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**FUSE** contents  
MAGAZINE

**VOL. XVII NO. 3**

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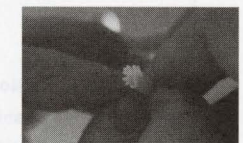
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contents

issues & events

- 7 **Film & Video News**  
Karen Tisch
- 9 **Bust!**  
Elaine Carol
- 9 **Fear & Loathing on the Prairie**  
Brett Grubisic & Bryan Young



column

- 11 **Cutting Your Nose to Spite Your Face**  
The challenges of diversity in the Canadian artistic community  
Kwame Dawes

reviews

- 31 **BookendS & Odd Books**  
Publications Refuting Conventional forms, from the Banff Centre  
review by Jeff Derksen
- 32 **Twenty Bold, Brash and Beautiful Years**  
Video In's Twentieth Anniversary  
review by Lynne Wanyeki
- 34 **Queer Looks**  
Edited by Martha Gever, John Greyson and Pratibha Parmar  
review by Lloyd Wong
- 35 **Dismantling Invisibility**  
Asian Artists Responding to the AIDS Crisis  
review by Xiaoping Li
- 37 **They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever**  
A book by Annie Zetco York, Richard Daly and Chris Arnett and...
- Bowl of Bone/Tale of the Syuwe**  
A film by Jan-Marie Martell & Annie Zetco York  
review by Gordon Brent Ingram
- 39 **Spontaneous Combustion**  
review by Jennifer Rudder
- 42 **In the Seam/En couture**  
A project of Art Access Now  
review by Laura U. Marks
- 44 **Blacklisted!**  
Danny Tisdale, the Last of the African Americans  
interviewed by karen/miranda augustine

featuring

- 14 **Cyborgs in Denial Technology and Identity in the Net**  
David McIntosh
- 23 **All in the Family**  
An Examination of Community Access Cable in Canada  
Dot Tuer

Cover image Christopher Eamon & Kika Thorne  
Photo (cover and above): David Rasmus

**Robert Lee**

Incidence of Storage Space  
and  
Myopia  
March 16 – April 16

**Performances at YYZ****Shake Well Collective**

TBA

**Richard Layzell**

Tuesday March 29 8 pm

**Pomo Afro Homos**

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**Beyond Destination**

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April 20 – May 14

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curated by Marilyn Jung

and

film and video

curated by Richard Fung

May 25 – June 25

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**David Buchan**

from *Lamonte del Monte to Damocles*

February 11, 1950 – January 5, 1994

David Buchan, a.k.a. Lamonte del Monte, Toronto performance artist, visual artist and designer, after a long and tireless battle finally succumbed to AIDS-related illness on the morning of Wednesday, January 5. Faced with another onslaught of seizures, David refused medication, refused to go to the hospital, and, surrounded by friends and in his own environment, chose his own moment to leave us.

David always went his own way. Strong-minded, stubborn and gregarious, he formed his own opinions, wrote his own life script, and remained tenaciously loyal to his many friends. In the best bohemian tradition, he fostered a personal eccentricity based not so much on a desire to be different as on an individual sense of style, which drew on a cynical but still affectionate view of the North American culture in which he was immersed, and a dedication to personal expression in every aspect of his day to day living.

David began working at Art Metropole, in 1975, the year after it opened. Working with Peggy Gale, he helped organize Art Metropole's collection of artist's video, audio, bookworks and multiples, and established the distribution system by which these materials were sold worldwide. David worked on and off at Art Metropole for the next ten years and eventually joined its Board of Directors, where he remained active until his death.

During the period in which he worked at Art Metropole David began to develop his performance personae. In 1976 he performed *Geek Chic* at the Crystal Ballroom of the King Edward Hotel. Enormously popular, it gave only a hint of things to come. Shortly after, David was invited to speak on artists' books at the annual conference of the Art Librarian's Society of North America, and did so in the personae of Lamonte del Monte, a flamboyant talk show host with a decidedly camp, low-brow personal style almost as pronounced as David's own. Thus began a legend.

Lamonte's official performance debut was in David Buchan's *Fruit Cocktails* at the Fifth Network Conference in Toronto in September 1978, where his maniacal mix of costume, set and lip-synch drove the audience over the top. Lamonte was soon performing at artist-run centers and museums across Canada, and at festivals and institutions in Vienna, Brussels, Frankfurt and other European centres. His was an idiosyncratic blend of high and low culture, art historical knowledge married to North American kitsch, percolated through small-town ingenue affectations.

The visual and verbal richness of David's unlikely materials were fully evident in a series of photos and text which culminated in his solo exhibition at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in December, 1979. The photographs were taken in collaboration with Jorge Zontal of General Idea, and depicted Lamonte del Monte in self-styled fash-

**In Memoriam**

ion statements that offered reinterpretations of the language of advertising from the postwar period to the present. "David Buchan: Modern Fashions" established David's mature style, in which self-portraiture and an interest in the clichés of commodification were invested with high art significance.

David's series of billboard-format works from the '80s are perhaps his best-known and most loved. David produced the first of these for the exterior of A Space's Spadina Avenue location for their Public Address project in December, 1984. Usually incorporating text and two images — self-portraits of course — these works were complex pun-like amalgams. In later works, (no longer in billboard format) David addressed death, illness and AIDS. He eliminated the text but the oversized photos speak loudly for themselves: David poses as Damocles with the sword poised over his head; David as Marat collapses dead in his bath.

Last summer the Power Plant held a fifteen-year retrospective of David's work entitled "Inside the Image." His work is also included in a number of public collections: notably the National Gallery of Canada and the National Gallery of Contemporary Photography, both in Ottawa.

David possessed unbounded generosity. In addition to his many years with Art Metropole, he was a founding member of the performance space Gap in 1980, and of the Cold City Gallery in 1986. He also served on the Board of Directors of YYZ Artists Outlet for some years. There is hardly an arts organization in Toronto that David has not helped in large or small ways, and his ability to throw himself into community projects such as the "Chromazone Fashion Show" (1980) and "Chromaliving" (1983), has given life and vitality to many an event. He will be sorely missed by all those who have valued his participation in the Toronto art scene, and even more by those who have come to take him for granted. His energy, wit and taste for the theatrical will be difficult to replace.

—A.A. Bronson

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VIDEO FROM V TAPE

Re: FUSE (Volume 16, no. 5 + 6)

Dear Editors:

I'd like to make a brief response to Rozena Maart's article "Cultural Appropriation: Historicizing Individuality, Consciousness, and Actions." In an act of heterosexism (or—if Maart knew I was gay—homophobia) I am made to stand in for all privileged straight white males. If I need to show my battle scars at the hands of heterosexist privilege, perhaps my conviction as a keeper of a common bawdy house (arrested at the Barracks steam bath for being a cashier in 1978) along with the numerous difficulties and bigotry I have encountered in relationship to my work (overtly Queer since my Alberta College of Art school days in 1973-75) will convince your readers that Rozena Maart's strategy is reductive and divisive. I am no Johnny-come-lately to gay representations, and she certainly did not have to worry about "outing" me by acknowledging that I had a slightly more complex subject position within this debate.

I'd like to take this opportunity to state emphatically that I have not made images related to Native cultures since 1988, and that I currently have a more informed understanding of Joane Cardinal-Schubert's arguments as they appeared in her 1989 FUSE article, "In the Red." I now see my image of a berdache in a sweat lodge (1986) as an incursion into the sacred and spiritual of another culture. I am fully aware that dynamic gay First Nation artists like Zachary Longboy, Billy Merasty and Thomson Highway are the ones to best explore gay subjectivity within Native cultures. A lot has happened in the art world in the past four years, and I value what I have learned from the discourse that Joanne Cardinal-Schubert initiated with her FUSE article.

Any honest appraisal of my work of the last five years would note a significant shift in thinking and practice. Most pointedly, since the December 1986 AIDS-related death of my lover at the time, Tim Jocelyn, my work has primarily dealt with various issues around HIV and AIDS. I was one of the first Canadian artists to venture into this terrain at a time when there was considerable public stigma, discussing my asymptomatic HIV seropositivity status in the media for the sake of public education.

In conclusion, I am suspicious of Rozena Maart's motives for singling me out in her FUSE essay when there are many higher-profile artists who have been named in the cultural appropriation debate. Some are artists who have been thoroughly validated by the museums of Canada (Jeff Wall, Liz Magor, Jack Shadbolt, to name a few) in a way that I will never be because of the overtly Queer content of my work. I worry that an article like Maart's misrepresents the overall concerns of my eighteen years of practice (the assertion of gay subjectivity in a homophobic culture and analyzing the numerous prob-

## letters

lematics of sexual identity politics in the arts) by concentrating on a brief, misguided investigation that I have long since abandoned. In a huge country like Canada where few people get to see the actual exhibitions of artists from other cities, I have learned that the fear of distortion in the print media is a legitimate concern for visual artists. So I wish to reassert that during the significant portion of my years as an artist I have not been Dancing with Wolves but with delicious, abject male homosexual bodies on the stainless steel dance floors of gay representation.

—Andy Fabo

December 27, 1993

Dear FUSE Magazine,

In your Fall 1993 issue (volume 17, no. 1), you presented an index for volume 16. I noted that an exhibition of photographs by Ellen Flanders which I reviewed ("Looking Beyond Identity: Coalition Initiatives from the Left," no. 2) was listed in three categories—"art/exhibitions," "lesbian/gay culture and politics," "photography"—yet the most significant aspect of the show, its Jewish subject matter and perspective, was left unnamed. I realize that the work of indexing involves many subtle decisions—what to place where—but the categories themselves must be relevant to the articles if the index is to be of any use. That my review was the only piece that contained significant Jewish content on your pages last year should give pause for thought, not an excuse for ignoring that very content.

—Sandra Haar

Erratum

The resource list on page 27 of volume 17, no. 2, listed an incorrect phone number for the Black Film and Video Network. The correct number is (416) 504-1442.

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## Film & Video News

by Karen Tisch

### Spotlight on Black Cinema

This February, Toronto celebrated Black History Month in cinematic style with Africa International: Celebrating New Black Cinema, an engaging programme of films and videos curated by Toronto-based writer and programmer, Cameron Bailey. Co-produced by the National Film Board and the Black Film and Video Network, the Africa International series brought together a diverse selection of works by Black artists from Africa, Britain, the United States and Canada, with special guest appearances by pioneer African American filmmakers Haile Gerima and William Greaves.

Highlights of the programme included the Canadian premiere of *Alma's Rainbow*, Ayoka Chenzira's eagerly awaited first feature, Pratibha Parmar's *Warrior Marks*, a cinematic investigation into female genital mutilation (produced in collaboration with African American novelist, Alice Walker), *The Blue Eyes of Yonta*, a dramatic feature by Flora Gomes of Guinea-Bissau and *And Still I Rise*, the latest in a series of shorts by Ngozi Onwurah, the extraordinary Black British director who brought us such cinematic gems as *The Body Beautiful* and *Coffee Coloured Children*.

A hot lineup of recent films and videos by Canadian artists (Clement Virgo, Stephen Williams, Christene Browne, David Findlay and Andrea Fattori, among them) rounded out this memorable event.

### If You Missed the Video...

In 1993, *The Raft of the Medusa*, a feature-length video by media artist Julian Samuel, brought to the screen an exceptional lineup of academics and writers in a series of interviews on post-colonial discourse. Now, Amin Maalouf, Thierry Hentsch, Sara Suleri, M. Nourbese Philip and Ackbar Abbas are reunited in a book of the same title, co-edited by Julian Samuel and Jocelyne Doray and published by Black Rose Books. Through a series of lively discussions on topics ranging from Islamic fundamentalism to the partition of India, *The Raft of the Medusa* gives voice to five powerful thinkers as they recreate history from a non-European perspective. A must-read for all those searching for an alternative to Western history books.

### Bold, Brash and Beautiful

Established in 1973, Video In is a Vancouver-based artist-run centre devoted to the production, distribution and exhibition of video art. Last October, in celebration of its twentieth anniversary, Video In mounted "20 Bold, Brash and Beautiful Years," a multi-media celebration tracing the centre's colourful history and the history of video art in general. Featured events included a month-long exhibition of a multi-media installation entitled *Making Video In*, a dynamic series of screenings curated by prominent

video artists and theorists Sara Diamond, Michael Goldberg, Karen Knights and Nancy Shaw, and a multi-media dance party and presentation produced by Paul Wong. This spring the final stage of the project unfolds with the release of a commemorative publication. It brings together a collection of writings by the curators on a variety of social, political and technological concerns—an important document in understanding the history of video art on Canada's west coast.

### Images 94 is on its way...

From April 20 to 30, Northern Visions presents the seventh annual Images Festival, Canada's largest showcase for independent film and video. Seventeen programmes of over 100 short films and videos will be screened at the Jackman Hall (Art Gallery of Ontario) and the National Film Board's John Spotton Cinema.

Highlights of this year's Festival include ten juried programmes of new dramas, documentaries and experimental works selected from an international open call; a two-part series showcasing independent production in Latin America (curated by Toronto-based programmer Ramiro Puerta), a programme of experimental animation presented by guest curator Stephanie Maxwell of the Rochester Institute of Technology and a series of new African

works selected by Carol-Anne Agard.

Speaking New Media Workshops, on topics ranging from Community Television to Script Editing to Production Management, will run concurrently. For more information and workshop registration contact the Images Office at (416) 971-8405.

### Calling the Shots

Janis Cole and Holly Dale are among the most prominent women filmmakers in Canada. Their film collaborations have included such noteworthy documentaries as *Calling the Shots*, *Hookers On Davie*, *Prison For Women* and *The Making of Agnes of God*.

*Calling the Shots*, a cinematic celebration of women behind the camera, is now available in book form. Published by Quarry Press, this important new anthology brings together a series of 20 candid interviews with contemporary women filmmakers working in North America. Featured artists include Patricia Rozema, Anne Wheeler, Lea Pool, Deepa Mehta, Sandy Wilson, Lizzie Borden and Euzhan Palcy.

Complete with filmographies and comprehensive biographies, *Calling the Shots* clearly illustrates the extraordinary contribution women directors have made to the development of mainstream and alternative film practices, while recognizing the diversity of the individual artists' experiences and artistic visions.

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still: S. Rynard

## Fear and Loathing on the Prairie

**Saskatoon**—An art piece in a student art exhibit at the Snelgrove Gallery of the University of Saskatchewan was recently deemed a scandal by the University of Saskatchewan administration and some local media. The "reprehensible" work was removed from the gallery without consent from the artist or curator, and resulted in an almost immediate suspension of the student from his programme. He was also denied access to University grounds and to his scholarship funds. The punitive measures were dispensed without dialogue, despite protestations by curator Elizabeth MacKenzie and artist Christopher A.E. Lefler. For the—powers—that—be at the University of Saskatchewan, it appears that art has limits; art may convey "political statements," but it should never break too much with decorum.

The exhibit of student work organized by students was called "Staging Identities," and was curated to investigate the diversity of subjectivities formed within contemporary culture. One of the pieces in the exhibit was produced by Queer activist Lefler, a student in his final year of the University's MFA programme. The work was quite simple: it consisted of a table, chair, black banner connotative of "Day Without Art" events and a black University of Saskatchewan binder containing two letters. It was the letters in the binder that provoked the ensuing controversy. The first letter was dated February 14, 1993 and was addressed to Sylvia Fedoruk, the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan. The second, dated April 8, 1993, was Fedoruk's response.

## BUST!

**Toronto**—On December 14, 1993 *The Globe and Mail* art critic Kate Taylor published a highly convoluted, damning review of an exhibition of Eli Langer's figurative paintings and drawings at the artist-run centre Mercer Union. The artist's work deals with childhood sexual abuse and its aftermath by exploring memory, violence, pain, terror, survival, the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective, sexuality and healing. Taylor admitted at the beginning of her critique that she didn't know what to make of the work; nevertheless, she proceeded to sensationalize the depictions of adults sexually abusing children and children engaged in sexual play with other children by taking the work out of its context and raising questions about its legality.

The Metropolitan Toronto morality bureau claim that two individuals contacted their squad to lodge complaints on December 15, the day following the review. Police visited the gallery that day and then returned on December 16, warrant in hand, to seize thirty-five drawings and five paintings. On December 21 three charges were laid against Langer for creating, owning and displaying child pornography. Two days later, the police charged Mercer Union director Sharon Brooks with possession and exhibition of child pornography.

Langer is the first artist and Brooks is the first art gallery employee to face charges under the new child pornography legislation in Canada. Since the law was passed on August 1, 1993, teen sex workers and adult video collectors have been arrested in Toronto, Milton and London, Ontario. The number of those charged escalates daily.



Untitled, Eli Langer, oil on canvas, 40" x 60", 1993.

Under the new federal legislation introduced and passed unanimously in the final days of the withering Tory government last summer, the definitions of "kiddie porn" underwent sweeping changes. Bill C-128 amended the Criminal Code and now states that any representation (whether visual, aural or written) of "explicit sexual activity" of people under 18, or people who appear to be under 18, is child pornography. Terms of five to ten years in jail will be issued to anyone convicted of creating, owning, selling, distributing or exhibiting under this category.

While there are supposed to be exemptions for work of artistic, scientific, medical or educational merit, the new law does nothing to define the criteria of these exemptions. In fact, Bill C-128 reverses the burden of proof and, in effect, renders people like Langer and Brooks guilty until proven innocent.

On January 17, 1994, International Artists' Day, Langer, Brooks and their lawyers Frank

Addario and Brian Greenspan, entered court to receive their trial dates. An ad hoc coalition of artists, writers, sex-trade workers, free-speech activists, students and others supporting Langer and Mercer Union are planning public protests, letter-writing campaigns and a number of other political actions. On February 24, 1994 Langer, Brooks and their lawyers will have entered court a second time to receive trial dates. At press time, it is not apparent whether the case will proceed by way of summary conviction (in which the maximum penalty is six months or less) or by way of indictment (in which the maximum penalty is ten years or less).

To aid in the defence of Langer and Brooks, please write to the Ontario Attorney General Marion Boyd at 720 Bay St., 11th Floor Toronto, Ontario M5G 2K1 Fax (416) 326-4016, or Premier Bob Rae, demanding that all charges be dropped.

— Elaine Carol



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## Janice GURNEY

SUM OVER HISTORIES

March 26 – May 22, 1994

A survey of ten years of work by the Canadian artist Janice Gurney.

Presented in conjunction with the city-wide interdisciplinary cultural project FEMINIST SPIN.

Organized and circulated by the Winnipeg Art Gallery with the financial assistance of The Canada Council.



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Fedoruk's involvement in Lefler's installation really began when she cancelled her speaking engagement at the December 1, 1992 "Day Without Art" ceremony. Fedoruk was *officially* supposed to be there in her capacity as Lieutenant Governor in order to address an audience of people affected by the ongoing AIDS crisis. Unofficially, of course, she was invited by the organizers of the event because of her personal stake in the fight against AIDS and the concomitant homophobia which has exacerbated the suffering. It is this fact, and the context in which she spoke that enraged Lefler, who has himself lost several friends to AIDS. Lefler alleges that Fedoruk is a lesbian who has benefited from her closeted status, and is therefore complicit with the homophobic structures that have destroyed the lives she was there that day to eulogize. What right had *she* to address this pain when she, a closeted lesbian, had been protected from the kind of discrimination that gay male AIDS sufferers face routinely? Thoughts like these and the anger attached to them compelled Lefler to write to Fedoruk. Her evasive response spawned the installation which has since been banned from exhibition at the University of Saskatchewan.

The exhibit opened at 9 AM. A half an hour later, Lefler was contacted by MacKenzie, who told him that an aspect of the exhibit had been found unacceptable by the Acting Head of the Fine Arts Department. By 10 AM the binder containing the letters had been ordered removed; Lefler was told that there were no options for appealing this order. He then replaced the absent binder with another one. The new binder was removed the following morning. Furthermore,

the Gallery was ordered temporarily closed pending further notice. The next day the administration had the remaining contents of Lefler's work removed. In response, curator MacKenzie placed a sign stating "This work has been removed from the gallery," and left the original title card intact.

