you think a writer should calculate an audience?

hooks: I think that most writers in fact do envision potential readers for the work that they are doing. And that is not something that, I think, robs us of an imaginative critical process because none of us talks into a void. We talk with some idea of a potential listener. And I don't think that it means that we totally conceptualize in a clear way who the listener is going to be. But I certainly think about the people I want to address when I write. I keep saying to people when you finally get a truly diverse audience as that audience [at the talk in Toronto] was that evening, then suddenly you can no longer use just one language

code and assume that everyone is going to understand your talk. I'm sure there were a lot of people at that talk who are not readers of theory at all. So then, how do you talk to them in a way that embraces them and shows that you want your words to be heard by them, unless you are able to have multiple languages, multiple paradigms for speaking. I think one of the problems we encounter when dealing with white people who are obsessed with theory is that a lot of us, as Black folks, have had to grow up in a context of multiple languages where we can go back and forth from standard English to patois—whether it's Caribbean or the Black English of the United States, or the underclass or what have you. And I think that what I often find in classes is that white students are somehow uncomfortable with any kind of language shift that they don't understand because they may not necessarily have those multiple language skills.

FUSE: Do you think that white people see this language shift as losing power?

hooks: Oh, absolutely. I think there were moments in my talk in Toronto where all white listeners did not necessarily understand what was being said because much of my talk was directed towards the many Black people and people of colour that were there. When I was first teaching at Yale, the white male students would complain all the time because they felt something was different about my class. They didn't feel at the centre because, in fact, I wasn't speaking to their experience as a universal experience.

FUSE: In *Talking Back* you also said, "Solidarity is not the same as support. To experience solidarity we must have a community of interest." Can you comment?

hooks: Well, I think, to stay within the frame that we're talking in, let's say a white person would say at any of the talks that I gave in Toronto, at the Euclid or at Osgoode, "There were times that I didn't understand what she was saying. She seemed to be

How do you talk to people unless you have multiple languages, multiple paradigms for speaking

just talking to Black people." It seems to me that if that white person has already identified themselves with the oppressed and struggled with us, they would understand the necessity sometimes of just talking to Black people. And that to me would be a gesture of solidarity. Unlike the person who might think "Well, I supported this event, I came out to it, this person should have been talking to me as well." Solidarity takes us beyond support because you can support something without really understanding it or being transformed by it. If you really want to be in solidarity with people, then you've got to go farther than standing on the outside. You've got to find a way of being on the inside of that struggle and that is very difficult.

FUSE: The concept of love is a continuous thread throughout your books. Can you explain?

hooks: One of the things that happens is that, in a lot of radical circles in the U.S., people don't want to see love as part of the politicizing process. One of the things that I like so much about the work of Paolo Freire is his early work; he talks about the revolution and the revolutionaries as needing to be people capable of love. What we've seen is people who are motivated by self-interest and self-greed. As we look at various Black power movements and see where they most failed were in those instances when leaders were motivated by their own egos and their struggles for power, rather than by their concern for the collective good. One of the things that makes Malcolm X such a heroic figure is that we sense in him that quality of love and commitment to serve Black people. It is really crucial to the de-colonizing process.

FUSE: As women brace for the 1990s are they bracing for a backlash against the feminist movement?

hooks: I don't agree with this whole evocation of backlash. Anti-feminism has always been strong. It's become more visible now because those of us who are in resistance, in feminist resistance, have become stronger. So in some way anti-feminism responds to the growing power. Think about how many Black men were at the talk. Five years ago Black men, in general, weren't coming out to feminist talks. It says that feminism is beginning to have an impact. That is, therefore, threatening.

FUSE: Do you think that this impact has any bearing in that your work does embrace men?

hooks: That's part of the development of feminist theory. We can look back on the early stages and say that the separatism that was so strong was particularly coming out of the privileged location from which people constructed theory. If you can go and live in your own privatized apartment then you can maybe talk about a conceptualized movement where women do not have to interact with men. But if your life is about living, it's

If that white person has already identified themselves with the oppressed and struggled with us, they would understand

about living within a community where you may have to share housing and work space continually with men, as it is so often with people of colour. Then we have to learn how to work with men.

FUSE: Are you saying, then, that involving and embracing men in the feminist movement does not necessarily mean women giving up their power?

hooks: Absolutely not. In the same way that I don't think I would talk about white people leading the Black liberation struggle, I don't see men as the leaders of a feminist movement but I see them as having a tremendous role to play in the transformation of consciousness around sexism.

FUSE: Taking another quote from *Talking Back*, you said, "Problems arise not when white women choose to write about the experiences of non-white people but when such material is presented as authoritative." What about writings that are racist and stereotyping?

hooks: Hopefully when people are committed in solidarity they will interrogate their own writings. All of us have to engage in constant critique of our writings that reproduce the old oppressive paradigms. And that means white people and people of colour who are aware.

FUSE: What about the "progressive/politically-correct" person who is aware yet they project a stereotyping image?

hooks: Our own response can be to critically interrogate that work and to show where it falls short. For example, my piece on *Do The Right Thing* was a piece of critical interrogation that was saying this work of art is important, it's valuable, but it also has some limitations. One of the things that was disturbing, was that

we did not get any kind of diverse images of Black masculinity in that film. We really got a lot of new taste on old stereotypes. It's important for us to look at the limitations, which is not about discrediting or putting down the work but saying let's look at it critically.

FUSE: Euzhan Palcy, director of *A Dry White Season*, has affirmed that the film was made consciously for a white audience. What are your feelings about making a film strictly for this market?

hooks: I find this very problematic because it seems to me that we need to recognize that Black people, globally, need to have awareness of the struggles in South Africa and of our complacency. Those of us who are U.S. citizens need to know that we are complicitous in upholding and maintaining the structures of apartheid so that we can engage in resistance struggles here. When someone makes that kind of statement, it suggests that only white people need their consciousness raised. I thought the film was very important, perhaps it would have been more complex if she had said, "I want Black and white audiences moved by this film."

FUSE: Contemporary Black Jazz musicians have said that if it hadn't been for white people there would not have been an audience for Jazz. What are your feelings about this?

hooks: To me that comment is misguided. We have to recognize that this kind of white audience is more of a contemporary phenomenon so that I don't think one can see it in terms of "we couldn't produce the art if there was no white audience." History has already shown us that is not the case. There have always been Black art forms, even when there was the kind of segregation that meant we could not rely on white audiences. The issue is that Black artists have only recently begun to think about making a living through their writing or playing music. In that sense, of course, if we want to start to talk about art that allows one to be economically self-sufficient, we are talking about an art that necessarily has to speak to the Black people who are most monied. Certainly there is a need for Black people to become engaged in the economic support of writers, etc. But we fall into a trap if we want to argue then, in the same way, that our creativity exists because of white patronage. I think that is erroneous. The extent to which we are able to survive economically and create is clearly tied up with white patronage. But those are two very separate things. What we also know is that there are many Black artists who have lost artistic power because of their tendency to create products that are specifically oriented to attract white patronage.

FUSE: What about Zora Neale Hurston who, in the '30s, created work that was very Black oriented?

hooks: What happened to her is that white people at one point were very interested in a certain kind of production of Black expression and paid for it because it was a part of fadism. When that went away, because she had not constructed her own vision of self-determination—that is to say, "How will I survive without white patronage?"—I think she began to think. Do you think white people are going to maintain this fascination with ethnic fashion and all that ethnic stuff? What we see is, within a commodity culture right now, these things are the new commodity.

FUSE: You must have heard about the recent massacre of women in Montreal. What are your feelings about this kind of violence?

hooks: One of the things that is always disturbing about this kind of incident is that it allows people to imagine, to feel that this incident is somehow special. In fact violence against women is taking place everyday in this way. And the fact that the killer used the term "feminist" makes this violence suddenly being represented in the media as unique or different. I don't think it's unique and different. I think it's important for people to keep a real perspective on this—not as some violent feminist/anti-feminist backlash but as part of the continuum of male violence against women. One of the things that we see already happening in places in Canada is a kind of specificity within the educational institution as a kind of identification with those women. Ordinarily, privileged white folks and other people, when they read that a group of women have been hurt or massacred, don't identify at all with these women. They don't feel that this could have happened to them when in fact we should be feeling like that about all the cases about violence against women. About Sophia Cook [a young Toronto Black woman recently paralyzed after a police shooting], a lot of white folks and white women didn't even respond to the shooting. The massacre in Montreal has been on the front pages of all the U.S. newspapers. Again, we have to always critique the obsession in our culture with spectacle and with sensationalism.

FUSE: With this recent massacre, do you think white feminist women will rethink their position about violence and be able to be more supportive of Black women and people of colour?

hooks: No. I don't see that happening at all. In fact, it may have just the opposite impact. A lot of white women are feeling again that somehow their struggle, in terms of sexism, is a more privileged struggle than other forms of struggle.

bell hooks will be returning to Toronto early next fall to speak on *Yearning*. ■

Ayanna Black is a Toronto poet.

FUSE

PORN AGAIN

Feeling the Heat
of Censorship
by Varda Burstyn

Zainub Verjee Talks with Hanif Kureishi

Lesbians & Representation by Colin Campbell

Toronto's Anti-Apartheid PART II by Norman 'Otis' Richmond

There Is No Category "Political Art" by Gary Kibbins

EXPO
&A
POLITICAL GUIDE
FOR
CULTURAL PRODUCERS

As performers and artists are being asked to make a decision about working at EXPO, it seems important to review the stakes in FUSE. In the next paragraphs I will outline the pros and cons, and then state my own bias on the issue.

● **Pro:** "There is high unemployment in all sectors of the province's economy and in the cultural sector, I desperately need work."

● **Con:** Expo is essentially a political event, not job creation; it's designed to guarantee Socred reelection and with it, continued long-term unemployment. The fair is mostly made up of private sector exhibits in order to promote the government's vision of free enterprise, "private sector initiative" and union-busting. Not all jobs are the same. Working for EXPO, especially in management positions, given its history and role is wrong.

● **Pro:** "Better me than a Social Credit appointee, if you can't stop it, join it." A variant of this is the argument that progressive EXPO employees can help to ensure that Third World and critical cultural voices are heard at the fair.

● **Con:** EXPO has consciously hired lefties in order to make certain that there is interesting "folk" culture represented. They want the cultural aspects of the fair to be inclusive. That there are no human rights in B.C. thanks to the Socreds, that the only religious pavilion despite massive protest is a fundamentalist Christian one, that there is racism in hiring policies (a Black man who applied for a job was told directly that Blacks were unrepresentative of British Columbians and that he would not be hired), that the Haida are suppressed and that South African wines are welcome on the liquor board shelves all become irrelevant as EXPO celebrates "folk" from around the world. The hard work of performers and progressive administrators could create

credibility for EXPO. Subversion from within can be an important tactic, but is it really possible?

● **Pro:** "It's not the cultural community's fault that it's an event the Socreds initiated. We are not working to re-elect the Socreds. It's art and culture we're producing, not an election campaign."

● **Con:** This resembles the old adage that "it's not political, it's art." In B.C., *everything is political*. This is the government that cut off grants to publishers of social history, journalism and political analysis and is bringing in censorship.

● **Pro:** "Anyhow, there's no difference between cultural producers and others who are EXPO employees; why should artists and performers be principled and self-sacrificing when others are making money, EXPO's the only game in town in '86."