A series of meetings and directives from University officials ensued, all of which ordered Lefler to refrain from further action. It was only after Lefler filed a theft report with the police that the University relinquished his work. In letters from Vice-President (Academic) Patrick Browne it was stated the administration was "unanimously of the view" that the work was "neither appropriate nor acceptable for any exhibition of student art at this University." Moreover, it said his piece was "offensive and reprehensible." A subsequent letter from Browne claimed of Lefler's work: "Not only is material of this nature offensive, it does not constitute art in any sense of the word, and is not suitable for exhibition" [authors' emphasis].

The movement from accusatory letters to suspension (and the attendant threat of expulsion) was swift. Lefler was informed that he was not to produce any more art for the Gallery space, and, still later, informed that he was suspended pending a decision on his ultimate status. Lefler was stripped of his scholarship, prohibited from entering University grounds and subjected to disparaging comments within the close art community of Saskatoon.

The whole incident raises significant questions around freedom of expression, especially in an artistic or academic context. Bruce Grenville, curator of Saskatoon's Mendel Gallery, suggests that since the University plays an important role as a teaching instrument, it



Office of the Vice-President (Academic)

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary, Board for Student Discipline

is in a perfect position to provide a forum for debate on such critical issues. Instead, the University forestalled dialogue on the matter and simply tried to sweep the problem under the carpet. The University claims, via Vice-President Browne, the primary "reason" Lefler's work was removed was because it was "offensive" and/or deemed "potentially libelous." Lefler repeatedly asked how his work was libelous, but University administrators refused to reply.

And so either or both of these explanations were deemed just cause for forced removal, censorship and suspension. In consultation with lawyers in Saskatoon, Lefler has found that the greatest risk the University now faces does not come from its potential vulnerability to a libel suit but, in terms of its public image, from the heavy-handed way in which it has reacted to the situation.

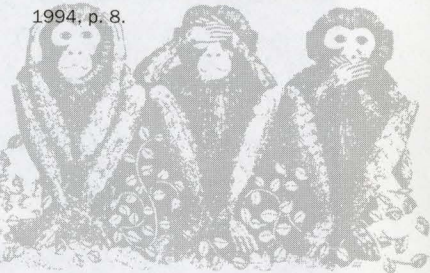
Elizabeth MacKenzie agrees. She said, "The situation has been handled abominably.... The administration has reacted so virulently against Christopher, he obviously represents some kind of real threat to them." MacKenzie, who suspects that homophobia is operative at some level of the administration in this case, cannot understand why Lefler has been dealt with in such a draconian manner. Furthermore, she says that the definitive way in which it has dealt with the matter has set a precedent which has created a "climate of anxiety" that tacitly discourages open debate. According to Lefler, moreover, the administration and assenting faculty are actively silencing debate on the issue. Lefler said, "These faculty have been telling students an official

version of the story." On occasions when students have contested faculty claims, Lefler said, "Students have been chastised. They're now afraid to speak out for fear that their grades will suffer because of their opinions." MacKenzie affirms the chilly climate: "We're supposed to speak about the situation obliquely and not mention Sylvia Fedoruk's name."

Given the University's refusal to speak on the matter, it is unclear how or when this conflict will be resolved. What is certain, however, is that there is a palpable chill in the air over the arts community in Saskatoon. Lefler suggests that in attempting to protect Fedoruk from what it sees as a damaging allegation (i.e. being lesbian) the administration has victimized those who are setting out to dismantle homophobia. What's more, the future engagement of sensitive political issues by visual arts students who exhibit at the University may be proscribed, as the Department of Art and Art History drafts new guidelines to determine what is suitable for display on gallery walls and for debate within them.

—Brett Josef Grubisic and Bryan K. Young

A version of this article was previously published in The University of Victoria's *The Martlet*, 20 January 1994, p. 8.



# Cutting Your Nose to Spite Your Face

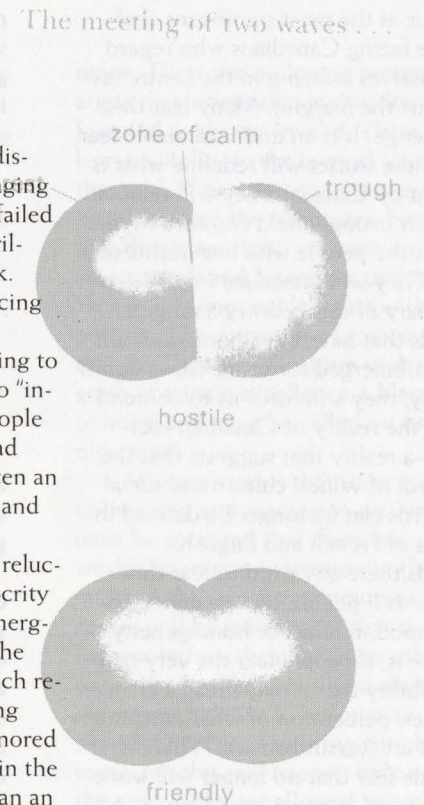
The challenges of diversity in the Canadian artistic community

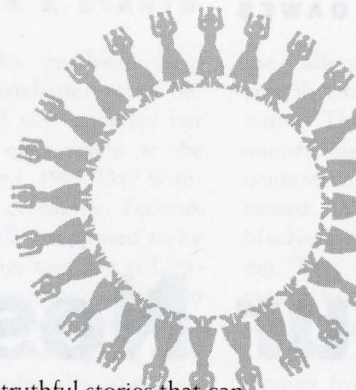
THE CHALLENGE FACING MOST Canadian artistic organizations and centres with regard to racial equity should be seen as a wonderful opportunity for growth and enrichment. Too often, the cry of such organizations faced with the demand for greater diversity in their programming, and greater empowerment of people who fall under the rubric of multiculturalism, is that political agendas, rather than art and creativity, are shaping the direction of artistic endeavours. Implicit in that assertion is the suggestion that much of the work that is being funded in the increasingly lucrative market of multiculturalism is largely mediocre in quality. Further, there is an implication that such politically derived and funded work is void of artistic merit. It is the same spirit of judgment that has characterized the reaction of many in the centre to people who have entered the centre through policies like affirmative action. The question is not so much whether such policies are valid reactions to racism or not; what is more fundamental is what reactions to these policies are doing to our judgment of art and artists, and what they are doing to the way marginalized artists see themselves. What these voices of judgment may fail to admit is that they have created this problem. It is

they who have introduced this discourse of mediocrity by encouraging mediocrity. It is they who have failed to recognize the potential for brilliance in such marginalized work. These are the central realities facing us.

Organizations are capitulating to financial pressure, and seeking to "include" in their programming, people of colour and Native people (read multiculturalism). This is not often an act undertaken with enthusiasm and genuine conviction. This is the tragedy, for such suspicions and reluctance perpetuate the very mediocrity they suggest that the work of emerging artists of colour possesses. The truth is that there now exists a rich resource of dynamic and fascinating artistic potential that is being ignored by society. Diversity, especially in the context of Canadian art, can mean an incredible revival of creativity and artistic strength in society. It will ensure that our reference to artistic expression stretches beyond the limiting and often barren bipolar vision of the French/English praxis. In truth, Canada is more than that—and this "more" is not simply a political reality, but an artistic reality.

Artistic expression is generally about the telling of stories. We are constantly searching for stories—fas-



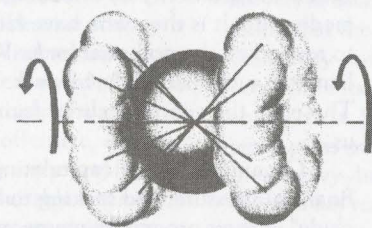


cinating, truthful stories that can move us. Today there are, in Canada, a multitude of untold stories will help society understand itself more. The willingness to hear and allow the soul and spirit to empathize with these stories, even if the tellers of these tales do not have the same skin colour, is the most significant challenge facing Canadians who regard themselves as being in the centre (as against the margin). Many fear this challenge. It is an understandable fear, for these stories will redefine what is meant by Canada. They will remove certain strongly held comfort-myths about the people who live in this society. They will introduce into the vocabulary of this country a range of words that have been lying dormant and submerged for years. Most significantly, they will force us to contend with the reality of Canadian society—a reality that suggests that the control of values, culture and social patterns can no longer be defined in terms of French and English.

Is there any need to fear this? There is if people seek to define nationhood in terms of homogeneity. There is, if people fear the very real possibility that it may mean a change in their perception of what constitutes good art (versus bad art). There is, if people fear that no longer will work be defined as containing Canadian content simply because it has a white Canadian in it. There is, if people fear that mainstream society will no longer have hegemony over the funding of artists in society. However, fear of a movement towards mediocrity is unfounded. Further, such fear is somewhat hypocritical, condescending and insulting because it makes a judgment on the work of artists who are in fact contributing significantly to the artistic expression of the country. It is

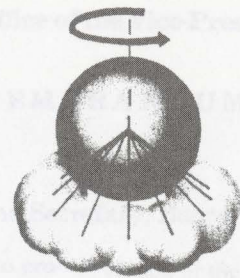
hypocritical because it denies the credibility of many of the works that have been produced under the rubric of multiculturalism over the past few years. It is insulting because it implies that such mediocrity does not exist in the work of white artists as well.

While many harp about what will be lost if certain "standards" are questioned, challenged and perhaps altered, an equal number should be intrigued and enticed by that which will be gained. Similarly, while many may fear the loss of their own access to funding and privilege, they should also recognize that art often feeds on itself, and the greater the artistic range and diversity, the greater the potential for more innovative and insightful work. The point is that it is growing increasingly necessary to foreground the potential benefits that are inherent in the shifting policies



and behaviour regarding the relationship between the centre and the margin.

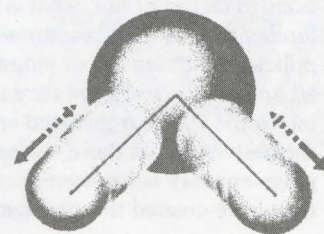
Instead of ignoring change in social realities, artistic organizations should try to understand what artists of colour and of First Nation descent are saying. Further, they should try to discover what we have to offer Canadian society. In reality, Canada is receiving some of the best talent in the world. Unlike in many parts of America, such artists are not faced with a monolithic and daunting culture that subsumes and devours them. We are, in Canada, not automatically compelled to submerge the strength and resilience of our own cultural and artistic instincts. Instead, we have encountered in Canada an environment that appears to sanction our willingness to maintain a sense of identity that may differ from that of the mainstream. But this tendency is not neces-



sarily a feature of Canadian benevolence or open-mindedness. And sadly, it is not necessarily the panacea to the alienation of the non-white community. Often it is a feature of ghettoization.

Ironically, this does become the reality. Marginalized artists begin to recognize that the corporations and the funding agencies are looking for that kind of material and so they produce it in great numbers. There is nobody there to challenge these artists to broaden their scope, their artistic voice, because this is not what multiculturalism desires. This is not the agenda of multicultural policy. So the dilemma perpetuates itself, and the marginalized artists know this. They know that in order to eat, in order to get a grant, in order to get something out there, the work should have a certain character, a certain angle, and they produce it. So mainstream agencies begin to call for the removal of such policies. It is breeding mediocrity, it is depriving true artists (read white) of funding that they deserve. But all that has happened is that we have perpetuated the model.

But it grows more complex. Having stigmatized the work of these artists in this manner, organizations seek to legitimate their biases by including, in a cosmetic manner, marginalized people from the ubiquitous "community" as consultants to advise on what is good for that "community." At no point in this process have they recognized these works as artistically viable. The marginalized advisors who are "included" are invited into a system that has already valued the art in terms more akin to social work than to artistic expression. Such artists are



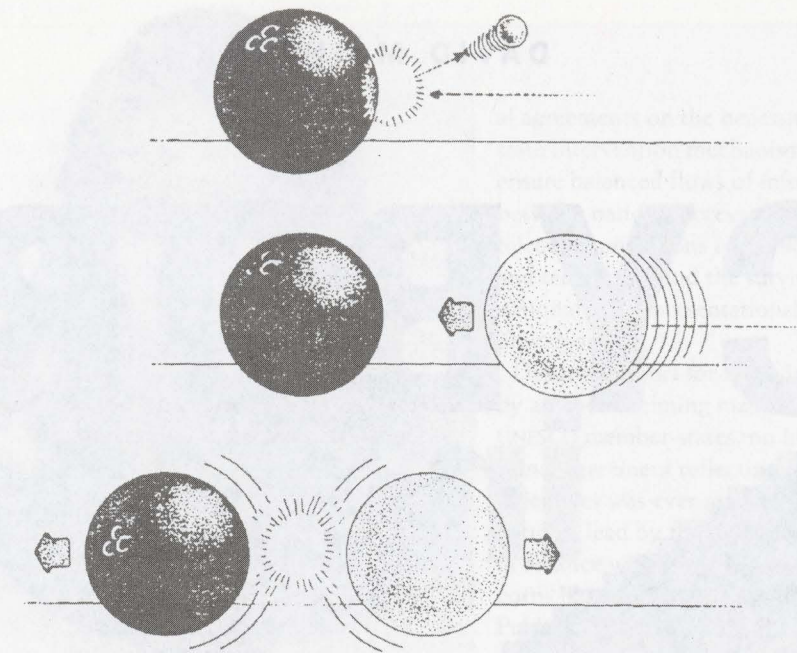
not encouraged to bring to bear on the process artistic values that may run counter to the dated but persistent values of the mainstream community. And so, the accusations levelled at these works are perpetuated—we ensure that they are credited in terms of their "quota" value—in terms of their political value. At which point, the centre proceeds to complain that too often multicultural work is not being treated with the same artistic criteria as others.

What are these artistic criteria? Who has defined this criteria? Have non-white mainstream people been invited to help formulate what these criteria are? Has there been a genuine attempt to include non-whites in the articulation and definition of such criteria? Are these criteria truly, as is constantly argued, founded on non-political, non-racist terms? Who is defined by these criteria? Do these criteria reflect the artistic values of the society at large? Do these criteria possess a language that can address difference?

These are fundamental questions that must be answered if our culture is to be enriched. If an equal commitment exists to dynamic work and the discovery of a distinctive voice, then we must begin to challenge many of the premises that have been operating in our societies for so long. Marginalization is not always a bad thing. What is bad is being on the margins and being ignored in the process. What is bad is being denied power while languishing in the margins.

To allow this voice to be heard, a basic reevaluation of how these existing policies are perceived and how "multicultural" expression is encouraged. It must be an honest, sincere reevaluation. Are artistic facilities willing to share the true power positions with people of colour and Native people in a manner that will encourage creative expression? The centre must ask whether its constant refrain: There are no experienced and talented artists in these fields who are Native or people of colour, is enough. Is there a point beyond that assertion?

Many will simply respond by saying that they live in areas that do not



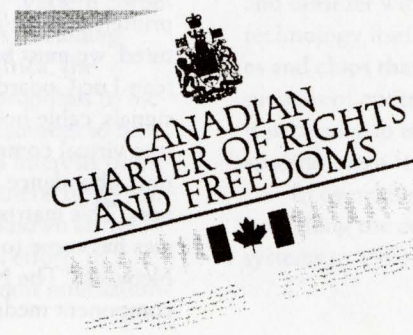
reflect the same demographic realities as do larger centres like Toronto. They will argue that they are trying to reflect the realities of their regions. Is this really true? Is this the basis upon which independent film and video organizations function? Is this the basis upon which gay artistic communities in such regions function? Is that the way avant-garde artists in such regions function? Hardly. Instead, they seek out their kind—they discover these silenced and marginalized people within these communities and try and remind others that they too exist. This is because most of them know that the problem is not the demographics, it is the perception of the demographics. Most of them realize that even in the most seemingly homogeneous environment, the marginal community exists.

The fact is that Canada is no longer a white society. To perceive it that way would amount to a perpetuation of the ostrich philosophy of exist-

tence. There are no longer grounds to argue that artistically, multiculturally founded works are invalid. There is less credibility in the cynical attitude that said: When there was money we could appease the minorities. Now that things are tight, we must do the true art stuff and forget the politics. Fact is, it is impossible to act without politics. The discourse of companies that privilege white culture under the guise of artistic excellence is blatantly political and must be called on its misdirection.

My suspicion is that there is a lot of listening and reading to do. First, it must be accepted that there is a wealth of artistic expression in the midst of the creative community. The centre will have to accept that its willingness to face the challenges inherent in the problems outlined above represents a desire to become enriched. Diversity can bring enrichment; but this will happen only when the new voices are allowed to enter the centre on their own terms.

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DAVID McINTOSH

# CYBORGS in denial

Technology and Identity in the Net

*Mechanization has emphasized complexity and confusion, it has been responsible for monopolies in the field of knowledge, and it becomes extremely important to any civilization, if it is not to succumb to the influence of this monopoly of knowledge, to make some critical survey and report. The conditions of freedom of thought are in danger of being destroyed by science, technology, and the mechanization of knowledge.*

—Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 1964

*There is a spectrum of orderliness that runs from something like a crystal at one end to something like a fluid at the other. In the middle, where order melts into disorder, is the domain of chaos. The notion of chaos shows us that a very simple process can in fact produce complex outputs provided that the process runs long enough. Our universe might be thought of as a very simple program which has run for a very long time, with successive outputs overlapping onto each other and building up a hyperdimensional moiré... Surprise is always possible.*

—Rudy Rucker, *Mondo 2000*, 1993

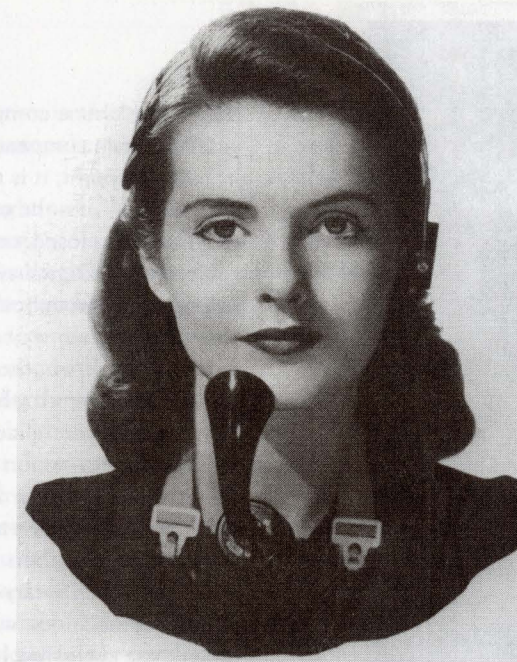
We live in an environment that is increasingly mediated by technology. To be considered marginally employable, we are required to have a working knowledge of computers, several software applications, networks, hard drives, E-mail, laser printers and fax/modems. To be considered marginally cultured, we must be able to distinguish Jean-Luc Picard from Jean-Luc Godard. TVs, CDs, PCs, VCRs, video games, satellite signals, cable hookups and remote controls turn our homes into virtual command centres where the ideologies of seduction, abundance and gratification osmose into our consciousness. This matrix of ubiquitous and interconnected technologies has come to be known as the Net—shorthand for "The Network." The Net is evolving into as distinct an entity as its component media—telephones, TVs and computers—previ-

ously were.

The deeper we are drawn into technologically mediated existence, the more difficult it becomes to find a position from which to perceive or critique the organizing structures that lie behind the Net's surface of seemingly benign diversity. The object of investigation is superficially amorphous, chaotic and constantly shifting. The two quotes that open this essay propose a paradoxical relationship between complex effects and simple causes that can serve as an entry point for mapping some of the most crucial deep structures of the Net. Speaking in social realist terms from an electro-mechanical age, Innis warns that mechanized complexity and confusion offer greater opportunity for the success of strategies designed to control and monopolize knowledge. Rucker's digital-era chaos theory suggests that complexity and unpredictability are produced by simple and eternal formulae that inhabit the frontier between order and disorder. While these two approaches to reading the technologized environment diverge in their language and intention, they both point to the necessity of making a rational analysis of surface complexity, confusion and unpredictability in order to determine systemic hierarchies and organizing forces that condition the potential for what Rucker refers to as "surprise" and Innis refers to as "freedom of thought." Rewinding history to a midpoint between Innis and Rucker offers a valuable point of intersection to focus on these theories in concrete terms.

## The First Battle for the Net: The New World Information Order

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the critical study of monopolies of knowledge in the "wired world" and the emerging phenomenon referred to as "electronic colonialism" became the focus of much of UNESCO's activities. In response to a global cultural and communications environment increasingly dominated by satellites, television, computers and digital data flows centrally controlled by Western corporate interests, an alliance of UNESCO members, including Soviet bloc and non-aligned states in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and South America, constructed proposals to recognize information and culture as national resources to be regulated and managed in the developmental interests of the independent state and its people, much as mineral or agricultural resources were. This strategic alliance, known as the New World Information Order (NWIO), in its efforts to encourage a global liberation movement, sought internation-



al agreements on the necessity of state intervention mechanisms to ensure balanced flows of information between nations, access to new telecommunications technologies and techniques and the survival of national self-representational cultural processes.

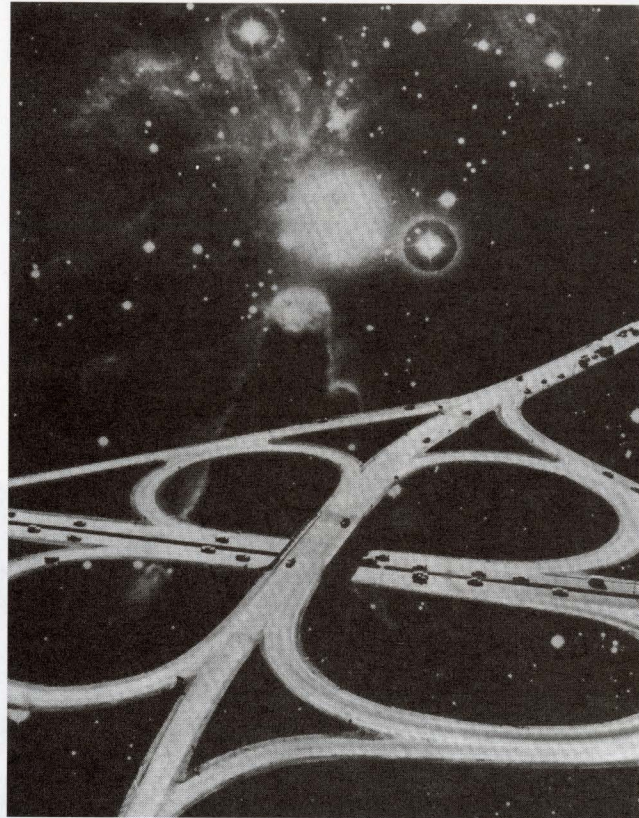
Despite support for NWIO initiatives by an overwhelming majority of UNESCO member-states, no international agreement reflecting their objectives was ever reached. Western nations, lead by the U.S. government in alliance with information megacorporations like IBM, AT&T and Hearst Publications, refused to sign agreements that in any way impinged on their entrepreneurial practices of

freedom of expression and freedom of the marketplace. NWIO was effectively dead by 1983. Largely a forgotten project ten years later, UNESCO's New World Information Order was perhaps our last chance for negotiating through national identity to effect fundamental and orderly change in the direction of the global information revolution. Its defeat cleared the way for global mob rule by a gang of U.S.-based media corporations that assumed the status of meta-organizing force in the deployment of a global technological and cultural infrastructure. As a result, many countries have become information colonies consigned to consumer status, dumping grounds for American cultural detritus. Paradoxically, the West's battle to maintain the disorderly practices of its freedom of expression and marketplace in the face of NWIO's principles of rational order and self-determination resulted in an even more intensely concentrated and technologized monopoly of information, knowledge and power. This first confrontation for control of the Net as it emerged set the pattern for all subsequent developments in global communications.

## Rewiring the Net: Some Technological Oversimplifications

Another crucial point of entry into the dynamics of order and disorder within the shifting terrain of the Net is through technology itself. To get at the physical guts of wires, switches and chips that usually remain invisible behind the smooth surfaces of our information and entertainment appliances, it is necessary to isolate from their corporate and ideological applications a few specific aspects of the new technologies.

In oversimplified terms, the two newest technologies propelling the complete restructuring of global information systems in 1993 are:



- fibre optic cable—a glass wire developed by AT&T in the 1970s that consists of thousands of strands of glass bound together, each strand capable of transmitting 100,000 telephone conversations simultaneously, or the equivalent of a 62,000-page book in a second;
- digital optical transmission—laser-generated pulses of sub-atomic light particles (photons) that are digitally coded to carry complex information (from phone calls to feature films) at the speed of light down the individual strands of glass in a fibre optic cable.

Fibre optics and digital optical transmission together comprise a new distribution technology that bundles the delivery of audio, video, text and data into one bloated pipeline euphemistically referred to as "the electronic highway." Fibre optic cable removes all limits to the speed, volume and form of information that flows through it. It also offers the potential for complete monopoly over a massively expanded information distribution system to whoever controls it.

Until quite recently, two entirely separate but parallel information distribution systems running on copper wires strung from house to house brought audio service through one wire to the telephone and video service through the other wire to the TV. Ongoing fibre optic rewiring by both the cable and telephone industries is collapsing the logic and profitability of separate phone and cable services to the point where the distinction between the two will soon be nothing more than a legal abstraction. Only government regulation is

preventing phone companies from delivering full motion video or cable companies from delivering telephone service.

At this point, it is necessary to examine the technology that distinguishes the open architecture of the telephone system from the closed, consumption-only architecture of the cable system. Digital switches (intelligent chips) placed strategically throughout the phone network route messages and allow for two-way communication among all subscribers to the network; in other words, digital switches serve as the on- and off-ramps to the electronic highway. The resulting distributed decentralized architecture of the phone system reduces the distinction between producers and consumers to the nature of the information-processing appliances that individual subscribers can afford to plug into the jacks in their wall. Some subscribers choose to plug in nothing more than a standard black rotary dial phone, others add fax and answering machines, while others plug in a complex computer database accessible to other users, as is the case with the Internet. System users control the use of the unprogrammed network.

Cable on the other hand is an "unswitched," programmed system. The cable operator controls the use of its one-way delivery system and every signal a cable operator emits goes to every subscriber indiscriminately. The absence of digital switches in the cable system architecture renders it utterly non-interactive. Cable is a centralized gatekeeping operation that profits by collecting mass-market entertainment from satellite and broadcast sources and distributing it to passive subscribers. The separation between production and consumption is absolute. To extend the "electronic highway" analogy, the unswitched cable system is like a perpetual Indy 500 run on a ring road with no on- or off-ramps.

It is important to note that the more desirable switched telephone system has developed under strict government regulation, while the oppressive unswitched cable system has grown amorously in an unregulated marketplace. If the most hideous monopolistic potentials of fibre optic technology are to be minimized, it seems obvious that it must be installed in conjunction with digital switching to create an open architecture that supports universal access and interaction in all media. However, the handful of corporations that currently control fibre optic distribution systems are responding only to the prime directive of maximum profit.

### Corporate Harmonic Convergence

While the Net is global in scope, it is undeniably run by an amorphous agglomeration of U.S.-based multinationals. Fortunately, the simple processes that underlie the complexities of megacorp manoeuvres are transparently formulaic. The centrepiece of this formula is the centuries-old industrial strategy of vertical integration, whereby a single corporate entity owns all steps in the life of a commodity from raw materials to consumption; its current manifestation is the enhanced fibre optic distribution system. The primary model

for the current round of vertical integration in the Net can be traced historically to the Hollywood monopolies or trusts that developed in the 1930s.

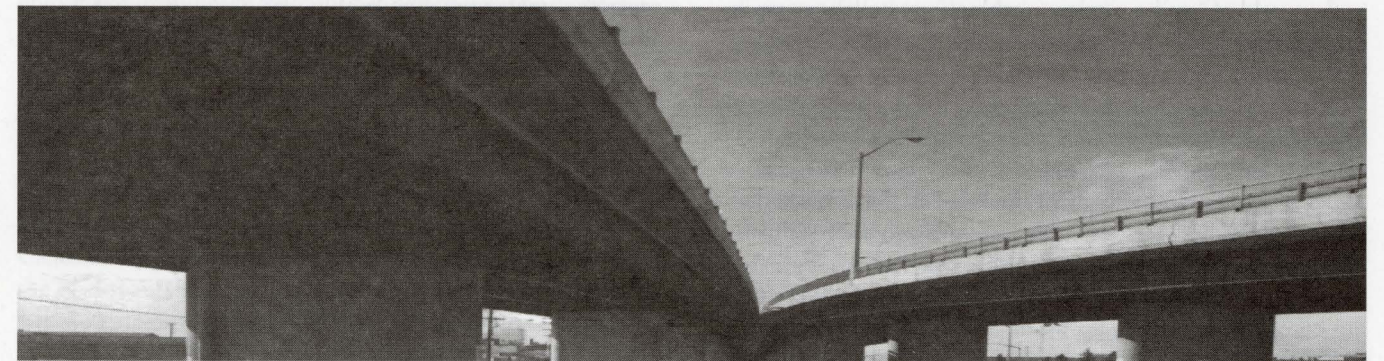
After the corporate shake-out brought on by the advent of "talkies," five large corporations or "majors," including Warner Brothers, MGM, Paramount, RKO and Fox, operated as an oligopoly, owning and controlling the production, distribution and exhibition of feature films. Independent production was virtually non-existent, and any independent films that did get made were kept out of theatres by the stranglehold monopoly of the majors. This situation held until 1948, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the majors were in violation of anti-trust laws and had to divest themselves of their exhibition holdings. A thorough study of the history of all information and entertainment industries in the U.S. reveals that this pattern has been repeated with each new wave of technological innovation in communications (film, radio, TV, cable TV). As the new technology (often developed by the military) becomes standardized and commercially exploitable, corporate monopolies based on the preceding wave of communications technology reintegrate vertically to contain the new technology. These monopolies concentrate into a new oligopoly, which is only curtailed by state intervention when "competition" is deemed to be threatened.

Most of the Hollywood studios from the 1930s and 1940s are still key players today, holding major stakes in the Net as a result of having been absorbed by the corporations that dominate the new distribution technologies (i.e., cable and telephone companies). Feature films remain the most highly prized software to hold copyright over, given their "repurposing" potential as home videocassettes, optical discs, CD-ROMs and theme-park rides. However, one aspect of the "production-distribution-exhibition" formula for vertical integration has changed irrevocably in the Net: exhibition or consumption occurs in the home or at work on TVs, computers and telephone appliances. As a result, exhibition has fallen out of the corporate formula since it is now owned directly by the user, whose consumption is limited only by his or her ability to purchase and operate a vast array of consumer electronics. There are several corporate cross-ownerships, like Sony/Columbia and Matsushita/MCA, where the produc-

tion and sale of home exhibition equipment is integrated with the production and sale of the software to be run on that equipment, but for the most part consumer technology suppliers have been relegated to the status of independents in the Net. As a result, the corporate formula for monopolizing the Net has been streamlined to "production-distribution."

Within this formula, however, there remain a number of twists in the road to complete monopoly, primarily in the distribution component of the equation. As pointed out earlier, the two leading forces in distribution—telephone companies (telco's) and cable companies (cableco's)—are separate but parallel structures, competing with each other to control fibre optics, a technology that has eliminated functional differences between them. In breaking up and deregulating the AT&T telephone monopoly, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, a state body that regulates telecommunications, intended to increase direct competition between telco's and cableco's. However, recent corporate manoeuvres demonstrate that the urge to monopoly is far more primal than the thrill of competition. Telco's have been furiously buying up cableco's, and vice versa. Consequently, there has been a consolidation of monopoly achieved through horizontal cross-ownership within the distribution sector of the Net. The reconfigured formula for oligopoly can now be restated as "studio + telco + cableco."

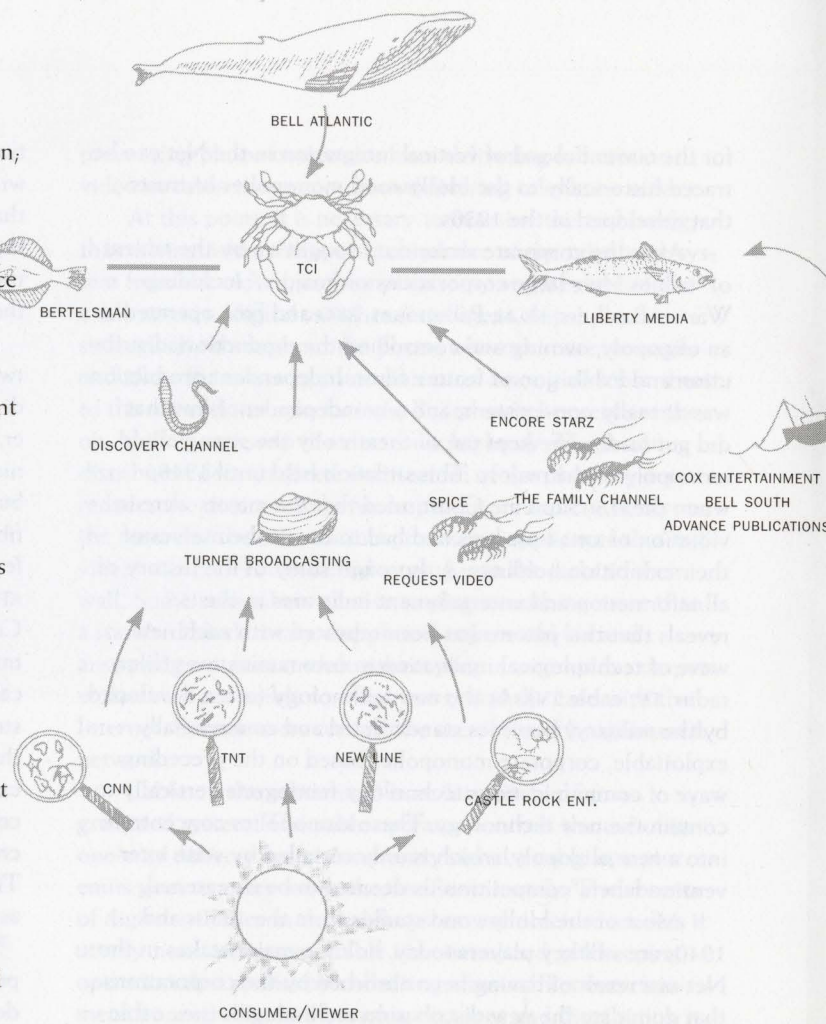
A detailed examination of some of the most recent corporate configurations reveals the extent to which the Net is dominated by fewer and fewer interlocking cartels, directorates, stock swaps and joint ventures. In 1993, international headline news was made by Bell Atlantic's bid to buy TCI, and Viacom's bid to buy Paramount. Within these mega-mergers, the shape of two of the largest and most convoluted information-entertainment agglomerations can be perceived. At the centre of the first corporate empire is John Malone, head of TCI (Tele-Communications Inc.), the largest cable system owner in the U.S., with a subscriber base of 9.6 million. Through its shell parent company, Liberty Media which is currently constructing a 22 million subscriber pay-per-view cable channel, TCI is part owner of: Request Video, the largest pay-per-view distributor in the U.S.; Encore Starz, a pay-TV distributor; Spice, an R-rated soft porn movie chan-



nel; The Discovery Channel; Black Entertainment Television; and The Family Channel. TCI/Liberty Media controls QVC, the major home shopping network, which is attempting to buy Paramount in conjunction with Cox Entertainment (another major cable system owner), Bell South and Advance Publications. TCI is also part owner of Turner Broadcasting System, which in turn operates CNN and TNT and owns film producers/distributors New Line Cinema and Castle Rock Entertainment. TCI has also merged with German music giant Bertelsman to create a music video/home shopping channel where viewers can programme their music video selections and purchase the accompanying CD. In buying TCI and its holdings, Bell Atlantic (yearly cash flow of \$5 billion, more than the entire U.S. theatrical feature film market) merges its own subscriber base, pay-per-use billing system and fibre optic assets with feature film production and distribution, print publication, music and cable TV distribution interests. The traditional role of the telco as an uninvested carrier of content designed by and for its users has been terminated.

The second megacorp taking shape behind the Net is Viacom, headed by Sumner Redstone. Viacom is a broadcast and cable programming giant that owns the classic libraries of CBS, ABC and NBC, as well as cable channels MTV, Nickelodeon and Showtime. Viacom recently purchased Nynex, a regional telephone company, and Blockbuster Video, the largest videocassette rental operation in the U.S. Blockbuster in turn owns Spelling Entertainment Group and Republic Pictures, whose combined libraries amount to 14,000 hours of programming. Blockbuster is also planning to buy MGM and has already merged with Music Plus, Sound Warehouse and Virgin Group, making it one of the major forces in music retailing. As well, Blockbuster has begun "repurposing" feature films as digitized CD-ROMs for immediate rental through its videocassette outlets and for eventual electronic home delivery on cable. Viacom is in the process of acquiring Paramount (at a cost of \$10 billion), which in turn owns Famous Players and Madison Square Gardens, has an extensive archive including television series like "Cheers" and feature films like *The Firm* and is launching its own television network in 1994.

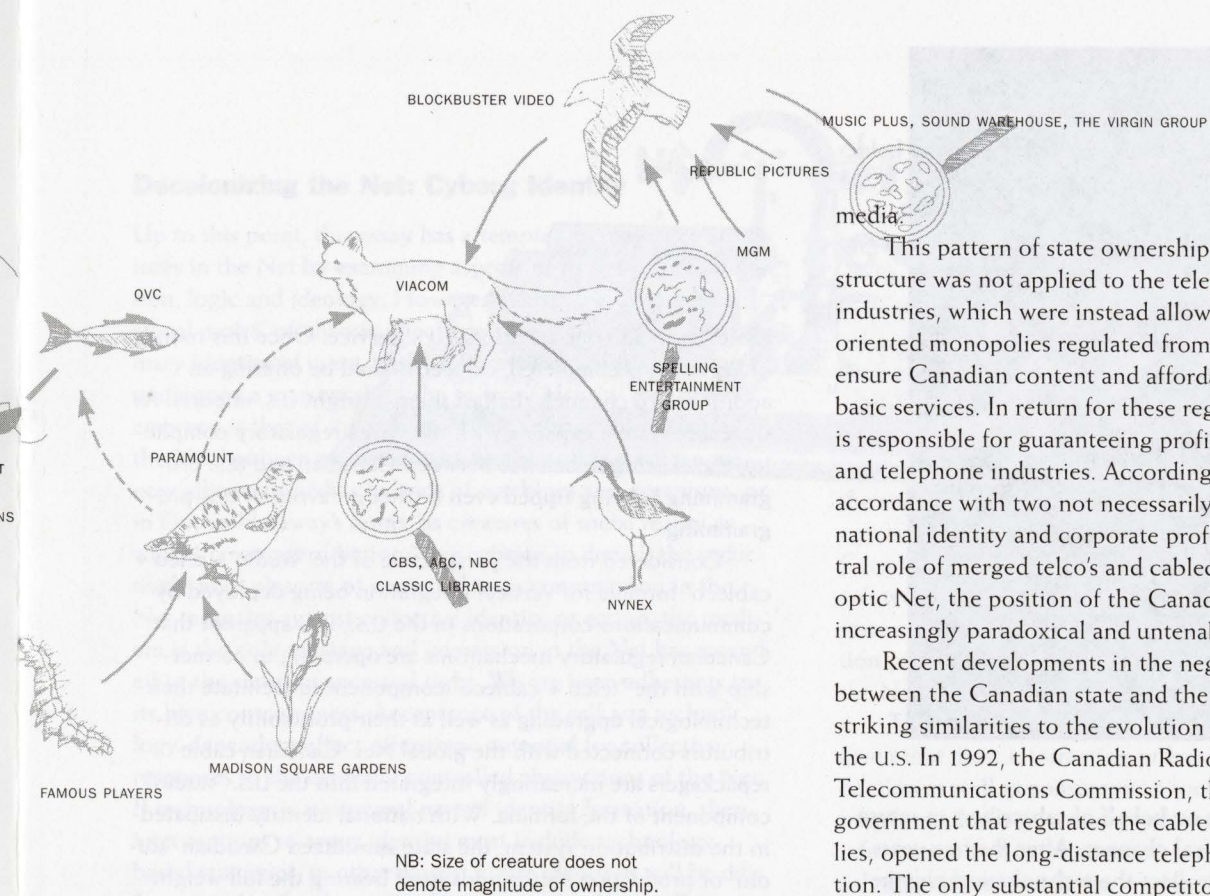
And as a final note to this migraine-inducing mess of corporate incest and dynastic wars of succession, opponents in the world of "studio + telco + cableco" are collaborators in the satellite industry. All the major cable operators, including Viacom, TCI, Time Warner, General Electric and Continental Cable, have hedged their technological bets by joining forces in launching Primestar, a direct broadcast satellite service that has also been referred to as the "Death Star." The forces determining the shape of the Net and the content that flows through it have consolidated so intensely that William Gibson's projection of an "unthinkably complex consensual hallucination, matrix, cyberspace, where the great corporate hot cores burn like neon novas, data so dense you suffer sensory overload if you try to apprehend the merest outline" is



on the verge of crystallizing into reality.