● **Con:** There is a difference between management positions and people simply working at the fair. Management is there to make EXPO successful while individual workers are there to earn a living in a context they don't control. The energy that's going to build EXPO could have gone into a counter-event, and that's the energy of managers and of staff. Some cultural producers and organizations have chosen not to work at EXPO.

● **Pro:** "This is a world-class event; it allows cultural administrators to work with top performers and artists. Employment here if you're an artist is a major career break. My music (art) is progressive and will raise consciousness. It's an audience I could never hope to reach otherwise."

● **Con:** It's true: to refuse an EXPO contract is to refuse an important career opportunity. It requires a choice. True, you can reach audiences, but your



"The Rhinestone Meatball" as it is affectionately known — by night an artificial gem of paste and glass

presentation will be mediated by the context. Besides, EXPO has treated cultural producers shabbily. One B.C. artist designed a pavilion interior on request and then was suddenly bumped for a mass media oriented project.

● **Pro:** "Why quibble because it's provincial government money? After all the federal government is right wing and no one criticizes people for getting grants from them. And how is it different from working for the mainstream media?"

● **Con:** Deciding to work for the mainstream media, if you're critical of mass culture, usually involves deciding where you can be instrumental and effect change, as well as earn a living. It involves fighting for control over the right to speak critically of the institutions of media themselves as well as on issues. EXPO employees are not permitted to be openly critical of the event. And the big question remains of whether *in this instance* the critical voice will have any impact other than building credibility for a destructive process. On the issue of funding: artists have fought for cultural funding mechanisms where they have some control and are not *controlled*; EXPO does not work that way.

● "But the fact is that there is not an organized boycott." This argument points out the realpolitik of the issue. Those who are strongly opposed to the fair have

failed to organize a coherent response to EXPO. Some have feared that an organized boycott, if successful, would cause many British Columbians to blame the left for the economic failure of the fair and have argued that we should let the event hang itself. Others have been simply too involved in the day-to-day defensive struggle that has come to characterize life on the coast.

Which relates directly to what I think EXPO has meant to B.C. Millions of dollars have been drawn out of public services, health care, and education to make EXPO possible. B.C. residents will carry the debt for years. The jobs lost to make way for EXPO were qualitatively better (Transition Houses, child abuse teams, nurses, teachers...) than minimum wage service jobs easily done by ex-social workers, ex-teachers, etc. EXPO has been instrumental in busting union labour in the construction industry and in piloting Social Credit free trade (non-union, no protective legislation) zones in B.C.

Nonetheless, it is hard to ask people to act on principle when there is not an organized boycott. Yet there is large-scale hostility to the fair. It's seen by thousands to be a drain on the province's resources. Many B.C. residents *can't afford to go to it* and, as has been explained at length, it is a Socred political project.

What then should cultural producers do?

I have two alternate suggestions from (1), the ideal, based on what I feel as someone living here, to (2), the bottom line:

● **1 SAY NO TO EXPO!** Explain that you don't want to help win the Social Credit Party another electoral victory in B.C. In particular, don't produce pro-EXPO hype and don't take on administrative positions and work to make the fair a "success."

● **2 If you agree to work at EXPO as a performer do the following:**

- Insist that EXPO writes into your contract that you do not have to cross picket lines. Remember: there have been endless labour disputes and there are discrimination issues that will come up in 1986, so there could well be picket lines.
- Make a political statement about politics in B.C. and about the fair itself at your performance, in your art or in your artist's statement about your art. *It's not enough to do a benefit off-site or talk in general terms about union issues, racism or sexism.* Please use your position of power as a performer to relate these issues to the reality that we face in B.C. Speak out: about the closure of Vancouver's Transition House, for example, or the fact that non-union contractors bilked building trade workers for about one million dollars in wages on the site, about the Haida losing their land or about the fair being a prolonged election rally... If you need information on B.C., just read back issues of *FUSE!*
- Make contact with progressive artists and performers in B.C. and with anti-EXPO groups and find out what the update is on resistance to both the government and EXPO. Lend your support.



Albert Johnson

On August 26, 1979 the Police received an anonymous call about a disturbance being created by Albert Johnson. P.C. Inglis and Cargnelli drove to the lane at the rear of Johnson's residence. At the sight of the Officers Johnson became frustrated and cursed the Officers. Johnson felt that the Police were unjustly harassing him, as he felt they had before. Johnson entered his house.

P.C. Inglis and Cargnelli entered the house. Even though they found a casual domestic scene in the house, they decided to arrest Johnson for causing a disturbance, in order to protect his family. Johnson refused to go with them. An altercation began. Police claimed that Johnson threw a pot of peas cooking on the stove. A witness claimed that the pot fell during the struggle between Johnson and the Police. Johnson freed himself and ran upstairs. The Police stayed downstairs.

The Police Officers claimed that Johnson came down the stairs carrying what they believed to be an axe, but turned out to be a lawn-edger. Their story went on to say that P.C. Inglis shot at Johnson, but missed. Johnson then jumped down the stairs; Inglis shot again, but didn't miss.

Another witness claimed Johnson came down the stairs and was kneeling when Inglis shot him. The forensic Investigation supported this evidence. Inglis and Cargnelli were charged with manslaughter.

They were acquitted.



Sophia Cook

On October 27, 1989, Sophia Cook, a Black Jamaican woman, was shot by P.C. Durham. Cook was in the passenger side of a stolen car when Durham stopped the car.

Durham approached the car and spoke to the driver of the car, Anthony Mcleoad. Mcleoad claimed that at this point Durham realized that the car was stolen, unholstered his gun and told the occupant of the car "Don't make my day." Mcleoad and the other men in the car jumped out and ran.

Cook, who was unaware that the car was stolen, also tried to run but was grabbed by the shoulder. When Durham grabbed Cook his revolver was fired, shooting Cook. Cook was left permanently paralyzed. Durham was charged with careless use of a firearm.

He was acquitted.

The disability arts and culture movement grew out of the disability rights movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Its origins coincide with a more general shift toward a concern with representation and cultural production in the 1990s. While in the UK, greater possibilities for community-based arts initiatives, as well as a vocal and highly organized disability rights movement with greater access to arts higher education has given rise to a radical community of independent artists and artist-led organizations, in Canada, the emerging disability arts and culture movement has continuously been threatened by arts institutions and charitable organizations that seek to promote disability arts while dismissing its political base.

"Disability culture" only emerged as an organizing concept in Canada in the past seven years. In 2000, Ryerson University launched its first disability culture event, "An Evening of Deaf and Disability Culture," as part of its fledgling disability studies program. In 2001 Geoff McMurchy of the Society for Disability Arts and Culture (S4DAC) organized the first "Kick-START Festival" in Vancouver. "Stages," the first disability arts festival in Calgary took place in 2002 (now

Whose Disability Culture?

Why we need an artist-led critical disability arts network

by Rachel Gorman

called "Balancing Acts," it is an annual festival produced by Stage Left Productions). The Canadian Disability Studies Association convened for the first time in June 2004; while Spirit Synott, a professional dancer who uses a wheelchair, was on the cover of the Canadian dance magazine, *The Dance Current* that year.¹ In 2006, Bonnie Klein weighed in with her NFB-funded documentary "Shameless: The Art of Disability."

When in 2006, Michele Decottignies, the artistic director for Stage Left Productions in Calgary, announced that she had received funding to start a national Disability Arts and Culture Network, many artists were excited about the possibility of a network that could develop disability culture and promote disabled artists. Funding from Canadian Heritage would allow Decottignies to gather disability arts festival organizers to discuss the challenges of sustaining and developing audiences for the different festivals. This would be the first time that disability arts presenters would meet to discuss the future of disability arts in Canada. People from six organizations were called to the table: Balancing Acts; Ryerson's Art with Attitude; Kick-START; S4DAC (the organization that runs Kick-START); Madness and the Arts; and the Abilities Festival in Toronto. Four out of the six organizations are run by disabled artists/activists with strong ties to the disability rights movement.

The first national Disability Arts and Culture Network meeting was held in Calgary in March 2006, and it was closed to all except representatives of the six organizations mentioned above, excluding independent artists from the conversation. When the second national Network meeting was held in Toronto in February 2007, Decottignies took the opportunity to consult with artists outside the Network meetings. Decottignies planned an open meeting for disabled artists to be held in Toronto at the Workman Theatre on February 21st, and asked Toronto-area presenters to send out the call.

Some last-minute scrambling in the two days before the meeting served as an

indication that the alienation between presenters and artists was more pronounced in Toronto than it was in the Western Canadian context where Decottignies is based. The e-poster, a call for "artists with a disability to provide feedback about a national arts initiative," was sent to arts presenters, who sent it to their respective boards, committee members and close collaborators, but not to their wider lists. As a result, almost none of the independent critical disability artists working in the Toronto area were contacted. When a friend heard about it and told me, we activated an ad hoc phone tree to get as many independent and emerging disabled artists to attend the meeting as possible.

In her presentation to the group, Decottignies described the funding and political context of the Network, explaining that Canadian Heritage would only cover costs for disability arts presenters to meet and that at the first Network meeting, presenters had argued over whether (and

which) artists should attend, reflecting a growing tension over the Network's political orientation. Having reached a stalemate, the second annual Network meeting was to proceed in Toronto with the six original organizations. Decottignies explained her intention for the open artists' meeting was to give artists a chance to raise issues that she hoped would inform the direction of the Network. Over two hours, we engaged in a lively discussion about the state of disability culture, with special attention to the experiences of professional artists. I will outline the recommendations that were put forward, but first I would like to give some context to the struggles over disability arts and culture.

The Politics of Representation

In part, the tensions in the Network meetings that Decottignies alluded to arise from power relations around access to funding. These power relations are related to divisions between artists and presenters and contradictions between disabled-identified and non-disabled-identified presenters. But underlying these issues are more fundamental questions about the politics of representation and the possibilities for artistic interventions into these cultural relations. While the disability culture movement is an expression of the disability rights movement, the idea of disabled people doing art has also proven itself irresistible to the charitable classes. For instance, the Abilities Festival, with its list of honorary patrons that includes Bluma Appel and Heather Riesman, seeks "artists with disabilities ... whose work exemplifies excellence, creativity and innovation" for its 2007 festival.² This call situates disability arts as a display of competence — proof that disabled artists are "as good as" non-disabled ones, while at the same time obscuring the cultural and political origins of the disability arts movement.

Disaggregating the political category "disabled artist" exposes how different groupings of people are positioned in relation to art, educational, legal and medical institutions.

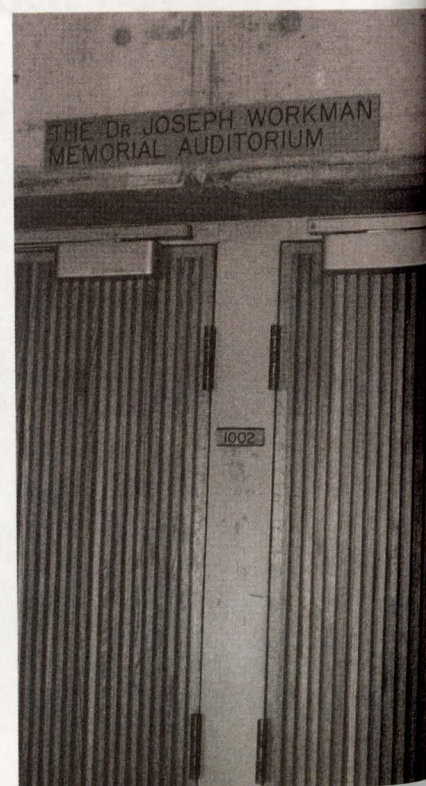
Eliza Chandler, *Hands*, 2005, video still. Courtesy: the artist.



Disability as a social category is reproduced through a web of political and cultural sites that predate these current struggles between artists, arts presenters and arts funders. Disaggregating the political category "disabled artist" exposes how different groupings of people are positioned in relation to art, educational, legal and medical institutions. The three examples that follow sketch out the politics of disability culture from the specific entry points of art therapy and institutionalized/incarcerated artists; access to training for physically disabled dance and theatre artists; and how disability narratives, tropes and metaphors function for "intellectually disabled" artists engaging in visual arts practices.

Madness and its Artworks

One of the issues on the table at the first Disability Arts and Culture Network meeting was the problem of what to do with the products of art therapy programs. When a struggle over art therapy comes up in relation to disability culture, it



Workman Theatre at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health on Queen Street West in Toronto. Photo: Aaron Cain.

is not therapy *per se* that is the problem, but the institutional practices that position disabled people as being in need of development (social, psychological, or functional) and non-disabled counsellors (sometimes in the form of art therapists and art animators) as providing rehabilitation/therapeutic services intended to address these developmental deficits. The non-consensual structure of disability services removes the possibility of self-determination and sharply narrows possibilities for self-expression.

The problem of art therapy in relation to disability arts and culture goes deeper than the question of whether or not it is appropriate to include artefacts produced in therapeutic or quasi-therapeutic contexts in public exhibitions (although I will have more to say on that topic below). I am concerned with the political implications of exhibiting work produced in a de-politicized and individualized mode at disability arts festivals that should be challenging the

very power relations through which these artefacts are being produced. I was confronted with this issue when I performed at a conference organized by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies in Winnipeg in 2004. Looking at one of the visual art displays, I realized that the artists' names were missing, with the name of their therapeutic program there instead.

Of the six presenters who participated in the Network meetings, the Madness and the Arts group may have the highest stake in the art vs. therapy debate — especially a discussion in which therapy is understood to be part of the systemic violence committed against people with disabilities. Madness and the Arts was produced by Workman Arts, a partnership of the Workman Theatre Project and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) where the Workman Theatre is based. Workman Arts is mandated to support people who are “receiving mental health services.”³ The struggle over the role of therapy in disability arts arises from a fundamental disagreement about the basis of the cultural exclusion of disabled people — are disabled people excluded because

we need “special help” to make it in a competitive world, or because we have been subjected to historically unfolding relations of oppression that are expressed in all of our major institutions and cultural imaginings?

Space, Technique and Access to Training

Disability culture is in part a response to, and exists within, segregated institutional spaces, but it comes from the artist/activists, not the institutions. Disability festivals emerged as spaces to showcase these artistic and activist cultural interventions. I have struggled to understand why the same theatre piece may feel different when it is performed in a disability culture space than when it is performed in a professional theatre space. In the former context, the implied or framing purpose of the event has to do with revealing disability-focused experiences and standpoints. In the latter context, when the audience supposes itself to be able-bodied, the same piece that served to reveal a lived reality becomes an affirmation of individuality, or an embracing of peculiarity. Without very carefully constructed contextualizing devices, a

theatre piece about someone's life ends up serving the theatrical purpose of bringing a catharsis of conformity to the audience that supposes itself to be able-bodied.⁴

Because of the focus on physicality and embodiment, theatre and dance are particularly politicized genres for disabled artists. Dancers with physical disabilities are met with disbelief when they state their occupation and are either patronized or ignored in the professional dance community.⁵ The entire pedagogy of dance training falls apart when a dancer with a disability enters a mainstream technique class. What the instructor may correct over and over in a non-disabled dancer, she may ignore in a dancer with a different body. A dance instructor or artistic director may assume that all the physical mannerisms of a disabled performer are related to an (unchanging) impairment, rather than to bad form or lack of technique. When asked in a radio interview how she trains as a dancer and develops as an artist, Spirit Synott emphasized the importance of working with choreographers who are willing to modify their technical training in order to challenge her to do more.⁶

The Trouble with “Innocence”

When we shift to visual arts, and consider the ideologies that operate around artists deemed “intellectually disabled,” the moral imperative (or trope) also shifts — to one of “eternal innocence.” Innocence is a trope that is often projected onto “publicly” disabled people, regardless of perceptions around intellectual capacity — Canadian artist Eliza Chandler addresses the idea of being publicly disabled through videos that document how passers-by react when she dresses and presents herself in a sexual way; and British artist Alison Lapper addresses the idea of innocence in her 1999 image “Angel,” in which the artist's

The entire pedagogy of dance training falls apart when a dancer with a disability enters a mainstream technique class.

face and winged, naked upper body hover in the top right corner of the image. But in the cultural imagination, the projection of innocence onto disabled people has expanded to include the trope of “absolute un-self consciousness” — a notion that has excited art collectors and psychiatrists alike.

I acquired a pamphlet from the curator/program director of Creative Spirit Art Centre at a public art showing and performance event she organized in 2004. The centre specializes in disability art, and the curator's mission is to promote the work of artists with disabilities by championing *art brut*. This philosophy contains implicit assumptions that certain people do not and/or cannot make conscious choices about the content of their artwork and what it represents. Therefore, while these artists would need time, space and resources with which to produce their *art brut*, they would not (according to this philosophy) require technical training to clarify and convey their

conscious analysis of the world. Implicit in this philosophy is the idea that “innocent” or “non-conscious” work will appeal to a “knowing” or “conscious” audience.

This appropriation and alienation of the artist from her work creates a non-consensual relationship between artist and audience. Analyzing disability as “unconsciousness” in the visual arts is akin to analyzing disability as “peculiarity” in the dance/theatre arts. In the former, the (implied) non-disabled art consumer can reflect on the existence of a transcendent human nature or psychic characteristics; in the latter, the art consumer can move from pity/fear to empathy and catharsis, through which the moral-physical attribute is cleansed. In both cases, the disabled artist becomes the object, not the subject of her work, and her humanity is erased and replaced with a trope, or living symbol, whose purpose is to provide guidance and healing to the non-disabled.



Trouble with Sirens dance company. Left to right: Perry Augustine, Paulo Raposo, Rachel Gorman, Spirit Synott. Photo: Lindsay Chipman.



Centre for Addiction and Mental Health on Queen Street West in Toronto. Photo: Aaron Cain.



Eliza Chandler. *To Look Back*, 2007, video still. Courtesy: the artist.

This philosophy of disability and art, which I have come to think of as the aesthetic of absence, has a particular relationship to technique and technical training. Since the aesthetic tends towards the presentation of an imaginary innocence, there is an assumed absence of technique. The technique that the artist *does* possess is interpreted as an inherent/unconscious mode of vision rather than a conscious stylistic choice.⁷ If we analyze the possibilities for access to technique for artists with disabilities, we quickly see that the content of visual arts training in a college art program is completely different than the content of a segregated arts program.

The failure to incorporate technique — thus giving artists tools to inform the choices they make in relation to their artworks — is not related to the capacity of the artist, but to the ideologies about the artist-as-disabled. There are examples of programs that do provide critical and technical skills training in the arts. Since 1999, Michele Decottignies of Stage Left has been producing politically and technically challenging work based in the ideas and struggles of the artists in the theatre group — many of whom have been labelled intel-

lectually disabled. Decottignies uses a forum theatre approach to develop the work, and operates a comprehensive theatre-arts training program, with ongoing skills training, and new productions in development every year.

But when arts programming is divorced from the critical disability movement, it can't help but replicate the institutionalization and segregation that sparked the disability rights movement in the first place. In 2004, the aforementioned champions of *art brut*, Creative Spirit, joined with us-based disability arts network Very Special Arts (VSA). VSA's advisory board includes an array of creative arts therapists and, according to their website, their 2004 national conference was hosted by no other than George and Laura Bush. The recasting of disability art as a therapy- and charity-based venture does not deter Canadian funding agencies — also in 2004, Creative Spirit received \$24,900 from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, to match \$24,900 from Canadian Heritage to conduct a feasibility study for a new facility, which has a projected annual operating cost of \$275,000 and projected renovation and property cost of \$4,000,000.⁸

Toronto-based Picasso Pro has also received Trillium funding to run workshops for people with disabilities. Yet despite that fact that the project's precursor at the Toronto Theatre Alliance had a disability advisory group of practicing artists with diplomas from OCAD and degrees in theatre, the majority of its workshops are led by non-disabled-identified artists. The choice not to hire disabled-identified artists as educators replicates the non-disabled-therapist/disabled-person-with-deficit power relation I described above. While these workshops may be a way for non-artists to get involved, this type of programming is not useful to the many trained professional artists and performers who can't get shows because of discrimination.

Of course, as professional artists, we do need access to continuing professional development. Specifically, we need more workshops organized by artist/activists, rather than by non-disabled-identified artists who want to do away with technique or who push alternative techniques as a substitute for doing the work of translating and adapting technique for the participants. We need master classes and workshops led by artists who have found

At all costs, festivals must avoid pandering to an imagined non-disability-identified audience who will benefit from learning about diversity and tolerance.

ways to re-present various aspects of their social identity — for example California-based playwright Lynn Manning, who deals with representations of race, class, masculinity and disablement; or UK-based theatre artist Deborah A. Williams, who has launched important work on representations of race and gender in a white-dominated disability culture movement. We need master classes and workshops led by Canadian artists who can teach us about how they have adapted the techniques of their respective genres in order to address disability critically in their work — for example, Alex Bulmer in video-making;⁹ and Alan Shaun in theatre and story-telling.

We need allies in fine arts schools and programs to bring critical discussions about representations of disability in arts and culture into the curriculum, both through the inclusion of critical disability perspectives in core courses, and through the creation of elective courses on disability arts and culture. We need basic access for students with disabilities — this in turn will necessitate a critical overhaul of how we understand and organize the training of students in fine arts techniques. We also need our allies in arts libraries and digital archiving to compile and give students access to examples of disability arts. An innovative example of accessible archiving and programming possibilities is the Stretch initiative based in the Adaptive

Technology Resource Centre at the University of Toronto.¹⁰

We need to re-politicize our disability arts and culture spaces. Disability conferences and festivals have been important spaces for the development of the critical disability movement. Disability culture events of the 1990s — where artists like Mary Duffy¹¹ and Cheryl Marie Wade first threw down their performance-art-based challenges to how disabled women's bodies are present/absent in the public sphere — have evolved into stops along the touring circuit for disabled artists. In the current Canadian context, we are operating several disability culture events each year without an independent artistic base. In the UK, radical disability artists and activists have long-established, touring theatre companies, with clearly articulated aesthetic and political mandates.¹² We need festivals to commission new critical and politically challenging work and organize artist calls around challenging themes. At all costs, festivals must avoid pandering to an imagined non-disability-identified audience who will benefit from learning about diversity and tolerance.

We need to support our established artists with residencies, commissions, and curatorial responsibilities. That's the way some us- and UK-based artists have been able to gain international profiles and produce and tour excellent work. We need to mentor our

young and emerging artist/activists. Disability culture events can be spaces for activists to experiment in making cultural interventions and spaces for artists to explore the politics of representation. We need, in fact, to create an *artist-led* network in order to put our lobbying, networking and presenting skills to collective use. In this way, non-disabled-identified administrators who position themselves outside the movement need not be the ones explaining and interpreting disability arts and culture to potential funders. We need our allies, especially the ones with privilege and connections to funders and donors, to lobby for the inclusion of critical disability perspectives in *mainstream* arts programming and festivals, rather than trying to direct the movement.