In surveying some of the immediate practical plans of these immense agglomerations, the new services being developed for delivery over the Net are predictable reworkings of what already exists on cable TV. Most proposals relate to developing home shopping possibilities into virtual shopping malls. In current 150-channel cable trials, almost one-half of those channels are devoted to multiple channel screenings of pay-per-view feature films and barker channels that promote what is on each channel. In New York, Time Warner has launched NY1, a 24-hour local cable news service that replaces camera operators, editors and sound technicians with solo Hi-8 videographers feeding a video-jukebox robot. In Montreal, a trial cable service offers viewers multiple channel/multi-camera coverage of sports events, so the viewer can switch from angle to angle by changing channels. The overall move away from "free" or broadcast TV (ten to fifteen channels) to specialty subscriber cable TV (up to 500 channels) is reshaping the Net into an almost entirely transactional and unregulated operation, where the pay-per-use or toll structure of the telephone system will dominate.

There is no evidence in the pattern of corporate convergence that the Net is evolving in the interest of individual



users or the public—either in terms of deep structure or surface effect. A handful of corporate impresarios are merrily hard-wiring their ideologies and taxonomies of society into the communications system. The state, which has traditionally attempted to represent the public interest through regulation, is increasingly an ineffectual by-product or effect of the Net. The most coherent alternative or opposition to corporate control presently rests in the consensual information networks that operate over as yet unprogrammed phone lines and in the chaotic nerd world of hackers, crackers, pirates and virus jammers whose primary weapon is surprise.

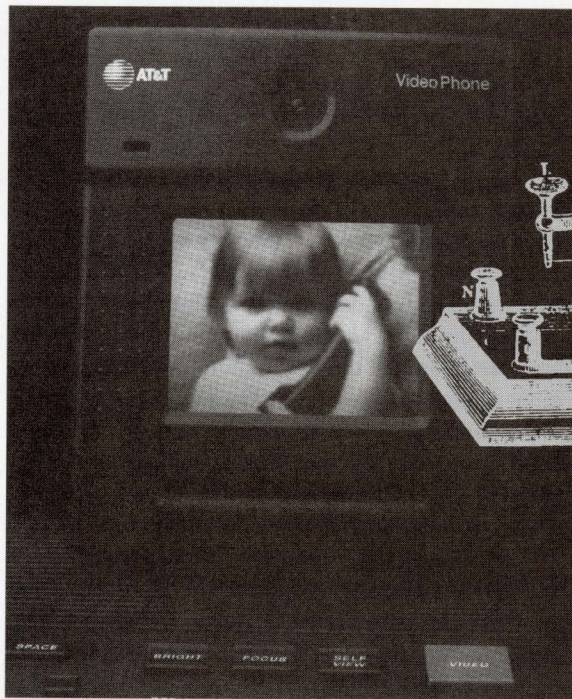
### National Identity in the Net: The Canadian Context

The Net does not recognize national borders except to enfold and profit from them. In nationally identified information colonies like Canada, the warp and weft of the Net are less tightly woven, since it is delimited by endemic lower levels of technological infrastructure and by state interventions in the interest of national self-determination. Historically, the state has been the primary force behind the installation of new communications technology infrastructure in Canada. National production and distribution capacity in film (the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau which became the National Film Board), radio (CBC Radio) and television (CBC Television) were originally developed entirely by the state in order to counter the increased influence of U.S.

This pattern of state ownership of technological infrastructure was not applied to the telephone and cable TV industries, which were instead allowed to develop as profit-oriented monopolies regulated from a distance by the state to ensure Canadian content and affordable access to essential or basic services. In return for these regulatory rights, the state is responsible for guaranteeing profit margins in the cable and telephone industries. Accordingly, the state now acts in accordance with two not necessarily compatible mandates: national identity and corporate profitability. Given the central role of merged telco's and cableco's in the global fibre optic Net, the position of the Canadian state is becoming increasingly paradoxical and untenable.

Recent developments in the negotiation of relationships between the Canadian state and the telco/cableco axis reveal striking similarities to the evolution of the corporate Net in the U.S. In 1992, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the agency of the federal government that regulates the cable and telephone monopolies, opened the long-distance telephone market to competition. The only substantial competitor to Stentor (the cartel of existing regional Bell companies) to surface so far is Unitel, which is owned by Rogers Cable and AT&T. A number of smaller-scale bulk long distance resellers have also emerged, some of which run commercials to cover their start-up costs. Throughout the fall and winter of 1993, the CRTC held formal hearings with all telco's operating in Canada to consider further deregulation to allow for telco carriage of new services including full motion video. Broadcast live on cable TV, these hearings played like a summit of vested telephone and cable interests carving up turf. Meanwhile, telco's and cableco's continue to integrate at a corporate level. BCE Inc., owner of Bell Canada, Northern Telecom and a number of regional phone companies in Canada, has recently circumvented CRTC cross-media ownership regulations by purchasing giant U.S. cableco Jones Intercable at a cost of \$275 million. Jones Intercable has 1.3 million cable subscribers in the U.S., owns cable and phone franchises in England and Spain and operates three local phone companies in the U.S.

In the realm of cableco regulation, the CRTC has affirmed the regulated monopoly status of cable as the nationally sanctioned distributor of programmed information and entertainment in Canada. Potentially competitive distribution services based on alternative technologies, such as direct broadcast satellite or MDS (microwave distribution system), are being kept out of the marketplace by the CRTC. Furthermore, the CRTC recently allowed cableco's a special rate increase in order to cover their technological upgrading costs. Canada's 7.2 million cable subscribers are each paying cableco's an additional \$10 per year, which over five years will amount to



a \$400 million investment on behalf of subscribers in return for unspecified technological changes. After the five years, cableco's can continue to collect the technological change fee if half of it is contributed to a new fund for investment in Canadian film and television productions. The CRTC makes wild claims that this fund would amount to \$100 million per year, while the cableco's suggest it might reach \$12 million per year. Cableco participation in this plan is entirely voluntary, so the fund may amount to absolutely nothing. Thus, the funds guaranteed by the CRTC for cableco expansion of their distribution capacity are not counterbalanced with any guarantee of expansion of Canadian production.

In 1993 the CRTC also issued a call for new Canadian specialty, pay-TV and pay-per-view services to be offered on cable. Sixty-eight applications were received, almost all of them sponsored by existing broadcast and cable interests. In the broadcasting realm, City-TV has submitted seven applications, the CBC is involved in five, Global in three and CTV/Baton in two. Rogers Cable, part owner of CFMT and YTV, has applied for five new licences. In addition to Rogers, cableco's Maclean Hunter, WIC Communications and Moffatt Communications have also applied for licences. All of these licence-seekers already operate as branch plant repackagers of U.S. programming, and the additional services they are proposing would also rely heavily on repackaged U.S. content. Predictably, the specialties proposed in these licence applications reflect a shivering bald taxonomy for programming Canadian society: country music, MOR music, nature, seniors, comedy, arts and entertainment, health, news, religion, multiculturalism, home shopping, lifestyle and pay-per-view movies and sports. It is expected that between six and eight new licences will be awarded by early 1994, and for each Canadian-operated service added, the CRTC allows

cableco's to add one additional U.S. service. Once this round of licencing is completed, cableco's could be offering an additional 16 channels, half of them outright U.S. imports. As the cable system expands with the state's regulatory complicity, the existing imbalance between Canadian and U.S. programming is being tipped even further in favour of U.S. programming.

Considered from the perspective of the "studio + telco + cableco" formula for vertical integration being deployed by communications corporations in the U.S., it is apparent that Canadian regulatory mechanisms are operating in partnership with the "telco + cableco" component to facilitate their technological upgrading as well as their profitability as distributors connected with the global Net. Canadian cable repackagers are increasingly integrated into the U.S. "studio" component of the formula. With national identity dissipated in the distribution system, the state subsidized Canadian "studio" or production sector finds itself bearing the full weight of the state's mandate to promote national identity while it is increasingly ghettoized, with no connections to the Net other than loose promises of a new production fund and Canadian content quotas.

The Canadian production sector finds itself in the untenable position of appealing to two conflicting sets of gatekeeping principles. On one hand, the production sector is almost entirely dependent on state subsidies that are contingent on production's ability to fulfil a complex range of artistic, bureaucratic and political notions of national identity; on the other hand, the production sector must negotiate access to the public through the telco/cableco distribution system's criteria of mass appeal and maximum profits. The continued existence of the fundamental principle of state intervention to promote national identity through subsidized cultural products is in doubt as international trade agreements from GATT to NAFTA undermine the structure of national identity through the global extension of the economic ideology of privatization and the "free marketplace." U.S. President Clinton, acting in the interest of the corporate controllers of the Net, has threatened to retaliate against any moves by Canadian governments to limit free access for American cultural products to the Canadian market. The challenges facing Canada in negotiating a position in the Net recall the unsuccessful struggle of the UNESCO coalition of states to establish the New World Information Order ten years ago. National political identity may no longer be a viable construction as a governing notion for Canadians, and national cultural identity based on a marginalized production sector is not a viable construction in the Net.

### Decolonizing the Net: Cyborg Identity

Up to this point, this essay has attempted to map deep structures in the Net by examining aspects of its design, evolution, logic and ideology. However, within the "hyperdimensional moiré" of chaotic effects produced by the Net, the primary identity of users, both consumers and producers, has undergone a massive shift: the primary identity that has emerged is that of the cyborg. The construction of the self in the Net has been technologized to the point where we are now all constituted as hybrids of machines and organisms, or in Donna Haraway's terms "as creatures of social reality as well as creatures of fiction." For cyborgs in denial, the seductively pure pleasure of perpetual mass consumption in the Net mitigates against collective identity or action; the medium is the only message and immersion in the Net has ascended to the status of ancestral right. We are born adherents to its hive consciousness. Acceptance of the self as a technology-dependent effect offers new potential for collective responses to the centrally controlled abstractions of the Net. If technology is an integral part of identity formation, then interventions to assert identity must include technology-based strategies; in other words, future identities will be differentiated technologically. Oppositional cyborg collectivity may be the only means left for decolonizing and deprogramming the Net.

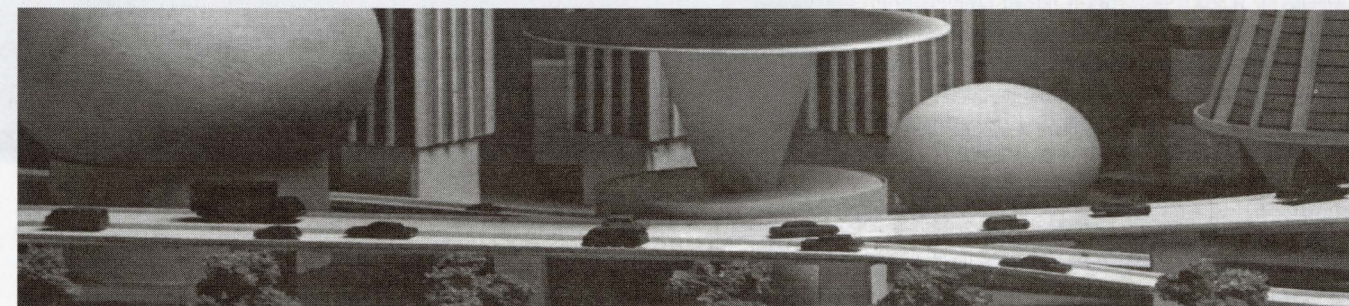
Cyborg piracy is currently the predominant oppositional option in the Net. Despite the fact that this ghetto of saboteurs is unstable, idiosyncratic and overpopulated by disembodied techno-nerds, piracy principles of consensual association and self-determination in the Net are crucial to building larger oppositional collective identities. However, cyborg collectivity requires a more principled and systemic approach to technological equality and access than currently exists in the anarchic fringe of hacker piracy. Codifying pirate principles and cyborg realities in public policy could serve as a staging ground for mounting a coordinated opposition to Net oligopoly and establishing conditions where freedom of thought can flourish.

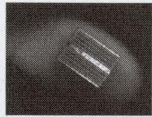
The Canadian state, our most sophisticated if threatened and conflicted institution for collective action, should be discouraged from the suicidal course of wholesale deregulation of Net monopolies and reoriented towards strategic and prin-

ciplined deregulation — negotiated trade-offs if you will — to achieve public objectives. For example, the state could allow Net operators unregulated but taxable profits on discretionary programmed services (movies, home shopping, etc.) in return for technological regulation, namely the installation of an open, switched fibre optic Net architecture and the reservation of a percentage of the unlimited distribution capacity of fibre optics for free non-profit access in all media to all users. As well, the state could recognize the cyborg's machine-body relation as the site of opposition and identity by enhancing the technology available to all Net users. Instead of scamming the Canadian public into investing \$400 million to expand cableco's technological base for social-control programming, the state could redirect funds to maximize and equalize information processing technology at the new site of exhibition in the Net: the individual user.

These actions would achieve two desirable effects: first, given that most information processing appliances are production as well as consumption tools, all Net users would be transformed into potential producers as well as consumers of information and entertainment; secondly, the corporate vertical integration formula for monopoly would be short-circuited by connecting production directly to exhibition. Within this framework of a distributed, deprogrammed and decentralized information system where the network is a big dumb pipeline and the users plugged into it through their enhanced information appliances are smart cyborg producers/consumers, new consensual and interactive forms of organization, representation and collective identity could grow. Shapes could shift, monstrous recombinant identities could multiply and powerful new myths of resistance could circulate freely in a liberated island of healthy chaos. This fictional cyborg utopia is very tentative and in need of further elaboration through a wide range of technology sensitive bodily realities, including privacy, poverty, gender and race, but in the words of Oscar Wilde, "A map of the world which does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at."

*David McIntosh is a Toronto-based writer, filmmaker and programmer. He is currently co-producing Judith Doyle's first feature film Wasaga.*





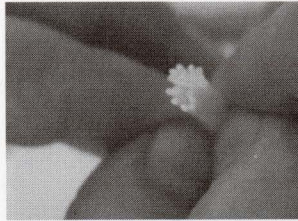
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For further information on telecommunications policy and regulation in Canada, the Public Affairs Office of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission can be contacted at (613) 954-6273.

A series of reports from the periodicals *Wired*, *Mondo 2000*, *Variety* and *Playback* and from the *Lexis-Nexis* database have also been used as sources.

#### DOT TUER



# All in the Family

An Examination of Community Access Cable in Canada

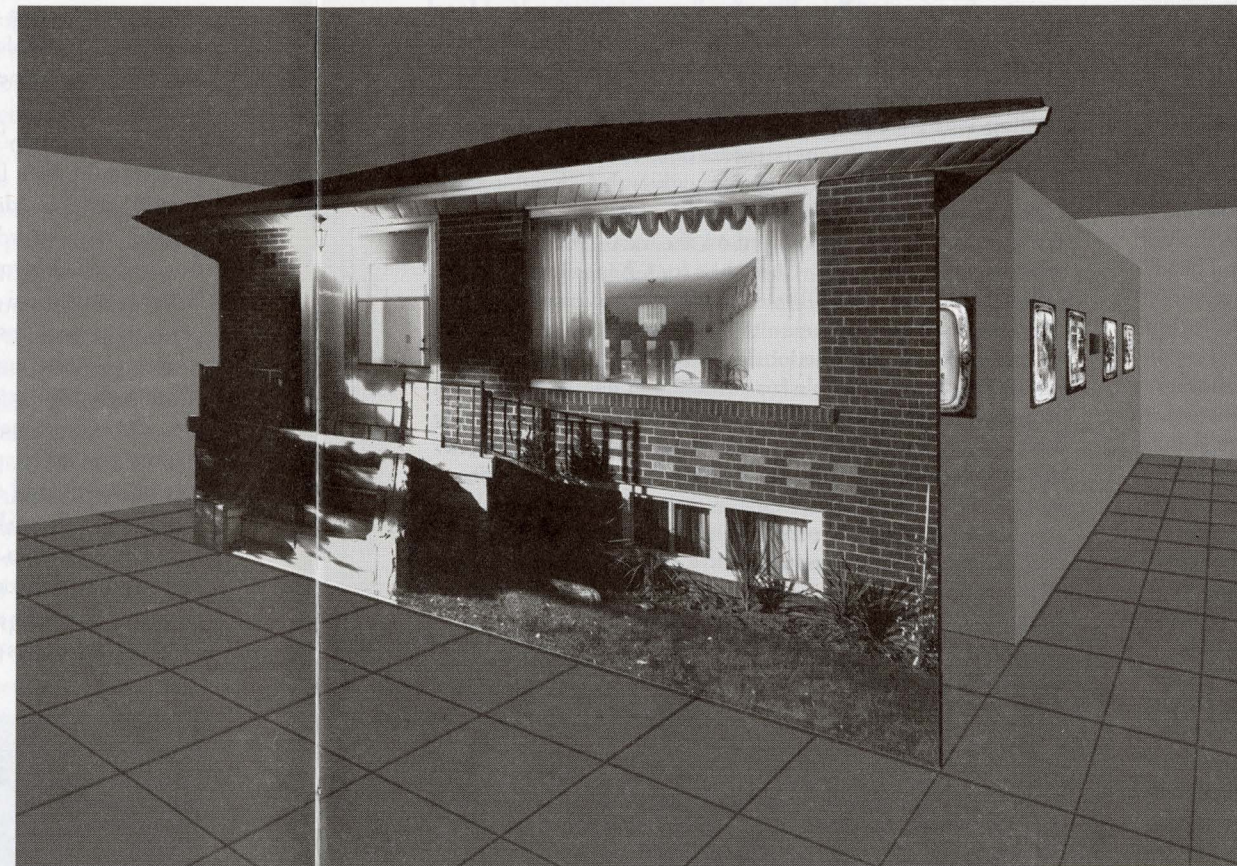
*It doesn't make me feel alone, it makes me feel comfortable. It makes me feel safe because I don't like to bear 'nothing.' I think just growing up in a house when I was little we always had the television on. It was never quiet in our house, and that's what I bring to where I live now. I bring that same sort of feeling. I get that instant family feeling when I turn on the TV.*

— Lin, interview subject's text from Jim Miller's installation work, *Compulsive Viewing*.<sup>1</sup>

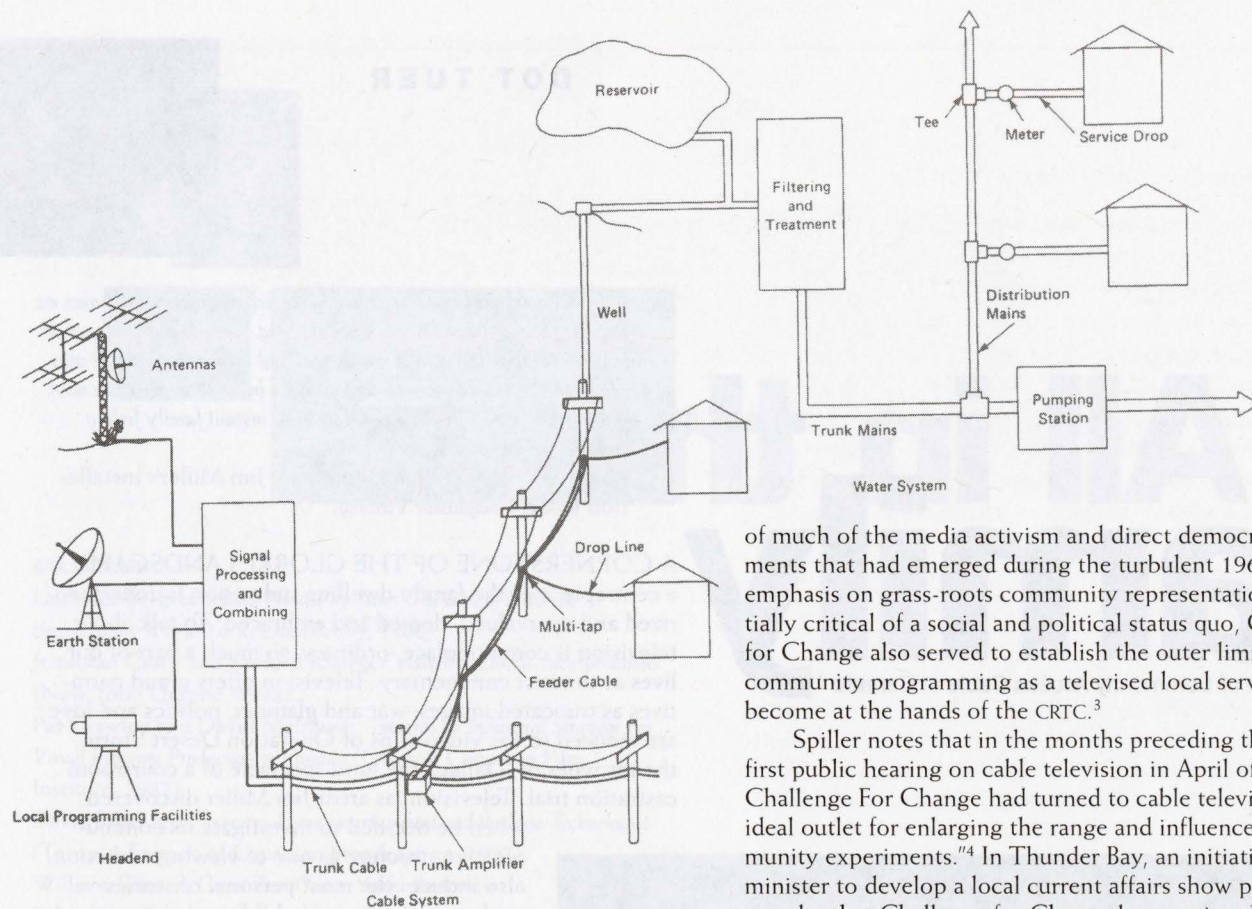
A CORNERSTONE OF THE GLOBAL LANDSCAPE, a centrepiece of the family dwelling, television is undertheorized and overvalued, denied and embraced. To talk about television is commonplace, ordinary, so much a part of our lives as to resist commentary. Television offers grand narratives as truncated images: war and glamour, politics and love are reduced to the video clips of Operation Desert Storm, the intrigues of "Dallas," the lurid spectacle of a courtroom castration trial. Television, as artist Jim Miller discovered when he decided to investigate its communicative structure as one of viewing addiction, also induces the most personal of stories; evokes confessions of childhood memories and buried phobias. At once the purveyor of universalizing referents and the provocation for intimate projections, television as an infrastructure for information dissemination deeply entangles the viewer in the paradoxical relation of the very local and the vastly global.