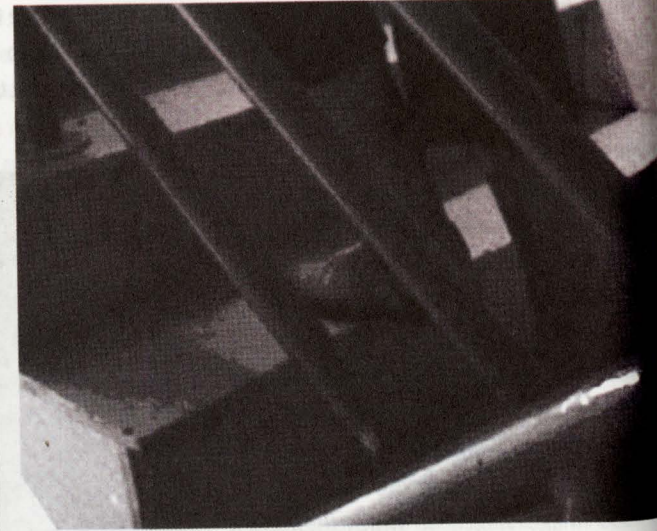
Rachel Gorman is a movement theatre and performance artist, and has been presenting her work in theatres, parks and galleries since 1999. Rachel is a Lecturer at the Women and Gender Studies Institute of the University of Toronto, an Adjunct Professor of the Ryerson School of Disability Studies, and a member of the Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists since 2001.

Notes

1. Robin Miller, "Including Every Body: Mixed-Ability Dance in Canada" [cover]; "Redefining dance to include every body" [article], *The Dance Current*, 7(3), pp. 12-17 & cover.
2. See Abilities Arts Festival. <http://www.abilitiesartsfestival.org/>
3. See Workman Arts. <http://www.workmanarts.com/>
4. Here I draw on Augusta Boal's explanation of the mechanism and function of bourgeois theatre. See *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985).
5. When Heather Mills fell on "Dancing with the Stars", Florence Henderson commented that watching Heather fall moved her to tears, and that she wanted to run onto the stage and pick her up.
6. Ted Fox, *Evidence*, January 18, 2004, CIUT Radio FM 89.5.
7. According to popular-psychology thinking, certain sensory states produce characteristic ways of viewing and representing the world — for example, the idea that autistics have a distinct and recognizable way of visually representing the world; or the idea that Van Gogh's distinctive style was in part a product of schizophrenia.
8. See Creative Spirit Art Centre. <http://www.creativespirit.on.ca/>
9. Alex Bulmer's "Beauty" (1998) and "NOB: Services for the Blind" (2003) are available through Vtape at www.vtape.org
10. See Stretch your Creativity. <http://stretch.atrc.utoronto.ca/>
11. See Mary Duff, Artist's Profile. <http://www.maryduffy.ie/>
12. See Graeae Theatre Company, founded in 1980, at <http://www.graeae.org/> and CandoCo Dance Company, founded in 1991, at <http://www.candoco.co.uk/>



Eliza Chandler. *Catwalk: Audience Participation*, 2005, video still. Courtesy: the artist.



Eliza Chandler. *Steps*, 2005, video still. Courtesy: the artist.

WORKING-CLASS HISTORY

Voices of Discord
Donna Phillips, ed.
New Hogtown Press (Toronto),
1979.
220 pp.; \$3.95.

Dangerous Foreigners: European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932
Donald Avery
McClelland and Stewart
(Toronto), 1979.
204 pages with appendix of demographic information; \$6.95.

The Organizer: Kent Rowley, a Canadian union life
Rick Salutin
Lorimer (Toronto) 1980.
163 pages; \$16.95 (cloth), \$8.95 (paper).

Indians at Work: An informal history of native Indian labour in British Columbia, 1838-1930.
Rolf Knight
New Star Books (Vancouver), 1978.
320 pages with appendix on historical background information; \$13.95 (cloth), \$6.50 (paper).

We Stood Together: First hand accounts of dramatic events in Canada's labour past
Gloria Montero
Lorimer (Toronto), 1979.
261 pages; \$9.95.

Soon To Be Born (A novel)
Oskar Ryan
New Star Books (Vancouver), 1980.
414 pages; \$13.95 (cloth), \$6.50 (paper).

By Karl Beveridge

One of the more tired maxims of English Canadian life is that we lack our own sense of history, and it is history, of course, that is the substance of national identity. And so it goes as we find ourselves slouched in front of the TV munching tortilla chips and watching the heroic parade of American thuggery.

Many a frenzied Canadian nat-

Karl Beveridge is an Associate Editor of FUSE

ionalist has searched for the elusive Canadian hero, bemoaning the fact that we didn't have a bloody revolution, ravaging civil war, or that the Mounties got out west first, thus robbing us of a good TV script. When a hero is dredged up, like Louis Riel, the CBC botches it, and we obediently switch back to Lou Grant.

While Canada is being rapidly de-industrialized, *Maclean's* runs a cover story on the new Canadian imperialists. Now here's the meat of national pride, the very item we as Canadians lack — a history of aggressive home-grown big capital. We could have J.R. Ewing shot by Eph Diamond of Cadillac Fairview.

The question of national identity is connected to the history of capitalism. As *Maclean's* ruefully points out, Canadian capitalism hasn't been a major voice on the world stage of capital. Our participation in world affairs has been as a polite servant of foreign interests, which doesn't make for exciting reading. Unless we're satisfied with being what some might call "the first post-nationalist citizens of the American world," we have to look for our history elsewhere. Where it appears is in the history of opposition to big capital. It is here that Canadian history is an integral part of world history. National identity, rather than being a mysterious state of mind, becomes class determined.

Canadian working class history has been receiving a healthy and extensive exposure in the past few years. Numerous books on labour history, immigration and immigrant life, womens' history, native history, socialist history, working class life and so on have appeared. The following are but a few randomly selected titles that do not pretend to represent all this material, but indicate its nature. These, along with other recently published books, including accounts of contemporary situations, are forming the basis of a uniquely Canadian history: the national expression of a world process of historical transformation.

We Stood Together by Gloria Montero, is a series of first hand accounts told to the author covering labour struggles from the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 to the Quebec Common Front of the 1970's. As history these accounts lack a context, but this is offset by a strong feeling of involvement in the events themselves. One of the difficulties of oral history,

however, is to distinguish between the lived experience of what is being described and the mediation of subsequent political opinion on the memory of the speaker. This, in itself, constitutes a kind of history and often in the book there is a sense of bitterness and irony in each narrator's reflections, particularly in the sections on the Sydney Steelworkers, the Mine and Mill workers of Northern Ontario and the Canadian Seamen's Union.

One of the most telling and interesting aspects of the book is the manner in which the radical political movements of the time, mainly the Communist Party (CP) in the 1930's and 1940's are down-played. It's hard to say whether this was the author's own intention, but it reads as if the narrators themselves, with the possible exception of Red Walsh describing the On to Ottawa Trek of 1935, shy away from a discussion of political circumstances. It can be argued that the book is primarily concerned with labour history, but it demonstrates that the temper of our own times is far from open.

A less successful book is *The Organizer* by Rick Salutin on the life of Kent Rowley who was instrumental in organizing the Valleyfield Textile workers in the late 1940's and later the Confederation of Canadian Unions. The description of the organization of Valleyfield by Madeleine Parent in *We Stood Together* for example, is more informative than Salutin's in *The Organizer*. This may be a quibble in that Salutin's main interest is in presenting Rowley's point of view. I have no objections to the approach of presenting a person's ideology, but it is hard to determine where Rowley leaves off and Salutin enters.

As presented by Salutin, Rowley's obsession is with the creation of an autonomous Canadian union movement. This is not the place to enter into that discussion, but Salutin's presentation so lacks in critical objectivity, to the point of admitted adulation (the last chapter is entitled "On the treatment of Canadian heroes") that the argument fails to convince. Salutin's nationalism leads him to ignore the broader political and social reality of Canadian life, and to build a Hollywood-type hero, casting Rowley as the lone voice of Canadian autonomy in the underbrush of international (American) sellouts. As history, it fails; as a polemic it is certainly passionate; as a description of the man it is compromised.

An excellent book is *Dangerous Foreigners, European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932*, by Donald Avery. It brings together three aspects of working class life which are most often treated separately; immigrant life,

labour history, and the history of radical political movements. It is, of course, an enormous field and the book can only touch the surface of its subject.

Fortunately the book does not idealize its topic which could happen in a short study. It deals with the contradictions and conflicts within the immigrant community; the role of immigrant labour agents exploiting their own people, the mix of homeland politics and Canadian issues within immigrant socialist organizations, the conflicts between immigrant socialism and Canadian socialist organizations, etc. What emerges is a picture of immigrant communities, particularly Ukrainian and Finnish, struggling against the ruthless exploitation by Canadian resource capital and fighting for their own cultural and social aspirations. It dispels the myths of both Anglo historical dominance and multicultural assimilation. A needed addition to this material is the history of the political roots of immigrant labour. For example, many Finnish radicals were the product of the Finnish civil war of 1917. Finnish history itself has only recently admitted that this was, in fact, a civil war, and not a repulsion of a Russian invasion.

Indians at Work, by Rolf Knight, also deals with a neglected aspect of labour history; the formation and existence of a native proletariat. The main point, which the author continually stresses, is that the myth of the un-skilled, work-allergic, noble savage is not only racist, but patently unhistorical. Concentrating on B.C. Indians, the author details their role and, in some cases, prominence as workers in the development and operation of B.C. resource industries as well as their participation in labour struggles. He is careful to note that the fortunes of Indian workers were apace with the general economic conditions of the region. Although Indian workers were victims of racial segregation this was more or less consistent with that of other racial minorities. The decline of Indian wage work from the 1930's on is only touched upon, and, as the author admits, needs an extensive study in itself. At times unevenly written and repetitive, the book, nonetheless, is an illuminating de-mystification of native Indian life.

Voices of Discord is a collection of short stories edited by Donna Phillips from left magazines of the 1930's (*Canadian Masses*, *New Frontiers*, and *Canadian Forum*). It includes stories by Dorothy Livesay, Mary Quayle Innes, Bertram Brooker, Sinclair Ross and others. The stories themselves constitute a better introduction to radical culture of the 1930's than some academic overviews, such as the book's own introduction. Beyond the fact that

they are competently written and interesting stories, they show a depth of radical culture in the 1930's that is often dismissed as politically simplistic and culturally naive. There is a noticeable lack, however, of stories revolving around industrial urban life. Most of the stories focus on rural life and poverty and, in a few cases, that of middle class conscience. If, in fact, it is the case that the majority of writing in the 1930's had this focus, as did much of the radical photography and film work, it is more a reflection on the class location of the authors who could more readily identify with rural desperation than with industrial alienation.

Soon to be Born by Oskar Ryan is a recently published novel about the 1930's. Set in Montreal, it depicts the lives of three characters: Gabrielle, the daughter of rural French Canadians who eventually marries Arthur, the son of Jewish immigrants, and Fred, the son of an Irish longshoreman who participated in the 1916 Irish rebellion. Effectively alternating between the hospital bed of Arthur who was shot in a demonstration in 1939, and the past lives of the characters, it climaxes in Arthur's decision to reject his middle class affluence and become politically active; thus his arrival in the hospital bed. Fred, who has joined the Communist Party acts, in part, as Arthur's conscience while Gabrielle represents the partially liberated woman. (A flaw in the book is the relatively inactive role of the women.) The book avoids political rhetoric, as its topic could well imply, and succeeds in developing a convincing portrait of the period, including short vignettes of real life characters such as Leslie Morris, Matthew Popovitch and others. Oskar Ryan, known for his plays in the 1930's (*Eight Men Speak*, New Hogtown Press) and for his political involvement then and since is one of the few active connections to that radical cultural history. The book has a subtle optimism that is both refreshing and commendable given the subsequent history of suppression in the 1940's and 1950's: Indeed it would be interesting if he were to continue the novel into that period.