It is this sense of entanglement, of entrapment, of the collapsing of memory with image, a collusion of sensation and transmission, that intrudes in any attempt to rationalize the omnipotence of the box as a transparent relation of power to ideology. In researching the history of community access channels in Canada, for example, my thinking about issues of citizen involvement and media self-determination was sideswiped without warning by particularized memories of the familial and TV. I have a crystalline memory of television punctuating family rhythms, fostering family feuds, with squabbling siblings gathered around the picture tube to watch Friday night's "Get Smart," Sunday night's "Walt Disney Hour." I can remember social despair when the prohibition of Batman from my viewing repertoire meant ostracism in the school yard. I can remember anti-social delight in faked high-school sickness which led to a steady afternoon diet of dreary B movies and turgid soaps.

With the number of channels increasing in proportion to my teenage years, late-night baby-blue flicks, the staid upscale theatre of PBS, more reruns of Star Trek fed my already glutted television appetite. I have to admit, however, that televi-



*Installation Drawing #1 (for Compulsive Viewing), showing house facade mural in foreground, Jim Miller, 1992.*



## VIDEO HUSTLER PRO-GOLF DRIBBLING

now, lay with the cable licensee.<sup>6</sup>

Since the CRTC looked favourably on cable licensee applicants who expressed a commitment to community programming, cable companies responded to this covert directive by building studios, hiring staff, and sponsoring training programmes. Community access by fiat, however, proved less easily realized in practice. A volunteer structure in a highly capitalized, labour and time-intensive industry clearly had its built-in anachronisms. Many individuals and groups burned out quickly. Groups with specific agendas that had little to do with community input overtook local facilities. With the exception of Quebec, where community groups could be granted a licence for the local access station and thus exercise direct citizen control over programming, cable companies use of community advisory groups and community input to shape programming proved sporadic and ineffective.<sup>7</sup>

In Vancouver, for example, Metro Media, which was founded in 1971 by artists such as Michael Goldberg, produced hundreds of hours of community programming through the local cable company—only to experience mounting frustrations over the cable company's censorship of sexually explicit educational material, the lack of copyright protection, and the lack of payment for technical expertise. In an attempt to circumvent the restrictions of private cable monopoly, an unsuccessful battle was fought in the early 1970s by Metro Media and Video In to secure support from the CRTC for an independent broadcast station. In 1975 a second bid for air time made by sixty community groups in the Vancouver area also ended in failure.<sup>8</sup> Community access, it appeared, was not conceived by the CRTC as a parallel communication structure to private and public broadcast channels, but rather as an addendum to a mainframe system that would function as a very local and containable pocket of participatory expression and citizen input.

In the same year that this bid by Vancouver community groups to enter into the television arena as a broadcaster

of much of the media activism and direct democracy movements that had emerged during the turbulent 1960s. With its emphasis on grass-roots community representation as potentially critical of a social and political status quo, Challenge For Change also served to establish the outer limits of what community programming as a televised local service would become at the hands of the CRTC.<sup>3</sup>

Spiller notes that in the months preceding the CRTC's first public hearing on cable television in April of 1971, Challenge For Change had turned to cable television as "an ideal outlet for enlarging the range and influence of its community experiments."<sup>4</sup> In Thunder Bay, an initiative by a local minister to develop a local current affairs show proved so popular that Challenge for Change became involved in the expansion of the programme by providing it with ongoing funding assistance and the training for portable VTR crews. This idealistic experiment in media democracy quickly came to a confrontational head, however, when the Thunder Bay City Council decided it did not like the feedback about its activities that was being offered on the local "Town Talk" programme. In response, Challenge for Change and Ottawa called for the city council to establish a board composed of a cross-section of the community that could "regulate" balanced programming. The local cable station claimed that it was ultimately responsible for content and demanded that all programming be pre-recorded and submitted for pre-viewing three weeks before scheduled broadcast. Straitjacketed by a myriad of controls and demands, the "Town Talk" crew abandoned its exercise in direct citizen control of the media.<sup>5</sup>

Spiller does not directly link the Thunder Bay experience of community access with CRTC policies regarding the relationship of the cable company to control of local programming, but an inference can be drawn between the Challenge For Change experiments and what would prove acceptable in subsequent state proscriptions on community cable access. On July 16, 1971, a Policy Statement on Cable Television issued by the CRTC emphasized the importance of representing a diversity of community interests through the local access channel, including both formal citizen groups and individuals. Local programming was deemed most effective when facilities and production values were simple and inexpensive. Direct citizen participation was to be seen to reflect fair and balanced access for all groups within a community, with conflicts over fair use to be referred to the CRTC for arbitration. Responsibility for content on the community channel and copyright of local cable production, then, as

sion has produced in my own mind not a single memory of a single image from the cable community access channel.

In 1968, when the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) took over the regulation of cable television, I would have been ten years old. While CATV (cable television) originated in local business initiatives of the 1950s to wire individual subscribers to a central head end of powerful antennas that could pick up distant television channels, its present and future after 1968 rested within a negotiated settlement between private programming interests and government policy makers. As Frank Spiller points out in his assessment of community programming's history in Canada, the first public announcement of the CRTC regarding cable made it clear that the state's intention was to promote the regulation of cable service as a vehicle of local access production and programming as well as a monopoly right over signal distribution services to viewers in a defined geographical area. Cable television, the Commission pronounced, "can assist in the development of community identity through locally produced programmes," and facilitate "the enrichment of the community's cultural life through the distribution of Canadian-produced films, educational information, and other films of particular interest produced for public showing but not normally available in that area."<sup>2</sup>

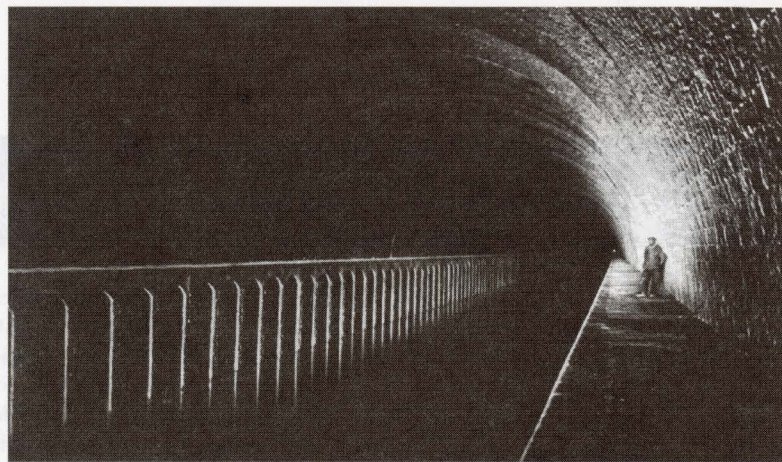
A vague echo of the NFB's wartime travelling projectionists project to bring Canadian-made films to rural communities, this governmental interest in promoting community programming also coincided with the NFB's Challenge for Change efforts to link media access to participatory politics. An officially sanctioned programme intended to offer citizen groups and the disenfranchised the means of media representation, Challenge For Change became a short lived synthesis

failed, the CRTC formally restated the principles of citizen access, requiring each cable system to provide a community channel with production facilities, while narrowing considerably the range of what would constitute community programming. Perhaps most significantly, an emphasis on the local origin of production prohibited the "bicycling" of programmes from one local community channel to another. While on the one hand this could be seen to actively promote local participation, on the other hand it impeded cross-country grass roots communication. It also blockaded the potential to develop a distribution system for alternative media and video art across Canada through cable television. A list of criteria compiled by the CRTC as an assessment guide for cable licensees' management of the community channels also affected the shape of future programming. For example, the CRTC stressed the importance of the number of groups involved, and the diversity of community perspectives represented, as indicators of successful community access. Programming that would serve a mass or general audience rather than specific interest groups was discouraged. Programming that was a clearly distinguishable alternative to broadcast television was encouraged.<sup>9</sup>

Ironically, although these guidelines were compiled by the CRTC, they were never followed up with a formal evaluation mechanism. Like the recommendation forwarded by the CRTC that cable licensees spend a "reasonable percentage" of their gross subscriber revenues on community access, CRTC policy principles concerning community access programming were voluntary rather than enforced directives.<sup>10</sup> In the negotiations over cable distribution between state and private interests, a pattern emerged that suggested that the two parties had settled into a cozy familial relation. Community broadcast access had become an administered paternalism. Cable companies, like good children, were awarded signal distribution monopolies in return for civic displays of goodwill towards community programming. The catch in this genteel relation is, of course, that children have a tendency to outgrow paternal authority. But now I am getting ahead of my story.

In a textbook on cable communication published in the early 1980s, the authors explain the basic functions of a cable system through comparison with a municipal water system: with the reservoir as a parallel to antennas and satellites, the local well mirroring local programming facilities, the filtering and treatment plant offering a similar function to signal processing, and trunk mains and trunk cables maintaining a steady flow of water and images to the North American home.<sup>11</sup> Such an analogy has its inverse reflection in the analysis of television viewing habits of Torontonians published by *The Financial Post* in 1963. According to *The Financial Post*, fluctuations in water pressure registered by a Toronto pumping station bore a direct correlation to the interruption





or end of a television programme. Producing a line graph charting the "toilet flow" of the city, *The Financial Post* noted that valleys and peaks were accentuated during prime-time hours. What such an analysis revealed, of course, was not only the degree to which television regulated

the scatological habits of Torontonians, but also the degree to which television as a viewing structure had permeated the fabric and shape of the family life.<sup>12</sup>

Paul Rutherford, in his history of television's early years in Canada, *When Television Was Young: Prime-Time Canada 1952-1967*, notes the rapidity with which the television became a fixture in the home, and the degree to which the effect of television on the family had become somewhat of a national obsession. From its inception, television induced an ambivalent reaction to its simultaneous presence as a miracle medium of fascination and an avenger destroyer of civilization. Speculative furor over television as an object of technological worship and revulsion found its focus in both media and civic circles over the effect of its gamma rays on the family unit and social values. Nancy Cleaver of *Saturday Night* declared television to be a "home breaker." Briefs to the 1957 Fowler Royal Commission on Broadcasting were more optimistic. The YMCA believed that television offered families "a window on the world." English and Quebecois women's groups, steeped in legacies of moral reform movements, saw television as an opportunity to promote wholesome and positive images of domestic life. Members of the Fowler Commission viewed television as a unifying source for the rejuvenation of family, serving as "a headquarters, a gathering place," enhancing family encounters in the home and strengthening the moral fabric of the nation.<sup>13</sup>

From the perspective of subsequent CRTC discussions over community access television, what is striking about this focus on the family was not only the reification of the home as the source of moral order, but the way in which television was contextualized as a fixture not of community, nor of the individual, but of the family unit. The connection of television to the nuclear family was everywhere one turned. It was on the screen, in media analyses. Its paternalistic structure of "father knows best" shadowed CRTC/Cable Company negotiations. It was the sinew that held together the living room and the nation. It was a central stage prop, a prime-time concern, an idealized "Leave It To Beaver" symbol that merged a televised technicolour never-never-land with dominant social mores. The relationship of community to television, on the other hand, was a sideshow: a government mandated afterthought important enough to be foisted onto the private sector as a civic duty, but not important enough to be embraced by the public broadcast network.

The results of the banishment of community issues to

the sidelines of prime-time were played out in the arenas of reception and representation. At the more practical end of the image-chain, the CRTC marginalized the community channel at its very conceptualization through the insistence that it serve particularized interest groups rather than a general audience and that it be tied to low-end production. While the Fowler Commission called for television to "perform unifying and cohesive functions in our society,"<sup>14</sup> and Toronto viewers flushed their toilets in unison, the community channel was expected to engage audiences through a fragmentary and narrowcast pattern of programming. When combined with the CRTC's definition of the community channel's particularized interest groups as those "which, because of ethnic affinities or virtue of economic circumstances, tend to occupy a particular part of the community,"<sup>15</sup> the implications seem clear enough. Private and public broadcast channels would serve the interests of the whole: the family, the nation, what has come to be known as CBC culture. The community access channel would serve what was left over, picking up the pieces of race and class that government policy designated as part of community rather than as part of mainstream culture.<sup>16</sup>

While positioning community access as a function of exclusionary rather than inclusionary forces can arguably be seen as a cynical rereading of an idealistic experiment, the cumulative effects of private sector monopoly over the access channel are telling. Charged with the civic responsibility of representing diverse cultural interests, yet ultimately in the business of making money not social change, cable companies steered clear of controversial or politically charged materials that might actually address the relationship of "ethnic affinities and economic circumstances" to mainstream television culture. Live telecasts of multicultural folklore, local sports events, and school board meetings more often than not became the cable company's formal commitment to alternative programming. Due to the built-up experiences of volunteer burnout, in many cases the response of the cable company was to function more like a local broadcaster than an access channel: with the hired staff of the cable company rather than "communities" producing much of the programming materials.

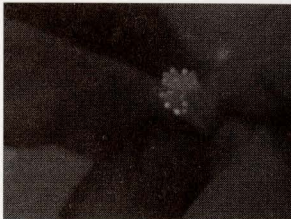
Artists who from time to time chose to work through the cable access system encountered the same obstacles that had frustrated Metro Media's ambitious embrace of cable access. Artists' commitments to community based production, alternative media image structures, and the exploration of issues of race, class, and cultural diversity, were just as often stultified as facilitated by the cable access structure. Lack of artistic control and financial support meant that realizing these goals on the community channel over an extended period of time was for all practical purposes impossible. The result was a chequered pattern of artists' interventions. In some cases, such as "The Gina Show," John Anderson's highly anarchic and wacky cultural magazine-format programme produced by Vancouver's Pumps Gallery in 1979, or Eldon Garnet's OCA student show "Three Hundred Dollars," produced in the mid-1980s, programming ceased when the individual artist could no longer contribute the necessary volunteer energy and resources. In other instances, such as

the recent "Living With AIDS" project organized by Michael Balser, for which Health and Welfare Canada provided production funds for video artists to make work about HIV and AIDS, the project was subsequently yanked from the air by Rogers Cable in response to the screening of Gita Saxena and Ian Rashid's *Bolo Bolo*, a piece which contained images of two men kissing.

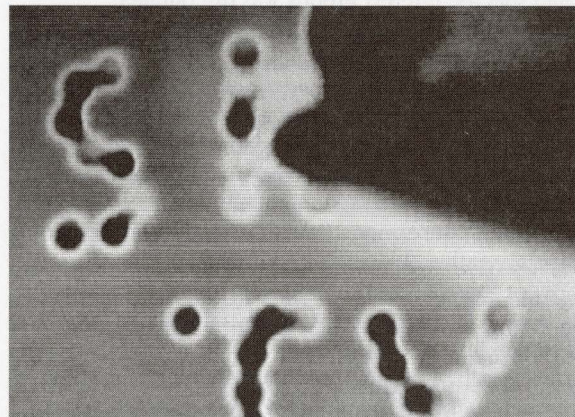
Obstacles notwithstanding, the community access channel continues to attract media and community activists seeking an alternative voice to prime-time broadcasting. More often than not, however, the degree of access is directly related to the attitudes and practices of the specific cable company and the professional staff running the community channel. At Rogers Cable 10 in Toronto, for example, community production studios are technically sophisticated but difficult to access. Programming is highly corporate in both structure and style. It is tightly controlled by the staff members, and rarely addresses the actual communities in its broadcast catch-area, which includes the gay activist downtown core, and large housing developments such as Regent Park. Typical fare concentrates on live coverage of events such as the Canadian Club Speakers Series, the Cancer Society Fashion Show, Festival of Festivals Trade Forum, high school intramural sports, and City Council meetings. The "Lemon-Aid" phone-in show on cars, and a new-age psychic reading tarot cards for an audience, augment live coverage with in-studio production.

By way of contrast, Maclean Hunter's Cable 10 community channel is known in cablevision circles as the radical fringe of access television. Serving the Parkdale/Trinity area, Maclean-Hunter's cable access enjoys a degree of community involvement that functions in inverse proportion to the production facilities and equipment it houses and in direct proportion to the commitment and enthusiasm of volunteers and production staff. The large number of artist-run spaces and artists located in the area is reflected in the shape of its programming. YYZ, an artist-run centre, broadcasts in-house video art programming on cable, and independent artists contribute their work to be screened on the channel. However, at both the production and distribution levels, most independent video and film artists refuse to work with the cable access structure, citing lack of copyright control and financial remuneration as major concerns. Rather, it is in the area of community activism that the most consistent commitment to access television has occurred. In turn, this commitment is nurtured and reinforced at Parkdale/Trinity through the roles that programme manager Manny Floriano and production facilitator Mark Surman have played in promoting broadcast access for a diverse number of community voices.