As this field of historical material develops and expands, so too should the beginnings of a new political analysis emerge. As much as Canadian history has been submerged by that of foreign glamour, so too have its radical movements been dominated by imported strategies. In this regard one can sympathize with Salutin's passion, if not his objectivity. Indeed much of what is commendable about recent historical material is its political openness to radical solutions. As the crisis of the capitalist economy in Canada intensifies, a historical sense of ourselves becomes politically more crucial.

FUSE

ART + CULTURE + POLITICS

STATES OF POST COLONIALITY

Our next 3 issues
take a regional
approach to unfolding
the relationships
between art practice
and the politics of
decolonization

FALL 2011
EGYPT

WINTER 2011
CANADA'S NORTH

SPRING 2012
LITHUANIA

LABOUR WORKING WITH ART

by Susan Crean

SCANNING THE LIST of briefs submitted to the Applebaum-Hébert Committee on cultural policy you will find one surprising entry: United Steelworkers of America, National Office for Canada. Surprising not because it is there (there are a bagful of good reasons why labour should be speaking out on cultural issues); but because, outside of ACTRA, Actors Equity and the AFM which directly represent cultural workers, the Steelworkers was the lone trade union in the long list of arts organizations, community and women's groups, multicultural and educational associations, concerned citizens and John the Poet who bothered to comment at all.

Perhaps though, on second thought, it is not so surprising. For there isn't much of a tradition of the Canadian labour movement involving itself in cultural debate. It has been a rare month of Sundays when all the cultural unions could be found in attendance at the hearings and public meetings convened by the plethora of royal commissions and task forces sent in by a variety of governments over the past fifteen years to study our entrails in the hopes of finding a policy. So what bestirred the Steelworkers to a seventeen page document which opens with the line "The future of culture in Canada is everyone's business"?

The answer boils down to a couple of individuals who, by 1981, had developed an understanding of the stake the working class has in culture and had started hiring and commissioning progressive artists in the course of carrying out their own responsibilities for the union. Deirdre Gallagher, then editor of *Steel labour* and D'Arcy Martin, Canadian Educational Director, undertook an even bigger challenge that same year — the making of a documentary film, *Moving Mountains*, about women working in non-traditional jobs at the coal mines in Elkford, B.C. which required their persuading the union higher-ups to entrust money and their support to an outsider (in this case, independent filmmaker, Laura Sky). Not an insignificant mountain to move itself, and not a usual undertaking for a blue collar, industrial union. Also in 1981, Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge produced a photo exhibit called *Standing Up* in collaboration with Steelworker members at Radio Shack which later formed the basis of

First Contract: Women and the Fight to Unionize published in 1986 with additional help (the cost of colour plates) from Steel.

The Steelworkers' brief to Applebert, written by D'Arcy Martin, addresses the accessibility of the arts to working people and the working conditions of cultural workers as basic rights, noting that "Since much of Canada's economic wealth is produced by workers in remote areas, their right of access to our cultural wealth should receive higher priority than it has in the past." The document also talked about how the portrayal of workers on television reinforces stereotypes and prejudice against unions, and expressed a belief in the importance of community culture in which it recognized "the seeds of a more democratic and authentically Canadian culture."

In sum, because of the efforts of Martin, Gallagher and their colleagues (and possibly because of a large francophone membership which, being rooted in a culture where artists have often

been at the epicentre of union struggles, is disposed to considering cultural matters), the Steelworkers recognized the value of developing links with the artistic community. Over the past six years, they have done this in a variety of ways: by purchasing or commissioning original work by artists, photographers and designers; by contributing to the recording of music by local singers/songwriters and the production of documentary films and videotapes; by using musicians and theatre people in seminars and educational as animators, facilitators and energizers — all of which is officially regarded as "a natural extension of our work." In 1985, the USWA went even further when it issued a general policy statement which highlighted cultural issues and announced the creation of two arts/media awards "for excellence in reflecting the lives of workers and unions" named after labour journalist Wilf List and *chansonnière québécoise*, Pauline Julien (and which will be awarded for the first time this Spring).

Poster: Carole Condé/Karl Beveridge



50 YEARS OF HISTORY
AN EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS
MARCH 2ND TO 6TH, 12:00 NOON TO 8:00 PM
LOCAL 222, CAW, 44 BOND ST. E., OSHAWA, ONT.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: JOHN BOYD, CAROLE CONDE & KARL BEVERIDGE AND LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHERS ORGANIZED BY: DAVID SOBEL, ROSEMARY DONEGAN, CAROLE CONDE & KARL BEVERIDGE, AND LOCAL 222, CAW

Local 222 poster for CAW Historical exhibit held in Oshawa, March 1987.

Painting from the
Winnipeg General Strike
series by Robert Kell.
Stoney Mountain
Number Ten, acrylic
on canvas, 1980-82,
4' x 4'.



And last January, the union was a sponsor of *Woza Albert*, the South African play performed at Toronto Workshop Productions, thus putting its logo up there on the theatre programme where the ad/ego space is usually monopolized by corporate benefactors.

The Steelworkers may be the only affiliated union in Canada outside ACTRA and Equity with an articulated policy on culture, but it certainly is not unique in the field of collaboration with artists on union related projects. There is a history, albeit it is disjointed and unacknowledged, of agit-prop theatre on picket lines, singing at union functions, skits at demonstrations, of banners, buttons and balloons festooned with cartoons, slogans and photos to accompany all occasions. However, in labour circles, at least in Toronto, there is definitely something new in the air as several organizations have recently begun making a conscious effort to develop the cultural side of their activities.

In the past five years or so, for instance, there has been a remarkable, though by no means universal, change in attitude towards the visual design of material put out by unions. As Dave Mackenzie, Organizing Department director for the Steelworkers says, "There is much more sensitivity to the graphic environment now. PR people who are good on visual design, and not just good speech writers, are in demand." Union editors who used to have to fight for the budget to hire professional photographers against accusations of wasting money on essentials, no longer have to make the case uphill. And unthinkable just a few years ago, would have been the Canadian Auto Workers' photo project for their founding convention where several professional artists were sent into auto plants across the country with instructions to "shoot what you see" and send back pictures which they felt had artistic merit. About sixty photos were selected and exhibited at the convention. Says Wendy Cuth-

bertson, CAW's director of public relations, "The exhibit was mobbed. People were just fascinated by the portrayal of themselves at work. The images ranged from formal Ashley & Crippen-like portraits, to shots of workers having lunch and laughing." For Cuthbertson the project was a milestone because it treated artists not merely as photo-journalists recording an historic moment in the union's life, but as image-makers.

At the same time as union publications are being spruced up by people with an eye for visual appeal (and an understanding that the message isn't only conveyed in words), educational officers are increasingly using artists-cum-animators at schools and seminars. There is hardly an educational department in the country now which doesn't regularly use videotape, some of it produced in-house and some contracted out. There are more people around like Doug Tobin, CLC Ontario regional director of educational services who considers art an essential ele-

ment of his work. Tobin describes how live theatre has transformed the experience of people attending the annual school at Port Elgin. "People arriving on Sunday afternoon are nervous and don't know what to expect. They come from all over so the chances of even three people knowing each other is very slim. Normally it would take people until Wednesday to develop a camaraderie; but with the play scheduled for Sunday evening it begins to happen immediately. They share an experience and that creates a dialogue."

This kind of collaboration is not really new either, having its roots in solidarity actions such as the public support visual artists and their union (CARO) gave the striking Artistic Woodworker employees in the mid-seventies. What does seem to be different is that a larger coalition is now being built up, as evidenced by the mammoth success of events like the Eaton's strike benefit held at Massey Hall in 1985. On the labour side there seems to be a recognition implicit in their participation in such events, that cultural action is more than entertainment.

Another concrete example of the change is the emergence of the Labour, Arts and Media Working Group (LAMWG) which functions as an ad hoc committee of the Metro Toronto Labour Council. In November, 1982 the Ontario Arts Council organized the Swedish Cultural Outreach Symposium on the role of popular movements in the development of Swedish culture which was attended by a number of artists and union reps who were equally appalled by a comment Timothy Porteous, then the director of the Canada Council, made to the effect that Canada didn't have any community arts. Galvanized by the idea that Official Culture doesn't even recognize the existence of popular culture, a handful of people decided to get together, in good Canadian tradition, for a beer at a local bar. In no time an ad hoc committee was formed with equal representation from labour (specifically from CUPE, the CLC, ACTRA, CAMERA, LCMT, OFL and the USWA) and the artistic community (in the form of Karl Beveridge, Steven Bush, Tish Carnat, Carole Condé, Rosemary Donegan, Catherine Macleod, Richard McKenna, Simon Malbogot and Kim Tomczak).

LAMWG's first project was a labour-arts forum, held in April, 1983 and



"Boycott Eaton's" poster by Barbara Klunder. Donated by OPSEU, USWA, and *Our Times*.

featuring a visual arts display, poetry readings, music, theatre and workshops on "mutual awareness," "projects and funding" and "a cultural policy for the labour movement." Seventy-five people attended and subsequently the committee had this to say about its new-found partnership: "artists whose creativity had for years been inspired by social issues, experienced the frustration of not having an outlet for their work. Labour representatives spoke of the need to find new and effective means of communicating with their membership...A single factor emerged as central to our discussion: that working people...are alienated from existing art forms and

that such alienation is detrimental not only to the worker but to the arts in general."

Out of LAMWG's deliberations came the idea for a Mayday festival modelled on the celebration held in Glasgow, Scotland each year which also was the brainchild of an arts/labour coalition. By happy coincidence, *Mayworks '86* occurred on the 100th anniversary of Mayday when the CLC was holding its annual convention in downtown Toronto. A fortuitous combination of events and the perfect opportunity for organized labour to show its new cultural colours. However, the experience of the organizers getting labour to follow

A SINGLE FACTOR emerged as central to our discussion: that working people are alienated from existing art forms and that such alienation is detrimental not only to the worker but to the arts in general.

through on the rhetoric is revealing. According to Catherine Macleod, the CLC was slated to kick in \$15,000 (the OFL, \$10,000 and the LCMT, \$5,000) but assumed that the donation would also cover organizing all the same old entertainment for the convention. This seemed to indicate that the whole point of *Mayworks* had been missed; or worse, that the project had been gummed up in the wheels of internal politics. Whatever the case, the CLC mysteriously pulled out followed by the OFL, leaving the LCMT philosophically muttering "the show must go on." And indeed it did, with the help of another \$5,000 raised from local labour organizations, but primarily because of the funding and early support of arts agencies (the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture and the Canada Council).

In any case, by this time the LAMWG had modified its original plan to organize nationally and refocused itself on the Toronto community. As an informal committee of the LCMT it had sponsored two "ground-breaking" Labour Arts Exchange Workshops organized by Susan Meurer who experimented with songs and skits created on the spot by participants. "The first year we put together a skit about the computerization of airline ticket reservations and took it up to the CALEA (Canadian Airline Employees Association) picket line on Bloor Street. It was incredible to produce that in one day and get an immediate response from an audience like that." But as of 1987, LAMWG's main activity seems to be the parenting of *Mayworks*.