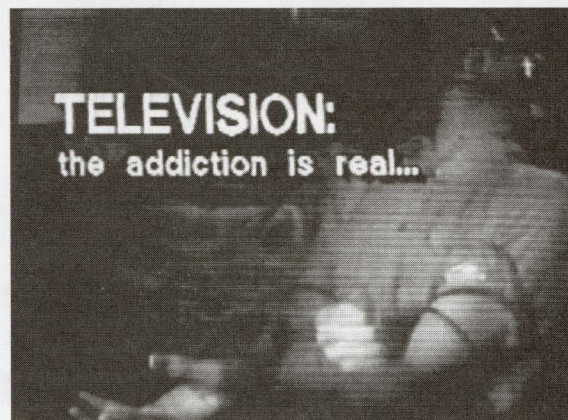
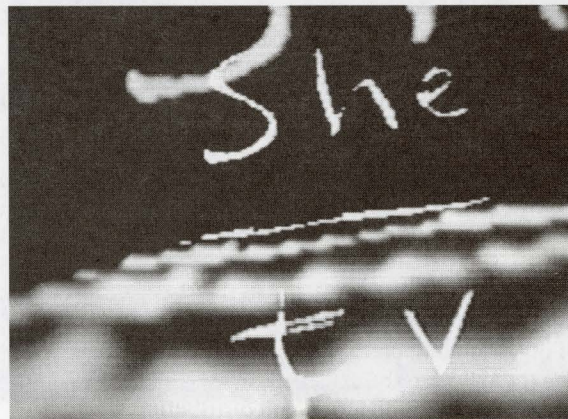
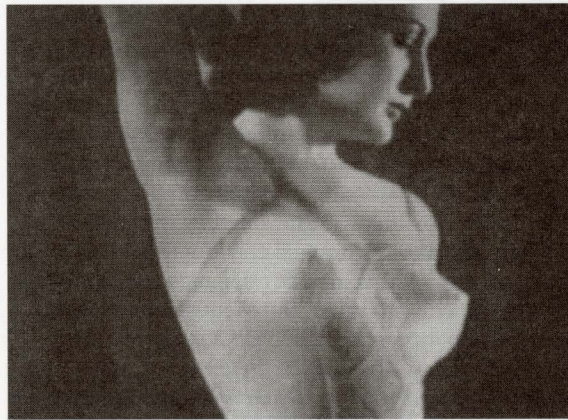
Surman, an environmental and media activist, has sought to facilitate community involvement in cable access by encouraging groups to form independent production collectives with a standing agreement to produce a given number of hours for the community channel. Through this collectivization of cable volunteers, there can be a continuity of programming interests without burning out any one individ-



Below: still from SHE/tv promotion tape, the SHE/tv Collective, video, 1993. Far below: still from *Gulf War Fantasies*, Mark Surman, video, 1991.



Top: still from *Breasts, Boobs and Bazoombas*, Karen Poce, video, 1993.  
 Below: stills from SHE/tv promotion tape, the SHE/tv Collective, video 1993.  
 Far below: still from opening sequence to the Maclean Hunter Cable 10 (Parkdale/Trinity) series "Nocturnal Transmissions," Michael Hardy, 1992.



ual or community group. Moreover, not all members of the group need to have achieved the same technical skills at the same time. Taking turns planning and producing programming encourages the exchange of ideas and of strategies. A decentralizing approach to production also decentralizes decision-making around programming, shifting the impetus for programming ideas from the station manager to independent collectives.

Under this umbrella access structure, programming and production collectives such as This Island Earth, Undercurrents and SHE/tv have emerged to give Parkdale/Trinity a distinctive and distinctively alternative broadcast flavour. This Island Earth, a coalition of environmentalist concerns, has covered topics ranging from the anti-car movement to the inner workings of a local food co-operative, and accommodated individual interventions such as Mark Surman's critique of the Gulf War aired ten days after the war began. Similarly, Undercurrents, a loose information collective committed to alternative media perspectives, covers everything from anti-racist and Clayoquot demonstrations to issues of Free Trade, animal rights and First Nations sovereignty. SHE/tv was founded in 1991 as a "forum to encourage expression by women" offering "supportive atmosphere, access to broadcast, and hands on training."<sup>17</sup> Encompassing a diversity of women's perspectives, SHE/tv has produced a number of programmes, including Jennifer Chang Alloy's documentary examination of women and traditional Chinese medicine; Karen Poce's homage to female anatomy *Breasts, Boobs, and Bazoombas*; and an experimental work by Kika Thorne, *Complications, Part One*, that seeks to engage a television access space as an integral part of a media practice, and as a formal framework for images.

In addition, shows such as "Full Effect," an arts coverage programme, "Motions in Poetry," Bart Cross's interviews and readings by local poets, and "Nocturnal Transmissions," Michael Hardy's entertaining satire on television addiction, spice up a weekly schedule that also accommodates the typical cable fare of local council reports, religious services, community news and local sports events. Through its mix of programming and the commitment of its staff and volunteers, Maclean Hunter's community channel in Toronto stands as an example of how community access television can work to democratize television, extend media literacy and expand the formal language of the medium. It must also be pointed out that in the larger context of the regulated cable industry, it stands as an anomaly. As Kim Goldberg writes in her book on community television, "a fundamental problem has always dogged community access television. It is a democratic concept without a democratic structure."<sup>18</sup> And it is this contradiction, she suggests, of "a collectivist, pluralist, egalitarian concept embedded in a hierarchical, privately controlled, corporate structure,"<sup>19</sup> that makes a channel like Parkdale/Trinity the exception rather than the rule.

During a one-day seminar/workshop on cable community access recently sponsored by York University's Advanced Research Seminar in Democratic Participation, Mark Surman echoed Goldberg's critique in his assessment of the issues facing access television.<sup>20</sup> Linking media access to issues of media literacy, he also noted that barriers to community par-

ticipation lie beyond the administrative stranglehold of a corporate cablevision over broadcast access. At stake in Canada, Surman pointed out, is not only access to television production and distribution, but access to a critique of mass-media images. Unlike the United States of America, where a fair-use law permits commercial television to be footnoted for the purposes of educational or artistic critique, in Canada it is technically illegal to use any clip taken from commercial or public television for any purpose without prior copyright permission. Correspondingly, cable companies who are legally responsible for content keep a strict eye out for possible infringements of copyright and/or libel. The result is a stranglehold by corporations over both the mechanisms of reception and of representation.

And it is at this more ephemeral end of the image-chain, where representation and the symbolic economy of cultural exchange meet, that the future directions of the cable industry threaten to erode the fragile and already contradictory space that community access television creates for alternative media expression. Having come of age in a New World Order of transnational capital and the restructuring of resources, cable companies are demanding circulation for their image machines that is "free" of state regulation. Governments, anxiously patrolling the porous borders of information, are acquiescent in their dealings with an industry that has grown from locally based signal distributors into some of the largest corporate infrastructures in Canada. Instead of asserting a regulatory authority over this proliferating communication sector, the CRTC recently endorsed the cable industry's attempt to move towards self-regulation (read deregulation) through its voluntary establishment of operational guidelines and national standards for community access. Thus, it is now within the jurisdiction of the cable television operator to decide how community access production resources should be allocated, and to determine what programming is deemed most appropriate for the communities it serves. The cozy familial relationship between government and business continues to flourish, except that it is now business that dictates the terms.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, back at the family home, the Toronto viewer is no longer experiencing television as a unifying narrative of family and nation, no longer flushing that toilet in harmony with his or her neighbour. Surfing across an information net that has grown to include specialized entertainment and news channels, pay-as-you-go television, home-shopping networks, phone-sex, on-line database services and much, much more, the contemporary television viewer is atomized, fragmented, alone but still a mass. Turning on the television to embrace a global "community" of images, to feel that intimate hug of fantasy, it is no longer a family feeling but a technologized self that is reflected back. In 1994, as the "Brady Bunch" recirculates in a live theatrical setting as camp, the trope of the family is replaced on television by a more engrossing promise of a fantastical real. Rape and castration trials, endless talk-show confessionals, recreated at the scene of the crime vignettes, polls, and electronic town halls sever the body from its lived presence while simultaneously offering a salve for its ideological dismemberment. An opaque screen that veils reality as image, and unveils identity as sub-

ject to the paradoxes of a vastly global and highly local infrastructure of communication, television's evolution as a means of representation is eroding the meaning of media intervention and alternative grass-roots participation.

In this context, community television itself becomes a pastiche. A recent work by video artist Steve Reinke, *Squeezing Sorrow from an Ashtray* (1992), identifies its production source as community cable television in 1979 because, according to Reinke, it had that community access "look."<sup>22</sup> At the other end of the image spectrum, public service announcements on Parkdale/Trinity sponsored by media environmentalists urge viewers to say NO to television and turn off their sets altogether. What seems to be at issue here, then, is not only access to the means of production, but access to representational narratives and to distribution structures that can actually change how people view television in relation to themselves. Camcorders and computer bulletin boards, the cable industry's affirmation of its "commitment" to community television access and the promise of five hundred television channels, all offer the illusion that grass-roots participation and technological restructuring are marching forward hand and hand. But at the same time, the mantra of the 1990s has become the withdrawal of government from a social contract and the end of the nation-state as a means for a citizenship to negotiate a terrain for its own collective self-determination. How are we then to begin to conceptualize, or reconceptualize, the relationship of community access to community control of broadcast in a brave new world of open skies, and endless border wars of information? The answers to this problem have never seemed more pressing, nor more elusive.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who offered me their time and insights during the writing of this article, including Ted Magder for the opportunity to attend York University's Advanced Seminar for Democratic Participation, Frank Spiller for a copy of his report on Community Programming in Canada (1982) and for his inspirational long-term commitment to issues of community access; Kika Thorne, David McIntosh, Chris Hill, Brian Springer for their observations and insights, and a special thanks to Mark Surman who offered bibliographies, information, discussion, and lots of enthusiasm for the topic at hand.

*Dot Tuer is a writer and media theorist who has written extensively on film, video, photography and the visual arts for Canadian and international publications. In addition to her writing she is also the curator of a number of film and video programmes, and teaches at the Ontario College of Art. She is currently researching a book on issues of technology in Canadian art.*



ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jim Miller's installation *Compulsive Viewing* was first presented at "Mois de la Photo" in Montreal, October 1993. A subsequent variation of the installation was on view as part of "Mediatrics," 365 Church Street, 3rd Floor, Toronto. In *Compulsive Viewing*, Miller combines elements of television culture such as TV trays, monitors, and photographs with excerpts from interviews he conducted with compulsive viewers who were reached through word of mouth, newspaper ads and cable TV notices.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Spiller Associates, *Community Programming in Canada*, (independent consulting report funded by Rogers Cablesystems) [Toronto]: 1982, p. 3. It should be noted that some local cable services were offered by cable companies prior to the regulatory intervention of the CRTC. However, these tended to be live coverage of local activities such as church services rather than services specifically oriented towards the concept of community programming as promoted by the CRTC.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the NFB wartime projects see Joyce Nelson's *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend* (Toronto: Between The Lines Press, 1988). The Challenge for Change newsletter (*ACCESS*), published from 1970–1974 offers information on goals, projects and discussions that emerged from this NFB programme.

<sup>4</sup> Spiller, 1982, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Spiller, 1982, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Spiller, 1982, pp. 8–15.

<sup>7</sup> For a description of the ups and downs of community programming in the early years see Kim Goldberg, *The Barefoot Channel* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Sara Diamond, "Daring Documents: The Practical Aesthetics of Early Vancouver Video," in *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, Stan Douglas, editor (Talonbooks: Vancouver, 1991), pp. 51–66. Diamond also describes the early feminist experiments in community television, with Women in Focus beginning its life as a production centre attached to local cablevision. See pp. 67–73.

<sup>9</sup> Spiller, 1982, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Spiller, 1982, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. Baldwin and D. Stevens McVoy, *Cable Communication* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1983), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Rutherford, *When Television Was Young, Prime-time Canada 1952–1967* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 444.

<sup>13</sup> Rutherford, 1990, pp. 24–25.

<sup>14</sup> Rutherford, 1990, p. 25.

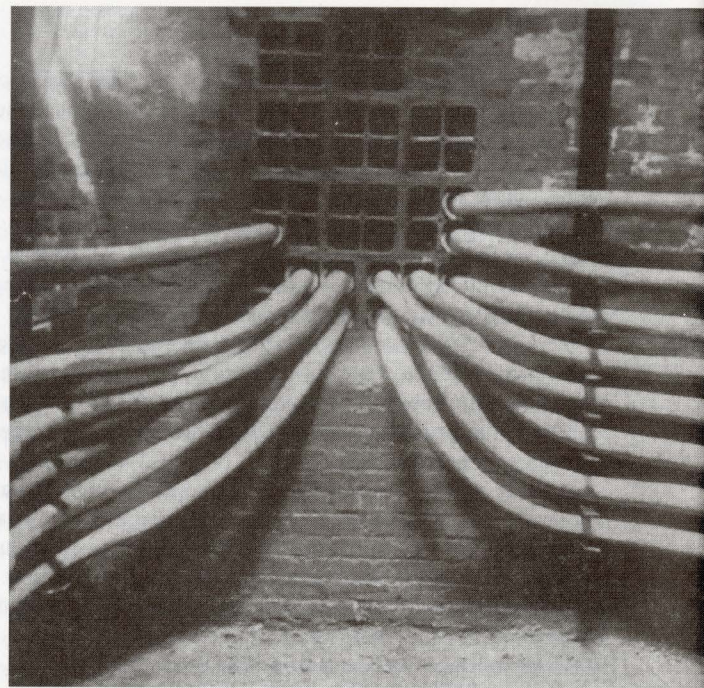
<sup>15</sup> Spiller, 1982, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that the Massey Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1949–51, also emphasized the complexities of cultural diversity in its call for government support for culture as a tool for constructing national identity. See Dot Tuer's "The Art of Nation Building: Constructing a Cultural Identity for Post-War Canada," *Parallelogramme* (vol. 17, no. 4), 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Text taken from a promotional compilation videotape produced by SHE/tv. Examples of various Parkdale/Trinity cable access programmes can be obtained for a small fee from Maclean Hunter Cable TV, 47 Lisgar Street, Toronto, tel: (416) 534-3341.

<sup>18</sup> Kim Goldberg, *The Barefoot Channel* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990), p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Goldberg, 1990, p. 38.



<sup>20</sup> The Advanced Research Seminar in Democratic Participation was organized by Ted Magder, Assistant Professor, Mass Communication Programme, York University. In addition to Mark Surman, other speakers included Frank Spiller, former commissioner for the CRTC, Chris Hill, video curator for Hallwalls Gallery in Buffalo, and Brian Springer, media activist. Both Chris Hill and Brian Springer were involved in organizing a franchise bid to operate a public access cable station in Buffalo. They spoke during the seminar of this experience and of the different challenges they face in the United States around community access. It should be noted that the United States and Canada differ significantly in their organization of community access television. Most importantly, it is not a federal body that regulates public access, but rather it is a municipal responsibility to negotiate a public access channel franchise with the cable company.

<sup>21</sup> For details of the industry's guidelines see the CRTC's June 1, 1992 press release and notice: "CRTC Welcomes New Cable TV Community Channel Standards." In Frank Spiller's presentation at The Advanced Research Seminar in Democratic Participation, he was very pessimistic about the current support on the CRTC commission for community access television. [Toronto]: York University.

<sup>22</sup> Reinke's discussion took place in the context of an after-screening discussion of his work held at Cinecycle, Toronto on January 27, 1994. The screening was organized by Pleasure Dome.

## Bookends & Odd Books

Publications Refuting Conventional Forms from the Banff Centre Library Collection

Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff

October 28, 1993–January 30, 1994

Books exist in an economy that writes the book's form from the outside. Standardized production and distribution methods dictate how a book will look, feel and read, and as a result, the most readily available books are more containers than active forms. This political economy of production and distribution also formulates how meaning is made by and within these books—there is a correlation between the form a book takes and the possible meanings it can generate.

"Bookends" seeks to politicize the form of books, to activate the book as a potential site of change. As curator Ashok Mathur writes in the exhibition catalogue (itself a bookwork with its bolted binding and business-card title pages): "In the end, included here are books that, in some manner, state/reflect/insinuate/some push toward sociopolitical examination and/or change."

The majority of the bookworks in this exhibition state or reflect this desire for change in their challenge to the object itself or in a combination of techniques that look for a dynamic between form and content. Terry Berkowitz's *Blood Stone* is a boxed book that deals with the Palestinian youths who use rock-throwing as one of their forms of resistance. It is also a book that shows the effect form has on content. Inside the box are stone-shaped cards printed with images of this resistance; overlaid on the images are narratives and other information about the history and conditions of this protest. The shape and size of the cards provide a tactile sense of the events around the Gaza Strip.

Other books that work with the poetics of form focus on the effects of the restrictive economy of books on language. Reflecting Mathur's own practice as a writer and publisher of disorientation chapbooks (with colleague Nicole



FACE: Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center, Mark Kessler and Katherine Labert. Photo: Don Lee. Courtesy of The Banff Centre.

Markotic), there is a wide selection of alternative books by poets. There is an interesting historical spread that also illustrates how the small press poetry-publishing scene in Canada has become less innovative under the bogus demands of standardization for distribution and display purposes. *The Great Canadian Sonnet*, from Coach House Press, is a 1970s collaboration between poet David McFadden and the late artist Greg Curnoe, which looks suspiciously like a scaled-down elementary school textbook and mimics the production values of cheap "adventure" books. The politicized content mocks the nationalist push of Canadian literature and counters the expectations of the title and the form.

Likewise, Steve McCaffery's *Carnival* panel, also from the 1970s, works simultaneously against the conventional book form and the commodification of language. Intended to be torn from its binding and assembled in a panel, *Carnival* must be "destroyed" as a book in order to be read, yet the densely typed-over text proves to be, as they say, un-

readable and hence, resists reading as a passive decoding of the voice of a cohesive subject.

"Bookends" is arranged into areas that mimic the rooms of a house: the kitchen, the living room, the bathroom, etc. Within these areas—marked out with chairs, carpeting, a futon and shelves—there are reading pods, groupings of books that are thematically or formally joined or juxtaposed. In the "living room" there is a witty pairing of Hermann Havelok's *Kunstler-Bucher Buchobjekte* and Richard Olson's *Double Bind*. The *Buchobjekte* is perfect bound on two sides but has been cut so that it can be folded over onto itself—a sort of doubled book that opens in different directions. *Double Bind* is a closed reply to this—it is bound at both ends so that it can't be opened.

In the "Coffee Table" area there is the contrast of the innovative and high production values of Henrik Drescher's book in an X-shaped canister, *Comeundone*, and Calgary artist Kira Wu's *10 Most Beautiful Women*. Using colour xerography, Wu doubles images of "beau-

Books + Art

10 most  
**BEAUTIFUL WOMEN**



**BEAUTIFUL**

10 Most Beautiful Women, Kira Wu. Photo: Don Lee. Courtesy of The Banff Centre.

tiful women" with photos of herself, inserting herself into this normally closed representation. Bound with bolts, and with its low yet effective production values, this book comments on the commodification of the female body and book, illustrating how the two are linked.

Some of the most innovative bookworks challenge the economy in which books exist by making themselves difficult to mass produce. For instance: Becky Singleton's *4 Dials* allows the reader to dial word combinations; Lai-sun Tong's *So I Smile...A Lot* is a series of tiny rolled-and-tied texts contained in a cigarette package-like box; Katherine Labert and Mark Kessler's *Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center* book uses Plexiglas and Mylar; and Stephen Kaplin's *Crank # 9: Seven Deadly Sins* is constructed in a cassette tape case that is read by turning a spring-loaded crank.

These bookworks show that an intervention at the level of form and production methods produces readings that would otherwise not be available. As an exhibition, "Bookends" provides an alternative distribution for these potential books.

Jeff Derksen is a writer and editor who currently lives in Calgary. His latest book is *Dwell* (Talonbooks: Vancouver, 1994).

LYNNE WANYEKI

## Twenty Bold, Brash and Beautiful Years

Video In's Twentieth Anniversary  
Video In, Vancouver  
October 1-30, 1993

October saw Video In, the only artist-run, non-profit centre for video production in Vancouver, celebrate the opening of its new facilities and its twenty-year anniversary. The move from its previous basement address to an airy and spacious location was marked by a month-long series of programming.

"Twenty Bold, Brash and Beautiful Years" documented some of the history of the organization through six curated screenings of Video In productions and a multi-media installation, *Making Video In*, which included archival material such as old photographs, posters and clips from videotapes of the organization.

Video In began in 1973 as a videotape exchange society inspired by the Matrix symposium, an international gathering of video artists, producers and journalists. The emphasis at the time was on utilizing video not just as an aesthetic medium, but as an alternative means of disseminating information. "We got tapes from the Black Panther movement, from the American Indian Movement, from Japan, from Europe.... We wanted to have not just 'art' tapes, but community-based, sociopolitical documentary work, to have a wider, more international alternative," says Jeanette Reinhardt, one of the early members and a current board member.

This purpose is still reflected today in various components of the organization. Jennifer Abbott, programme manager, says that "we provide a space for the alternative, progressive voice and tend to align ourselves with artists involved in social justice issues."

Video In's mandate includes providing access to video production and post-production services. With subsidization from the organization, prices of training workshops and equipment rental are about a tenth of the price

that they would be elsewhere. The organization also runs a work exchange programme. By volunteering and logging hours, a person accumulates "videobucks," which can be used toward a video production. "It's a very unusual centre in that you can do your production from beginning to end with no money whatsoever and with support from people with video experience," comments Nicole Thompson, equipment coordinator.

In addition, Video In's annual migrant programme encourages people who wouldn't necessarily have the ability to get grants in other ways. In keeping with Video In's equity principles, every year one of the five grants goes to a First Nations person, and two go to people of colour.

Video In shares its space, production and post-production facilities and administrative equipment with the First Nations Access Programme (FNAP). Begun in 1991 at the initiative of Margo Kane and Zachary Longboy, both longtime members of Video In, FNAP operates as a society autonomous of Video In, and is committed to facilitating access for First Nations people to all aspects of video production. Cease Wyss, who recently began working with FNAP, feels positive about the programme. "We as First Nations people need to have other First Nations people teaching us. Our pace is different, our view of things is different from that of non-Native people. This programme is geared for us, for what we want to learn, for how we want to learn."

In 1992, a programme similar to FNAP was set up, aimed at people of colour. The Racial Equity Video Access Media Project (REVAMP), however, has not had the same success and is not currently operational.



Videograb from *Skinned*, Jennifer Abbott and David Odhiambo (dirs.), video, 1993. Courtesy of Video In.

Dissemination of video work happens through Video Out, the distribution component of Video In. Video Out started in 1980, by which time video producers felt the need for an actual distributor to set up licensing agreements and distribution/artists' agreements, to push for rentals and get money coming back to the artists. Up to that time, distribution had occurred on a fairly ad hoc basis, in keeping with the spirit of "free" circulation at the time.

The video and print libraries of Video In were also re-organized and fully catalogued in 1980. The video library has well over 1000 titles, local, national and international. The print library includes technical manuals, catalogues, policy papers and reports, arts magazines, etc. Both libraries are open to members and the public alike.

The anniversary screenings addressed the role of video as a medium both linked to, and divergent from, popular culture ("Before the Generation Loss: Video's Earliest Years," curated by Michael Goldberg); conceptions of the body in a consumerist society ("Sculpting the Deficient Flesh," curated by Karen Knights); and issues around technology, access to technology and



Videograb from *Wohosheni*, Susan Harman (dir.), video, 1993. Courtesy of Video In.

conventions of its use ("Techne," curated by Sara Diamond).

The most interesting screening to me, as a non-video producer, was *Recent Takes in Feminist Video*, curated by Nancy Shaw. This portion included Video In productions from 1990 onward. Two of the videos screened deal with the female body, addressing our conceptions of it and its treatment both by external agents and by the self. Dana Claxton's *Tree of Consumption*, dedicated to the Dakota Nation, examines the relationship between women and nature—both as objects to be fragmented and consumed. *Big, Fat Slenderella* by Lorna Boschman is an indictment of a society that dictates slenderness, combining biting and humorous commentary from women and men who are coming to a level of comfort with their bodies. Three of the videos address the nature of desire, its construction and enactment. *Skinned* by Jennifer Abbott and David Odhiambo explores the internal and external reactions to an interracial (white/Black) relationship, exposing the way racial power differentials affect conceptions of what is desirable. Susan Harman's *Wohosheni* attempts to flip the way women are typically positioned as objects by exploring an erotic moment between two white lesbians. *Trust You* by Katherine Selzer is a short video of a woman reflecting on a fantasy while in her bathtub. Three of the remaining videos have to do with the notion of identity and its self-determination. River Sui's *Fast Life on a Lazy Susan* looks at Asian women and food in a diaspora that determines definitions of "authenticity" in relation to both

food and Asian identity. *This Alienation* by Nicole Thompson details the alienation engendered by immigration both, upon arrival in a new country and in terms of one's connections to one's "homeland" after time. *A Paddle and a Compass* by Shani Mootoo and Wendy Oberlander looks at the positioning of two women (South Asian and white) in relation to the outdoors, and questions notions of "ownership." The final video has to do with women and the early labour movement. *29/92* by Sara Diamond and The Women's Labour History Project, 1992, documents early union organizing and the role of women in support of this organizing during the 1930s Depression.

Video In carries out regular programming of screenings and artist talks with videomakers from around the world. Programming is open to suggestions from individuals and various communities, as well as from within the organization, with an emphasis on both content and practice. For each programme, considerable research and outreach are done to ensure that programming does not just attract those already involved with the medium, particularly when programmes are specific to particular issues or communities. Jennifer Abbott says: "We try to bring in artists whose work is on the cutting edge of video, who are making significant contributions to video production, whether that contribution is theoretical or artistic."

Lynne Wanyeki is a Kenyan Chotara lesbian who writes and works in community media.

## Queer Looks

Edited by Martha Gever, John Greyson and Pratibha Parmar  
Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1993

Once upon a time there were three media activists named Martha, John and Pratibha. One day while playing in an orchard of cultural studies, they gathered around and decided it was timely to harvest one particular tree. Well they shook and shook that darn little tree (poor tree, as it was still a young one only beginning to blossom and bear fruit) until all the fruits fell out. Now some that were overripe had already fallen to the ground; some that fell out were just a little underripe but you could taste the great beginnings; and of course some were just perfect. Well, Martha, John and Pratibha gathered up all the fruits and put them all together into an anthology of essays called *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*.

Okay, so I'm not clever enough to carry this metaphor all the way through a review of the book, but you get the idea. With contributions from over thirty-six different writers, the book covers a broad range of writing styles and even includes artist pages by Kaucyila Brooke and a do-it-yourself lesbian visibility lampshade by Jean Carlomusto and Donna Evans. As the metaphor goes, some contributions are well written, in clear and accessible language with exciting ideas, some others disappoint with academic overwriting, and some essays just won't mean a thing if you haven't seen the film/video in question. In that sense, the anthology seems to be aimed at an audience that is up to date on lesbian and gay media. The same is true for the kind of lan-

guage, ideas and assumptions it uses. Some contributions really don't offer much if you haven't seen the film, and you really have to go out of your way to find a public screening of some of these films (in Toronto anyway). Now this isn't a fault of the essays themselves per se; rather, it speaks of the sorry state of exhibition for independent, non-theatrical work in this "world class" city.

As well, the book assumes a certain level of media literacy on the part of the reader in the issues it raises. For example, in the round table discussion between Joy Chamberlain, Isaac Julien, Stuart Marshall and Pratibha Parmar, the producers discuss the politics inherent in making representations, from their ideological meanings to the difficulties of funding. Much of what they say only resonates if you are already engaged in the issues at a certain level. The title of the piece, "Filling the lack in everybody is quite hard work, really..." is the first clue to the reader.

Close readings of film texts (contributions by Liz Kotz, Patricia White and Mandy Merck) as a "strategy" also assumes a certain level of media savvy on the part of the reader. If you didn't go to film school or its equivalent, you must wonder why anybody would spend so much time making detailed interpretations of a film. Don't get me wrong, I think it's very useful to do close textual analyses, but you also have to consider how that fits in to building a broader base of media activism that is energized by a larger, more diverse lesbian and gay community.

One of the most exciting contributions is the essay from Catherine Saalfield, which documents the rise and the working styles of video collectives throughout the United States. Cleverly written, using a meeting agenda structure that slides into historical exegesis and back again, the essay manages to recreate the exhilarating (as well as frustrating) sense of empowerment such video collectives engendered. There are some really funny moments in this too. One of my favourite accounts is of a collective member's pin that reads "Process is for Cheese." Where do I get one of those?

Because the anthology encompasses so much in terms of writing styles, issues, ideas and genres, it's really difficult to say anything about the book without having to contradict myself. What can be said about a book of such size seems so obvious: that there are some real gems and some real stinkers. Some essays written a few years ago need to be updated, as do some of the essays that were commissioned for the anthology. The book starts off enthusiastic and energetic and then pursues a drier, more academic tone (with a couple of exceptions of course, namely Greyson's own witty and insightful contribution on state censorship and police surveillance in Toronto, using a Peanuts cartoon analogy).

I would like to say that I found the essays by diasporic people of colour the most engaging in the way they handled complex ideas in an accessible language, but that's not completely true. There are some not so interesting essays by diasporic producers as well as some very engaging contributions by "white" producers. The impetus to be inclusive is, at times, arch. In a concerted effort to be truly international and include the voices of people of colour, some essays are actually done a disservice by the fact that they stand out in such a strange way from the rest of the anthology. In the long run, those essays may have been better served by being saved for another publication.

More than anything else, the book serves as a historical document of the convergence within cultural inquiry of various discourses on lesbian and gay politics, identity, race and media. Such

a book could only have happened now and it will be interesting to see where it stands in ten or twenty years in terms of the issues and debates it has raised (much like the *Christopher Street* anthologies of 1970s gay liberation writings).

The book is a testimony to some of the bright and articulate minds out there—damned smart, those queer media types. In addition to the faves I've already mentioned, there are even more jewels in this anthology, from Sara Diamond's clever mock dialogue between herself and Emily Carr about whether or not Carr's work is lesbian, to Matias Viegner's insightful history of the gay punk movement and its films (ten points alone for the title, "The Only Haircut that Makes Sense Anymore"). These and other essays are a treat because not only are they well written (and sometimes even downright entertaining), but they also have something interesting to say, and they say it with a language that is free of theoretical rhetoric.

Returning to the tree metaphor, let's hope that the tree is a fertile one that will continue to bear fruit in the upcoming years rather than wither away and die in a hostile environment of right-wing politics and attacks on public funding. As the editors note, these are contradictory times we live in. It was certainly the best of times, the worst of times.... "On the one hand, as film and video artists and critics, as people working in independent media pursuing lesbian and gay themes, the field had never seemed so ripe with possibilities. Funding, production, and distribution opportunities existed in ways that were unthinkable even five years earlier.... On the other hand: Jesse Helms, Section 28, Canadian Customs...a gang of international thugs conspiring to create a significant moment to suffer.... Funding was slashed, screenings were censored, films were banned." Will we get a next Queer look?

Lloyd Wong grew up in the fruit belt of Ontario.

Dismantling Invisibility:  
Asian Artists Responding to  
the AIDS Crisis

A Space, Toronto  
November 6 – December 18, 1994



"Dismantling Invisibility," installation view showing far right: +, -, Ho Tam, 18 panels, oil on canvas, 1993, Canada. Photo: Ho Tam.

"Dismantling Invisibility" (curated by Marilyn Jung, Kyo Maclear, Tamara Makhan and Scott Marsden) issues a forceful political statement through artistic forms. The result of collaborative work by a group of Asian and Pacific Islander artists, the exhibition is an attempt to enhance public awareness of the AIDS crisis. It is comprised of works in video, music and visual art, and presents a diverse spectrum of art practices and individual responses to the worldwide epidemic. The exhibition was a part of Toronto's Day Without Art—a commemorative day in honor of members of the arts community who have died of AIDS. At the same time, "Dismantling Invisibility" hopes to communicate other messages.

According to its curatorial statement, the show seeks to highlight issues of class, race and ethnicity, and to call attention to racial, linguistic and cultural insensibilities towards HIV-positive Asians. While affirming similarities in their experiences and struggles, it also intends to initiate awareness of the important and essential differences

among those who are called "Asians." Furthermore, it attempts to disclose systemic barriers that impede access to AIDS information and treatment generally for Asian Canadians and Americans.

In short, *Dismantling Invisibility* does not mask its intent or politics. The project of enhancing AIDS awareness is tied in with struggles surrounding difference, marginality and the right to representation. The artists contest the homogeneity of individuals conventionally represented as comprising the "AIDS community."

The exhibition displays a rich variety of themes and styles. *Hands of the Spirit Mural* (by Nhan Duc Nguyen and Warren Knechtel) is a clear sign of group solidarity and determination. The many hand-prints collected from individual Asians demonstrate a multicultural community's hands-on involvement in the cause of AIDS awareness. Artists Brenda Joy Lem and Masami Teraoka highlight race and ethnicity in their works. They use imagery and concepts from Chinese and Japanese culture respectively, to make statements about



Paul Pfeiffer, November–December 1991, USA.

cultural perceptions of AIDS. Other works explore the realities of AIDS with emotional and thought provoking results. Chingyu Sun's computer art *Patience, Truth and Hope*, for example, exposes devastating contradictions in our society's attitude toward AIDS. Ho Tam's group portraits, by showing images of people who are suffering from AIDS, compel us to face and remember those who are struggling between life and death and those who have already left us.

Two pieces of work that particularly touched me are Soonki Park Schaub's untitled installation and Xu Jinguo's *Voices Unheard*. Schaub's work is comprised of an Oriental chest and numerous masks placed in lines on the floor and hanging on three large wooden frames. The piece conveys a number of messages and has a startling visual effect. This is another holocaust visualized. The human faces (masks)—all twisted and deformed, shouting without a voice, or with their lips sealed—propel my imagination into terrains of desperation, clash, combat and dissolution.

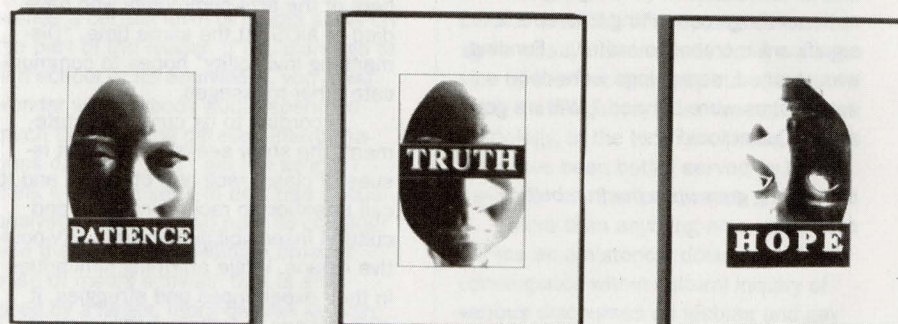
In contrast, Xu Jinguo's *Voices Unheard* enables the silenced to be heard through video images and what appear to be excerpts from the diaries of people with AIDS. Well thought out, the work displays on video the facts of

death—the loss of human life and loved ones; through words, it uncovers the ordeal of people with AIDS and the labyrinth of their inner worlds. Here, the sense of lingering at the edge, of being pinched between the known and the unknown, of stumbling in the midst of hope, despair, anger, guilt and shame is powerfully evoked.

As an audience member, I think that the exhibition succeeded in fulfilling most of its imperatives: enhancing AIDS awareness and giving voice to "marginal" communities. Through the utilization of the artists' cultural symbols, it also highlights the racial and ethnic in a realm where little attention is paid to race and ethnicity.

What I see as missing dimensions in the exhibition, however, are some issues the exhibition claims to have included. The term "invisibility" needs further elaboration. For example, different experiences (of people with AIDS separated by race, settlement patterns, immigration policies, population density and availability of community resources) are rarely evident in a single work. Systemic barriers and other problems specific to HIV-positive Asians remain largely invisible. Class, a reality of Canadian society too often obscured by apparently commonsensical thinking, remains absent. Finally, I think that we should not forget that a large number of HIV-positive individuals are women, and that the greatest number dying of AIDS are in the Third World, suffering from the additional effects of colonialism and neocolonialism.

*Patience, Truth and Hope*, Chingyu Sun, digital imaging, 17"x22" each, 1991, Canada.



Is it possible for visual artists to capture multiplicity, to address a common crisis while dealing with its differentiated impact on distinct groups of people? The exhibition's drawback reminds me of a strategy conceptualized by experimental Asian American filmmaker Trinh T. Minhà—what may be called a dialectic of same/difference. I think that a "minor" discourse must, as Trinh says, "move about with always at least two/four gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in its difference; and that of reminding itself 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at." While this appears to fall into the simplistic us–them dichotomy, still it opens up space for creative ways of addressing complex social realities.

Deliberately fusing art and life, "Dismantling Invisibility" expresses these artists' firm commitment to art for social change. But to have a voice—asserting one's presence and the right to represent—is hardly enough. A "minor" voice can only be influential and effective when energized by the depth of its thought, its ability to delineate complexity. The artist has another challenge; that is, to provoke thinking and action by utilizing the visual. "Dismantling Invisibility" marks a resolute step by artists of Asian descent towards political involvement. Their artistic and political impact beyond this will be substantiated by further efforts.

*Xiaoping Li is a freelance writer in Toronto.*

## They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever

Rock Writings in the Stein River Valley of British Columbia  
Annie Zetco York, Richard Daly, and Chris Arnett.  
Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1993

## Bowl of Bone/Tale of the Syuwe

Directed by Jan-Marie Martell and Annie Zetco York, 1992.  
Turtle Productions in association with the National Film Board of Canada.  
Distributed by Canadian Filmmakers Distribution West.

### *Breaking the code: drawing/site/territory*

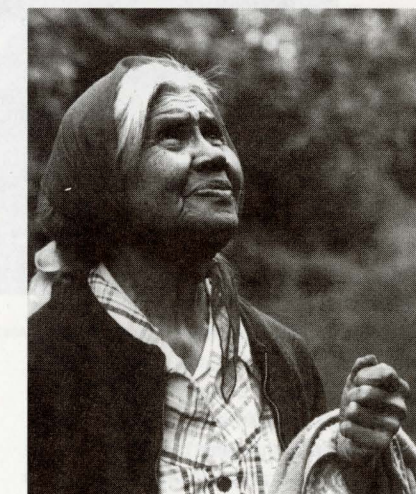
Whether or not one can develop authentic and viable Native/non-Native collaborations has emerged as a central question in Canadian art. *They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever* and *Bowl of Bone/Tale of the Syuwe* are both evidence of a new level of engagement with emerging issues. The book and the film represent problematic milestones in the formation of new stances or practices countering appropriation and providing fuller freedom for Native cultural expression.

The book and the film look at the interconnected threads of traditional healing, art, spirituality and sacred sites of the 'Nlaka'pamux of the Fraser Canyon region of interior British Columbia. Their focus is on the experience of one of the foremost traditional healers, Annie Zetco (Zex'tko) York (1904–1991), and the Stein Valley, probably the largest and richest area of rock drawings in Canada. This valley was considered by traditional elders as a "university" for local life, art and religious observance. It has also been the focus of as yet unresolved contests between land claims, conservation, logging and road building for over twenty years, and could eventually be a candidate for a World Heritage Site designa-

tion. The film *Bowl of Bone/Tale of the Syuwe* is based on a fifteen-year collaboration and an unfinished dialogue between Zex'tko and Jan-Marie Martell.

Both projects illustrate emerging contradictions in Native/non-Native collaborations that require renewed dialogues on positioning and appropriation. The major force in both of these collaborations, particularly from the standpoint of Zex'tko, was interest in the sharing of traditional knowledge and, thus, in the protection of respective 'Nlaka'pamux sites.

An additional motive for making *Bowl of Bone/Tale of the Syuwe* involves an exploration of traditional 'Nlaka'pamux healing and the friendships between York, her cousin Arthur Urquhart and filmmaker Martell. There is a complex and often overwhelming alternation between of a kind of personalized documentary of actual interactions between Annie and Arthur and accounts of traditional shamanism. Because Annie and Arthur both had parents with mixed 'Nlaka'pamux and European backgrounds, they were non-status Natives and were therefore exempt from being required to go to residential schools. Because they also chose to remain unmarried, they were chosen by



Annie Zetco York in *Bowl of Bone*, Jan-Marie Martell (dir.), 114 min., film, 1993. Reproduced by permission of the director.



Still from *Bowl of Bone*, Jan-Marie Martell (dir.), 114 min, film, 1993.  
Reproduced by permission of the director.

traditional elders to be trained as keepers of traditional 'Nlaka'pamux culture. Martell states early on that,

I want to belong here and learn from Arthur and Annie but I feel disqualified so I'm here pretending to make a film.... Like a useless shadow, I've been dogging Annie in hopes of learning from her but she can't teach me. I'm not part of her family. I don't belong here.