For its part, the Ontario Arts Council has been gingerly testing the waters. Its \$12,000 seed grant to *Mayworks* came mainly from its Community Arts Development office with small amounts contributed by various discipline sections, predicated on the involvement of professional artists. Naomi Lightbourn who runs the community arts programme "on a budget that equals

about two-thirds of Stratford's grant," notes that the operational definition of community has thus far been a topographical one, referring to localities outside Metro Toronto, and unlike the funding situation in the U.K. where amateur and professional activities mingle amicably, the OAC is a bit flummoxed by hybrids like *Mayworks*. "It landed in my lap," says Lightbourn, "because it didn't fit anywhere else." She and OAC's Special Projects Officer, Ron Evans, are guardedly enthusiastic about the expansion into labour-arts and aware of the political reefs lying ahead. For one thing, the proposal raises the ticklish question of whether the Council should get into "social service arts" (as it's been called), if only to initiate programmes that could be turned over to other ministries. Then too, Evans acknowledges that certain factions in the arts community might well oppose the Council "travelling down this byway" when basic arts funding is under seige. (And



Painting by Connie Eckhart. *Brown Lung Disease*, oil on canvas, 1983, 4' x 5'. Collection of the Amalgamated Clothing & Textile Workers Union.

someone is sure to lambaste those responsible for letting standards slip — an accusation women and minorities have often run afoul of.) The perception that unions constitute a special interest lobby would also have to be countered, and the difference between them and, say, corporations or religious groups, carefully drawn in policy terms. Despite these obstacles, OAC is nevertheless trying to fashion "a response to labour without setting up a specific programme" and is considering an artist-in-residence pilot for unions.

Like many other individuals who have been working on an approach to labour-arts in Canada, Evans and Lightbourn have been studying the experience in Britain and Australia. The Australian Art and Working Life programme is without doubt the most progressive and advanced model to go on, operating as it does through a collaboration between the Australian (arts) Council and the Australian Council of Trade Unions. The ACTU formed a national arts sub-committee in 1977 to draft an arts and recreation policy (officially adopted in 1980) and subsequently hired an arts officer to oversee, with the committee, the programme's activities, but not, significantly, to initiate projects itself, this being left to local groups. Meantime, the Australian Council which is comprised

THE FIRST CRITIQUE of cultural policy that tends to emerge, then, is a class analysis expressed in terms of the twin issues of accessibility and portrayal (or the right of working people to see themselves reflected and respected in the media).

of a community arts board, an aboriginal arts board as well as your regular Fine Arts board (all with the same status and funding) had developed a fairly extensive network of community arts officers working throughout the country, and the Art and Working Life programme was piggy-backed on that system and kick-started in 1982 with \$140,000.

What is striking about the Australian model is that it is predicated on the recognition that trade unions function as a specific community and that the widespread practice of artists working with trade unions is a legitimate artistic activity. Moreover, the community arts idea when applied to the labour movement produced a new phenomenon — the union arts officer, responsible for animating projects, orchestrating funding and administering the participation of professional artists. For socially committed Canadian artists who have a desire to work with labour groups, the Australian arrangement looks like heaven on earth. At the moment, however, outside of LAMWG there is no formal recognition, let alone a designated place for such activity to take place on an on-going basis here. There is only a vaguely remembered history and pockets of personal commitment on the part of a handful of enlightened bureaucrats. None of whom are betting on the appearance of union arts officers this side of the turn of the century.

For most unionists involved with the arts, the first and most obvious value of labour-arts productions which reflect the lived lives of working people is the validation they impart. In these days of yuppie-thought where reality is defined by television news which routinely deletes the working class from the picture, this is no small point. The experience of seeing/hearing an artistic rendering of an event in one's own community can be shocking, maybe radicalizing.

It is often followed by the realization that the arts in Canada are a middle

class pursuit which is deliberately exclusive. Larry O'Hara, a letter carrier for the post office and chairman of the *Mayworks* board, sees it as an artificially induced division. "Art is part of everybody's culture," he believes, "but somehow it got split and acquired this artsy feeling. You don't see people walking into the theatre in sweaters; they come in \$300 suits and mink coats. And the \$300 suits don't think that workers on Spadina have anything to do with the arts. My whole reason for getting involved is to close that gap — from both sides. Workers should have the right to go to the Toronto Symphony or the O'Keefe Centre and they should *feel* they have the right to go."

The first critique of cultural policy that tends to emerge, then, is a class analysis expressed in terms of the twin measures of accessibility (or the democratic right of workers to participate in activities which they pay for as taxpayers) and portrayal (or the right of working people to see themselves reflected and respected in the media). But unionists like Deirdre Gallagher, who



Artist Union agit prop performance, Labour Day, 1986.

is now a regional rep with the Public Service Alliance, and Geoff Bickerton, research director for CUPW, see the arts as a natural way to build solidarity. Says Gallagher, "Art represents the spirit of our movement better than anything else can — even ideas." Both see cultural activity as an outgrowth of social unionism which Bickerton believes is still evolving. "For years CUPW felt it was not the job of the union to discuss services. Now it has turned completely around to look at the products our members are producing and the service they are providing to other workers. As the union movement gains confidence it will start looking at the right to say how plants should be run, what investment should be made and there will be a lot more debate about the kind of society we want *and* what our culture should be like." To which Gallagher adds, "Working class people are brutalized in our culture, and I don't say that in any way to be patronizing. Just as the labour movement fought for education and universal medicare, so I think it should be more involved in the fight for our class perspective in all public funding of culture."

Gallagher also regards the latterday greening of the labour movement to be partially the result of her generation's passage through the counterculture and the legacy of Women's Liberation, its coalition politics, collective practice and "the tendency of feminists to put

IT IS ALL TOO EASY to set up a programme which essentially makes cultural missionaries of artists, peddlers of foreign and upper class exotica to the deprived masses.

our mark on things, understanding that there is more to politics than picket lines which, with a little imagination, can be fun and can appeal to the spirit."

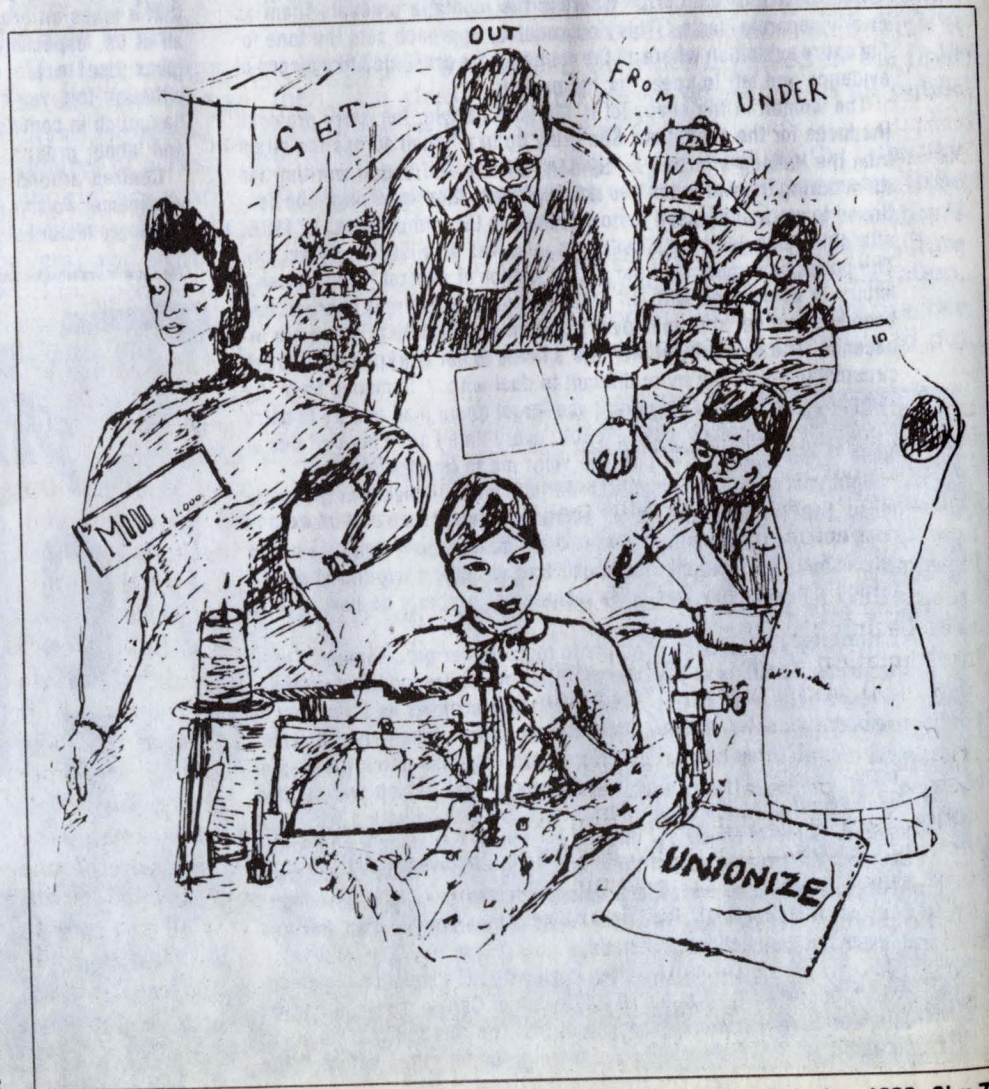
Constructing the coalition is still a delicate business and has to be done across an abyss of class prejudices where, on one side, artists are looked upon as tricksters who specialize in flattering the egos and serving the purposes of the ruling elite. To quote D'Arcy Martin, "The attitude towards anyone with cultural power is one of awe and resentment mixed in together. But there is also a common assumption that artists are economically and politically naive. They don't understand leverage (contracts, negotiations, bargaining) the way unionized workers do and they don't assume the establishment is against them. Moreover, as a whole the arts community shares the class arrogance of the country as a whole and even among progressive artists you find people who may be pro-worker but who are anti-union."

Naturally enough, the working class also shares the middle class view of the artist as a social and occupational derelict, and has little knowledge of the working lives of creators. It is a great revelation, therefore, to many union people to discover how bad and exploitative the working conditions really are (and that, as many have suggested, may be the basis for an alliance with unionized workers). Still the assumption persists that an artist's time is free and gratis. As long time union artist, Arlene Mantle has said, "Think about all the artists you've seen and heard at various labour functions. Most are expected to donate their labour and most do because they believe in the cause. People don't realize, however, that this is our work and we have families to support too."

As they say, and as you might expect, the working relationship between artists and labour isn't a rose garden. Things don't always proceed in harmony; unionist and filmmaker have been known to end up arguing over the

size of the lettering in the credits. Artists are often exasperated by the glacial pace of union bureaucracies and frequently mystified by the final decisions (yea or nay) meted out to their proposals (it still being the case that the main ideas and energy behind labour-arts projects comes from artists). Typically union reps like Gallagher are trapped in the middle catching flak from both sides. "Because [these projects] are chronically underbudgeted, artists often feel we aren't paying up fast enough. From my point of view, I put my reputation and my job on the line, and I often have felt [the artist] didn't appreciate what I went through."

Susan Muerer is more acerbic. "My personal opinion is that some artists have the impression they are dealing with a huge milk cow, an endless source of money for gigs, which is unfortunate. I also think some of them think they are dealing with illiterates instead of paying attention to what working people enjoy and why they choose what they do." You also hear about artists who operate on a "hit and run" approach, and others who are romancing the dream of a proletarian avant garde and who bring with them a left perspective hostile to union leadership. However, it is also true that through the seventies when many, if not most, artists on the left were cultural nationalists, the mainstream of the labour movement in English Canada was hostile to the national question, if for no other reason than the "internal" politics of its own international/American movement. The artistic community found scant sympathy for its primary struggle there. So

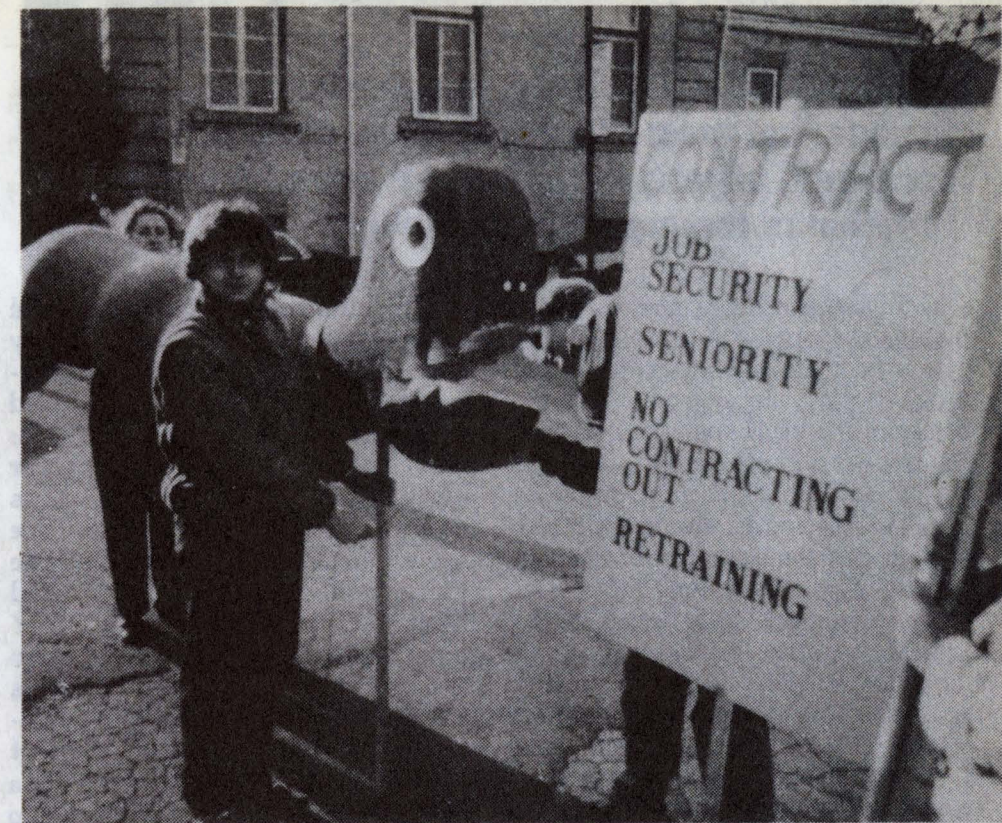


Drawing/mural by Chris Reed, *Get out from under: Unionize*, 1986, 6' x 7'.

it is highly significant that the labour-arts coalition now on the horizon coincides with an astonishing shift in the prevailing attitude towards Canadian autonomy which has made separation from American headquarters the fashion of the eighties.

If unions have been chary of artists, the feeling has been mutual. It's easy to see the propaganda value of the arts for labour, and there is equal opportunity on both sides for careerism. Inevitably tension arises over aesthetic and political content. To Joss MacLennan, a visual artist who works with Union Communications, a publicity firm which works exclusively for labour and progressive organizations, unions may have traded in the "horrible fifties functionalism" but generally it has been in favour of a "sixties minimal budget" look. "I often feel that the work artists do for unions is not appreciated at the level that's deserved. There is not an understanding of what we are trying to do. Yet when I do something for a union I want to communicate to as many people as possible; I'm not interested in taking the avant garde to the masses. But I also don't want to work beneath my own level because the union leadership assumes a less sophisticated audience than I do. I wish it were a case of unions feeling we should be creating an alternative mainstream look. That would be visionary."

So on one side there is the question of how (or if) the union's practical demands can be expected to mesh with the aesthetic purpose of cultural workers. On the political side, there are risks for both parties. Unions may indeed find themselves working with people who are personally critical of labour leadership (though exactly when that crosses the line and becomes 'trashing' as some unionists charge, is a matter of interpretation — and possibly freedom of speech), and artists who are lending their good names to the union enterprise will no doubt occasionally find themselves politically used. For instance, to what degree does a film like *Moving Mountains* actually advance the cause of women in male-dominated unions, especially when the filmmaker had no responsibility for the existing status of women in the union nor any in improving it? Five years down the road, Deirdre Gallagher wonders if it gave the Steelworkers credit they didn't deserve. "In trying to highlight women's



"Bookworm attacks contract." Mike Constable agit prop for Library Workers' Strike, Toronto, 1983-84.

achievement you have to wonder if that didn't create an illusion. I felt it was wonderful at the time; that the union was really moving on the issue. But that momentum hasn't been maintained."

To put it simplistically, art isn't politically neutral, and neither is working for unions. (Which isn't to say that a lot of artists wouldn't prefer working for the CAW than for Ford.) Be it a photo-history, a video on equal pay or a strike poster, the artist's work is being fitted into a context and it is definitely smart to keep your political antennae tuned and your independence intact. This brings us squarely to the issue of which end of the union structure artists plug into when they do pull off a proposal, and how this affects their ability to understand and embrace the workers' perspective. If the practice of art implies, as it does in this country, that a person becomes middle class by becoming an artist, then what ought the relationship be between artists and workers on the one hand, and artists and union bureaucrats on the other? It is all too easy to set up a programme which essentially makes cultural missionaries of artists, peddlers of foreign and upper class exotica to the deprived masses. (A top-down approach favoured by arts councils which treats the working class as

another market, working people as passive consumers and art as one more commodity.) So the relevant question is — where and how are these structures being challenged and redesigned? After all, union reps are caught in the same middle class dilemma artists are, so where does the rank-and-file come in? As spectators or participants? Are they expected to follow the leadership even though, in some cases, they may be following from in front?

From the vantage point of artists, moreover, there is a familiar ring to many aspects of the labour-arts project. Again your time will likely not be paid for properly (if at all), and again your work will be mediated, curated or packaged by administrators whose time invariably is. Union reps, naturally enough, come with their own cultural baggage and are equally capable of romanticizing their role — or for that matter of harbouring secret desires to hob-nob with the rich on prestigious arts boards. Whatever else is discussed, this means that eventually we have to confront the issue of whose culture is being promoted and why. What, for example, are the merits and demerits of including a quintet of TSO musicians playing classical music as part of *Mayworks*? Was that pandering to bourgeois notions of Fine Art or democra-

POPULAR CULTURE does, most assuredly, exist in Canada, but most of it takes place outside the rubric of culture, beyond the pale of art and beneath the line of vision of the mainstream media.

tizing an artform long since colonized by Official Culture? And what had it to say to Canadian workers in the 1980s?

Despite the keen interest in labour-arts, there are precious few strategies around and certainly no consensus about the role unions should adopt. At the moment, there are too few artists working consistently with unions to forecast a trend. Charlie Stimac is one exception to prove the rule that no one can make a living from the labour movement, though he admits to doing a bit of remedial carpentry from time to time. A third generation unionist, Stimac is self-taught and only began painting in the late seventies. His activities since have included large commissions for the USWA National and District offices, posters supporting union strikers, and artwork based on the working conditions in mills, mines and fabricating plants. This work has been exhibited in local union halls. Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge are another exception — a team with a surprisingly long track record (few artists, they acknowledge, can afford to stick to labour arts) and a prodigious reputation for knowing how to stick-handle a proposal to the right people in the right places at the opportune moment. The Condé-Beveridge approach has been to combine funding for their work as artists from arts agencies with support and some project materials from unions, as the case may be, in cash or in kind. The philosophy is based on a concept of community, says Beveridge. "One reason why we came back to Canada was a critique of that market approach and a realization that we wanted some kind of social base that made sense." Drawing on the British and Australian experiences which he has studied in depth, Beveridge notes that there has been a shift in the last decade from a focus on geographically defined communities (usually economically deprived areas as well) to an emphasis on *communities of interest* which could be the key for us.

Community development as a social and political movement had its heyday in Canada in the sixties with the Antigonish movement in the Maritimes and the Company of Young Canadians; but it did not translate into popular arts activism or a community arts movement that ever forced itself on the institutions of Official Culture. The impetus did have some unintended results when federal LIP and OFY grants inadvertently funded the start-up of numerous theatres, artists spaces and alternative magazines in the seventies. But, again, the cultural politics of the period were not formulated on a community approach, or dedicated to a re-interpretation of Art beyond ensuring that it had a 'made-in-Canada' label. To the extent that there was

pressure to democratize culture, it was co-opted by federal policies hailing decentralization and multiculturalism and pleading National Unity. Thus, there is nowhere in the country one can point to as an example of an integrated and articulated cultural practice where popular art — defined as the informal, spontaneous, locally-based creativity everyone participates in by virtue of belonging to the human race and some sort of community — is conceived of as the wellspring of all art. Of course, popular culture does, most assuredly, exist in Canada, but most of it takes place outside the rubric of culture, beyond the pale of art and beneath the line of vision of the mainstream media.

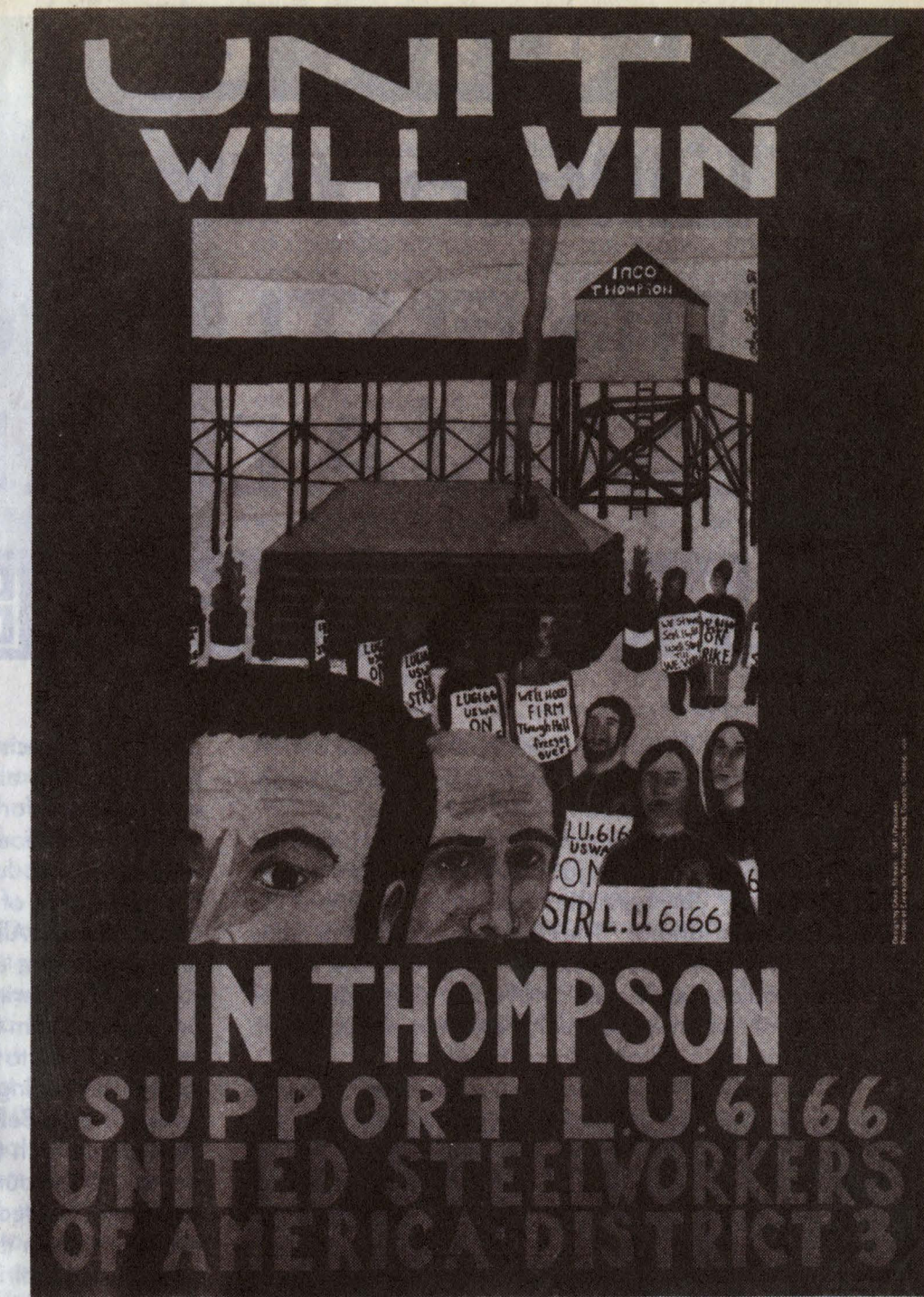
All this means that a great deal of theoretical — or ideological — work remains to be done before a genuinely progressive labour-arts coalition can emerge. For all their emphasis on things practical and immediate, there are union reps around who have begun to think about such issues. D'Arcy Martin, now the National Education Representative of the Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada, ar-

ticulates a notion of "union culture" which he describes as an oppressed culture, one which is virtually invisible and which can be broadly characterized as "diverse, dynamic and oral." Because Martin regards the union movement as the core of organized social opposition in Canada he also sees it as the logical venue for progressive cultural action. Just how far we can go with this notion of trade unions forming the basis for a revived community arts is debatable — and ought to be debated. Unions certainly represent a community of interest, but are they communities in any organic sense, such that people can share an important part of their cultural lives through union activities?

These are perplexing, perhaps painful, but necessary questions. They imply an analysis which recognizes that working class culture exists, has a history, but that it is badly fractured. A salutary union culture may be evolving, but the fact is that the leisure-time culture that is available and affordable to most working people is demeaning, distorted, and largely American. On one level, therefore, it is dumbfounding that the labour movement in this country has never taken up the mass media as a priority issue (further, that is, than tabling annual resolutions at CLC conventions calling for a workers newspaper). On the other hand, perhaps it is entirely understandable that labour leaders are as oblivious as everyone else is to the fact that we live inside an invisible ideology which has made a fetish out of separating culture from the everyday business of life, and especially economics.

The opinion of many artists that the union movement has a lo-o-o-ng way to go in understanding the cultural dimensions of its own struggle is echoed by labour leaders like Mike Lyons, chairman of LCMT and a LAMWG member. "We're in the early stages of raising consciousness. When I ask people to help with arts projects, true, it still seems very esoteric to many. We have to establish the connection between that and collective bargaining."

So far organized labour-arts projects (as opposed to spontaneous expressions of popular arts in a union setting) have come about because of common professional interests among a handful of artists and union bureaucrats. The issue of whether this activity will open



"Unity Will Win." Poster by Charles Stimac supporting Local 6166 USWA Strikers, Thompson, 1981.

up opportunities for working people who have their own artistic talents, imagination and energy to put to cultural use, to help heal a damaged culture, has only received rhetorical attention. If that were to change, if unions were to grasp hold of the idea that cultural action is the key to their own success (as Bob White and the CAW seem to have understood, at least in part, by their decision to allow NFB filmmakers to document the split with the UAW in *Final Offer*) then we would be looking at a new coalition that is artistically exciting, politically serious and pro-

foundly radical. The labour movement would join the cultural debate and art would become a bread and butter issue.

Susan Crean is a Toronto writer and critic, an editor of *This Magazine* and author of *Newsworthy: The Lives of Media Women* (publisher, Stoddart, 1985); due to be out in paperback (publisher, Good Read Biographies).

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"Picasso was a Union Man." Poster designed for Artists Union, Summer Symposium, July 1986, Toronto.



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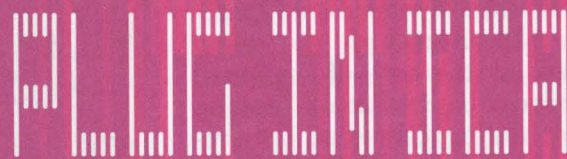
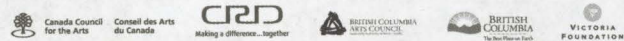
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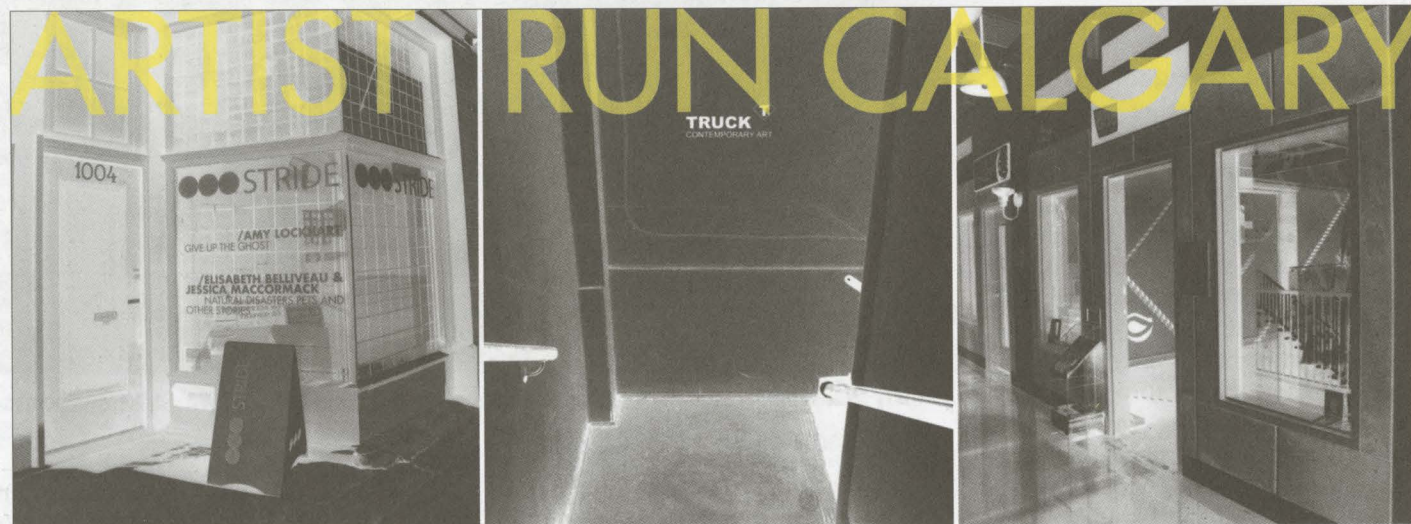
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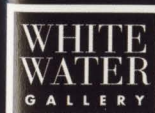
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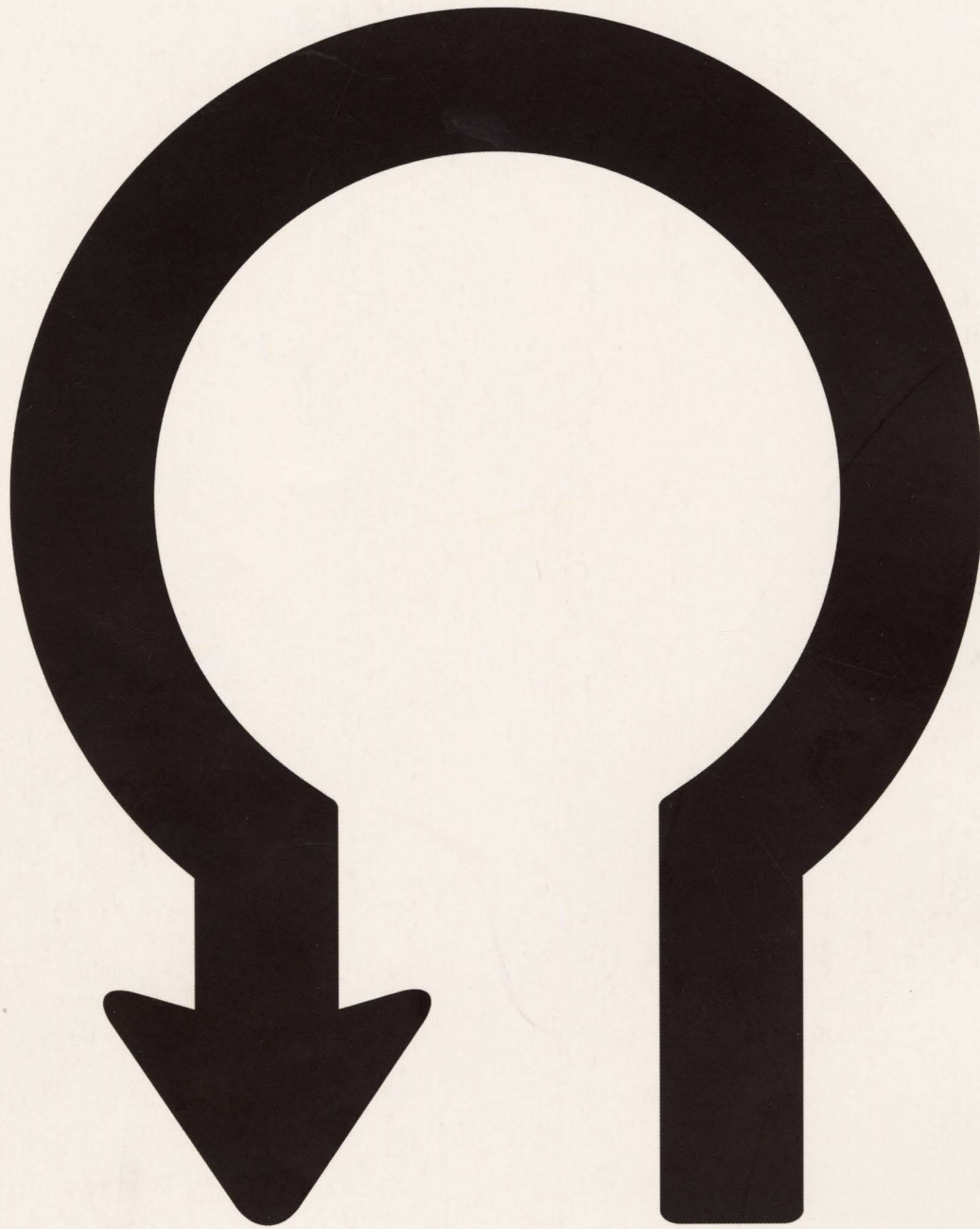
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