Toward the end of the 114 minute film, Martell looks at photographs of Annie and Arthur's 'Nlaka'pamux and Métis relatives, noting "these people feel like my family. It hurts to look at them in this way because they are being seen as something that is dead." Between and around these points the narrative progresses from an introduction of Annie and Arthur and the Fraser Canyon to a narration of Martell's background, a description of traditional 'Nlaka'pamux medicinal plants, and then to dual crises: the death of Zex'tko's mentor and guardian, Aunt Josephine, and the logging of the traditional burial site of their ancestors. It then becomes clear that Annie had only become fully a traditional healer, a *syuwe*, after her protector was gone. But soon after, Annie dies of breast cancer, forcing the central (postcolonial) mythic rupture in the film. In so far as Martell is not 'Nlaka'pamux, and was busy making the film, she did not apprentice as a *syuwe*. This fact orders the appropriation dis-

course. Martell does not pretend to be able to take on the weighty responsibilities of her friend; a collaborative film is no substitute; and this highlights a deeper loss.

The filmmaker's strategy to overcome the pressures for appropriation is to put her "cultural baggage" up front. In defence of this approach, relationships between the collaborators are complex and must be carefully understood before the lessons that Zex'tko wishes to impart can be unveiled. The "active (Native) informant" has a better chance of taking control of her own position when the documentarian clarifies which parts of the film are more about his/her own experience. More problematic than Martell's personal baggage, is the inadequate recognition of the importance of particular sites even while Martell notes, "the landscape is a registry of dreams...every place has a story and a name." But the underlying internal constraint of the film is that the names are only partially remembered. This compounds both the personal and cultural losses.

With all of its self-conscious heaviness, it is fair to say that this document represents a significant development in the Canadian documentary tradition away from the relationship of (white) filmmaker/ethnographer and (Native) subject/source of cultural information/"cultural worker" toward something more directly controlled by the "informant" and more obviously the result of provisional decisions between the indi-

viduals involved. The film constructs a brooding labyrinth of memory, loss, disappointment and dreams that spans a number of eras and cultures, but which is more often about the filmmaker.

While the film footage of Zex'tko involves considerable information and powerful imagery, in *They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever*, Zex'tko's interpretations of the Stein pictographs and petroglyphs only begin to assert her own world-view and aesthetics, as well as provide linkages to issues of art, site and representation. Unfortunately, the effect of the recorders' active intervention and direction in these interviews is to de-emphasize questions of source and location, central to site-based art, in favour of reducing the drawings to "a form of non-alphabetic literacy" which "transcend those of works of art" (Daly, p. 223). But this view of "art" is perhaps less consistent with both contemporary and traditional Native art practice than with some nineteenth century Eurocentric frameworks.

The reduction to line, form, juxtaposition, space and sequence, to "pictorial literacy" precludes consideration of the lower Stein Valley as a cohesive and living configuration of sites of cultural expression, and can be argued to be an insidious form of colonialism, particularly as the area takes on an expanding role in renewed Native ceremony and reflection. In this case, the (Native) "informant" is still being used to support the (non-neutral) aesthetic interpretation of the (white) "recorder" in exchange for the somewhat Faustian bargain of limited support for land claims.

Daly has the last word in this well-produced book, asking, "How are we to break the code, and read *definitively* the writings on rocks...?" [reviewer's emphasis]. Break the code for whom and for whose purposes? The answers to these questions, which diverge for Native and non-Native individuals, groups and communities, have tremendous implications for strategies to better understand, appreciate and protect Native representations and sites—especially since most are still vulnerable to road building and vandalism, as is the integrity of the entire valley.

These are also questions for much of contemporary art, where relationships of site and performance are increasingly central. But rather than pursue such a revised "reading" of the drawings, it is more crucial to support ongoing Native-centred reinterpretations that are not filtered by outside experts and that reflect the reality of the multiplicity of (Native) perspectives, purposes and strategies. It is these emerging processes of contemporary 'Nlaka'pamux reappropriation and place-making that the book, unfortunately, negates.

The most problematic aspect of both the film and the book is the lack of non-Native focus on the site-based nature of 'Nlaka'pamux culture and knowledge. Zex'tko was constantly framing her experience from within the landscape, and the recording tends to remove this from the respective narratives—information that makes "land claims," with their many implications, more compelling. An achievement of these projects is how these two diametrically opposite experiences of culture and territory are so poignantly illustrated. It is a testament to the personal dignity of Annie and Arthur that the contemporary politics remain secondary to the disclosure of rich lore that may take generations to be fully appreciated and understood.

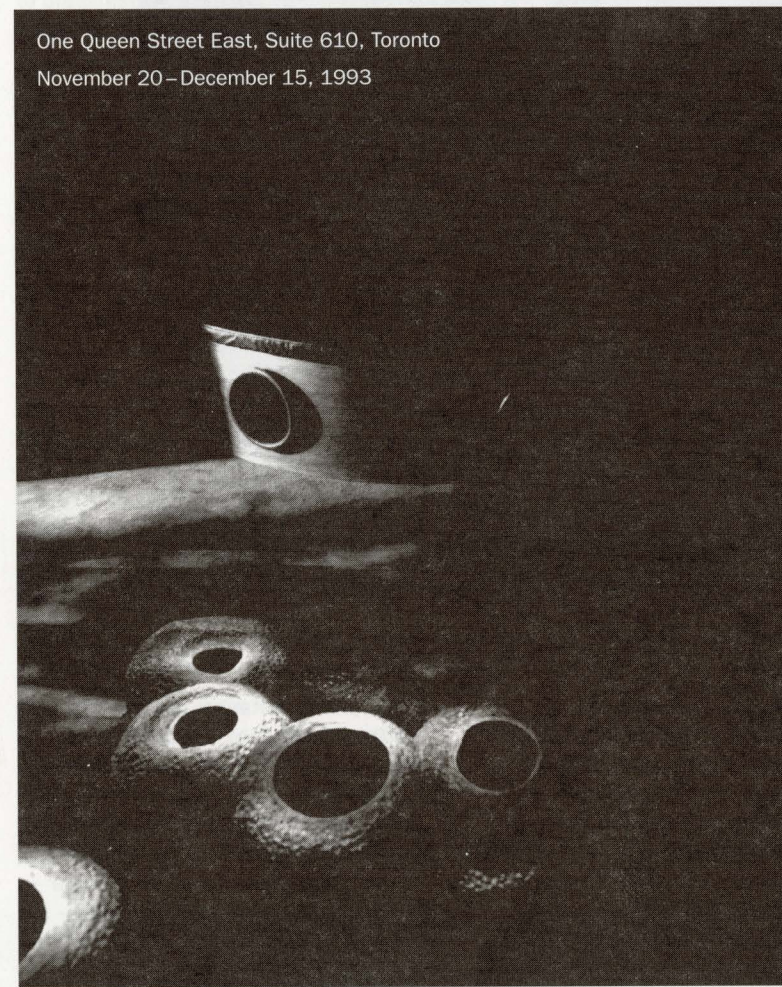
The "codes" have not been broken in these two treatments, nor may they ever be outside of the shamanic and familial contexts of the 'Nlaka'pamux. But non-Native obfuscation, the vestiges of a colonially cultivated blindness to site and cultural memory, emerges as the primary obstacle to deeper understanding. In the wake of this, more specific and critical strategies are inevitable, particularly for 'Nlaka'pamux-defined linkages between land claims, conservation, cultural observance, and yes, the making of art.

*Brent Ingram teaches environmental planning and photography at the University of British Columbia.*

JENNIFER RUDDER

## Spontaneous Combustion

One Queen Street East, Suite 610, Toronto  
November 20–December 15, 1993



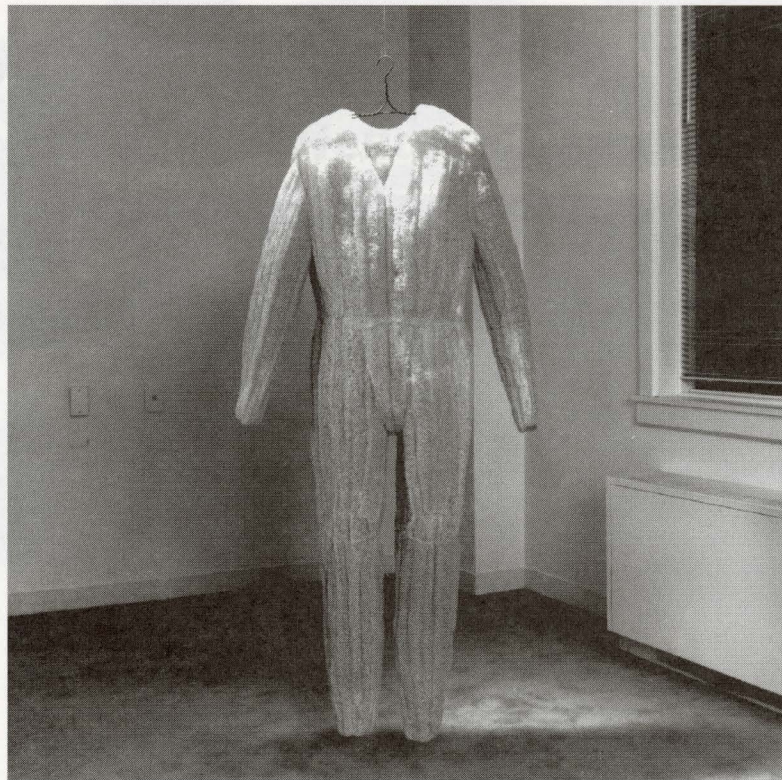
*Like Ancient Pots...* Panya Clark, mixed media installation, 1994. Photo: Ian Smith-Rubenzahl

In 1989, disillusioned with the lack of prospects to show their work locally, the members of the provocatively named Spontaneous Combustion collective rented the stunning former industrial showroom of the Massey Ferguson complex and wowed the Toronto public. Remarkable for its independence from the gallery system, the exhibition of predominantly technology-based work was one of the first to represent a generation of artists who had been virtually excluded from solo and curated exhibitions, critical attention and even individual grants. A decade earlier, arts councils had provided funding to similar artists' collectives to programme art in their own centres.

In November 1993, with the recession now hitting the financial district, the collective rented a suite of rooms in the Confederation Life building at Richmond and Yonge Streets. With its plush offices, shining washrooms, hushed board rooms and twenty-foot-high ceilings, it made for an unusual location in which to view art, especially work examining a cross section of issues such as family, technology, representation, tourism, homophobia and the media.

In a corner office, Gwen MacGregor's installation *Body of Knowledge*, a consideration of women's relationship to technology, incorporates rotting fruit and text engraved on brass strips. Across a wall of windows, dozens of

Art



Loofa-suit, Barbara McGill Balfour, loofa, 1991. Photo: Ian Smith-Rubenzahl.

mouldy oranges are suspended in a grid of Plexiglas cases, like somebody's science experiment gone mad. Each orange is unique in its degree of velvety discoloration and deterioration; their funky smell fills the room. Facing the oranges on the opposite wall are two quotes engraved on the brass stripping used for nameplates on office doors. The artist tells us of a dream in which she was so thin she could move inside the wires of her computer and, for the first time, felt in control of the technology. In the dream, the power gained is subversive, a result of being small enough to infiltrate the technology. In the text below, an NEC executive declares that the fact that technology is getting smaller is good news for women and that soon, "we will be able to wear computers like jewellery," preferring that women relate to technology as harmless doodads, rather than as something to understand and use to any advantage. The night I visited the exhibition, the fluorescent ceiling panels of the office building across the street reverberated beyond MacGregor's rotting grid, over acres of darkened computer screens.

The title and concept for Panya Clark's installation *Like Ancient Pots...*

began with a metaphor in a caption to a *National Geographic* photo, "Like ancient pots spilled from a drowned ship, tube sponges bulge eerily..." In the entrance foyer to the exhibition, above two leather couches, a museum-mounted colour photo of tube sponges faces a case containing reconstructed clay urns. The photo and the pots serve as a reference that we remember further on in the exhibition when we pull back a black velvet curtain and enter a small room. There on the floor are the sponges, lit by an underwater simulator (a moving variegated light source), which turns the room into the bottom of the sea. Visible through two glass portals built into the base of a corner couch, more of the ancient vases appear to be submerged far below on the seabed: perfect, theatrical, bathed in cloudy blue light.

We know that the floor couldn't be excavated that deeply, and if we are familiar with Clark's previous work we know that she is a master fabricator of objects. Is it a hologram? Is it an optical illusion? Actually a trick done with mirrors, and we sit and contemplate "nature" from our comfortable seat on a glass-bottomed boat, the sponges as warm and inviting as a flickering fire.

This isn't Disney World and it isn't a museum, but Clark's skilful recreations demand that we contemplate the world, both natural and constructed.

The installation of Barbara McGill Balfour's *Loofa Suit* features tissue clothing—pattern pieces pinned to the wall, a revolving pattern rack with pattern envelopes for the suit, a doll-size loofah suit, a businessman's pinstripe suit and an actual loofah jumpsuit rotating slowly on its hanger. A drawing referring to the act of wearing a loofah suit—"to toughen my skin and make it less sensitive to touch," seems particularly apt given the surrounding business environment.

In Tony Tavares' *Two Dozen Traveling Landscapes*, an automated, dry-cleaning clothing rack parades twenty-four 1'x 6" oil paintings. In this ironic painting factory, the scenes of exotic postcard locales, painted in thin photo-realist fashion, pass by in a solemn procession of sites. Vaguely familiar, we recognize a marketplace in Latin America, the Great Wall of China, the rooftops and the Duomo of Florence, a snow-covered Canadian barn; the brilliant blue skies of all postcards is the only common feature. While I would agree with Tavares that the tourism industry reduces the *image* of famous locales to a cliché, I wouldn't want to negate the value of travel and visiting natural or historic sites.

Francis Le Bouthillier has chosen an interior boardroom with twenty-foot ceilings and no windows for his multimedia work *The Language of Silence*. A huge black-and-white video image soundlessly repeats the disturbing image of someone manipulating the mouth of another, forcing them to chew or speak. In the middle of the room, an overhead projector scrolls enormous line drawings from public school workbooks. Banal images of alarm clocks, diaper pins, a pair of socks, a candle appear on the wall facing the video-taped indoctrination session.

Bill Crane found the book *On Becoming a Man* by Harold Shryock, M.D., and, interested in the patently absurd notion that a child could become engendered simply through instruction, uses the book in his installation *Harold's Question*. Like health-class books from

the 1960s that mixed information on sex with etiquette, one chapter depicts an older man approaching a young boy, a not-so-subtle warning of homosexuals. In *Bedtime Stories*, Crane lines the entrance hallway of the office with heraldic shields or plaques featuring images from the book. Dozens of white, middle-class, earnest American children study and do chores in their neat and tidy homes. Like icons of a code of ethics of constructed male identity, we see how orientation is read visually.

John McLachlin has several works scattered throughout the offices, washrooms and corridors of the exhibition. In *Edition*, the artist has remade pages from *The Globe and Mail*, featuring sports, entertainment, AIDS reporting and the stories uncovering the federal government's test used to identify and rout out homosexuals, known as the "fruit machine." Examples of the ridiculous list of words used in RCMP tests to identify homosexuals are circus, bagpipe, blind, camp, fish, sew, house and restaurant. McLachlin repeats these words subversively throughout the exhibition, using barely visible white Letraset on white walls, silver on wash-room mirrors.

In an office at the far end of the exhibition, a row of wooden theatre seats faces a corrugated tin, outhouse-like structure. The sound of a woman crying comes from within—soft yet desperate, but the door can't be opened. On the seats the phrases such as, "You watch the news," "She wishes she could help," and "I collapse memories" appear. In her installation *Bomb Shelters*, b.h. yael has successfully recreated the helpless, panicky feeling of watching the 6 o'clock news. A witness to pain, you can't help or change anything, and the sound of crying follows you into the other exhibition rooms.

Greg Woodbury's unsettling video installation *Requiem for a Suburban Housewife*, is cleverly installed in a vinyl siding-clad room. One enters the kitchen via a screen door that reveals the gold colour scheme familiar to escapees of any Canadian suburb. A strip of plastic-wrapped pink insulation pokes out through an unfinished wall. The kitchen window and the stove-door window are actually monitor screens. A

middle-aged woman appears on the lower video "screen," calling her husband to breakfast while above, home-movie footage shows a man mowing the lawn endlessly, marching back and forth. In the woman's monologue, she whines about her children, and nags us to eat—a stereotype of a martyred mother trapped in a claustrophobic kitchen, with the constant drone of the lawnmower in the background.

The quiet subtlety of the works by Caroline Langill and Michael Buchanan seems oddly out of place here. Langill's suspended, cast steel shapes and Buchanan's convex colour photo work are lost amongst the predominantly large-scale, multi-media installations.

While it is always exciting to see the work of a variety of artists in a large group venue, it is important for artists to show more of their work, more often, in either solo or smaller group shows.

The lack of curation is felt in this show; and by that I refer to the curation the artist carries out when grouping works for a solo show, as well as the thematic or issue-based grouping of works by an outside curator. Most of the artists in Spontaneous Combustion have worked consistently at their practice for ten years now and they deserve the chance to show often and in a variety of situations. Getting together to rent space and show together shouldn't have to be the only answer.

The works shown here by Spontaneous Combustion will be exhibited at the Atlantis Gallery in London, England, in 1994.

Jennifer Rudder is a writer who finds living in Toronto requires using a loofah.

*Edition*, John McLachlin, photolithographic plates (installation detail), 1994.

## Love thy neighbour



## Cruisin' for kicks

## Serial killer feared

## In the Seam/En couture

A project of Access Art Now  
The Eaton Centre, Level 4, Toronto  
January 7–February 6, 1999



*Catalogue*, (installation detail), Jeannie Thib, clothing, glass cases, 1994.  
Photo: Kelvin Kwong.

The images that remain with me from Jane Campion's film *The Piano* all have to do with clothes. The layers of skirts and petticoats and unbearably thick wool stockings that encased the woman's body; the triumphant moment in which her lover finds a glimpse of her pale skin through a tiny hole in the stocking; and, in particular, the scene where she is running from her husband and in which the slow motion of her flight is made all the more agonizing by the grotesque ballooning of her hoop skirts. It is as though, even as her small wiry body struggles to be free, the body given to her by these clothes is

doomed to be recaptured by her husband.

"In the Seam/En couture" is, in part, a show about how clothes define the body, and the Victorian elements that made *The Piano* such a fetish-fest occur again in a number of these pieces. The show, which includes work by members of the collective Name 10 Parts of the Body, as well as invited artists, was exhibited on the fourth level of the Eaton Centre. From its prime location, looking down upon the well-kept ficus trees and tony establishments of the top level of the mall, "In the seam/En couture" at first appears to be another boutique, with pink gowns and a thick mink coat glowing through its glass windows. When you get closer to the exhibit, the difference between the luxurious promise and the actual artifacts is almost nauseating. The coat, you realize, is made not of fur but of shorn tufts of straight, dark human hair. This piece, *Naked* by Millie Chen, recalls the many Asian women who sell their hair for a little income, often to make wigs that show up in commercial palaces like the Eaton Centre. Similarly, the rosy gown hanging in the window turns out to be a worn and stained satin party dress. Squashed like a bug between two sheets of Plexiglas, it preserves a collective memory of bad dates and awkwardly lost innocence. Yet this piece, *Perfectly Preserved From Queen* by Deborah Salac-Ashforth, also has a geometric spareness, a perfect circle of the skirt suspended on the clear plastic square, that seems to poke fun at 1960s minimalist/masculinist painting.

Since seduction and shock are as much a part of commerce as of art, "In the seam/En couture" faced a challenge by exhibiting at the Eaton Centre. The establishments on the floor below tend to dress their windows like galleries, a reminder that there is already

a heavy traffic between art and fashion. In a high-concept shopping mall, how can art comment on commodity without sliding into it? One response is to bypass the art-conscious ethos of the Eaton Centre's top-floor stores and go right to the bargain basement. *Atomic Skull*, Jennifer Hemsworth's large collage of T-shirt logos is a clever response to this dilemma. It combines nine lurid pictures of skulls—entwined with guitars and snakes rising from an atomic explosion, drinking bubbling poison—in a sort of death rocker's patchwork quilt. Because these images are so ubiquitous on teen bellies full of beer and angst, they raise questions when isolated in this way. Whether the piece celebrates the inventiveness of heavy metal culture or points out how commercial art neutralizes the ability of other sorts of images to shock, I could not decide.

Another piece that resonates with a more restrained sort of commercial display is Sandra Rechico's installation of seven wall-mounted cases filled with photos of underwear, *Pauline's Dresser* and *Stephen's Dresser*. From a distance they look just like the J. Crew catalogue, tastefully solitary, casually askew. Up closer they are a little more like Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*: a soiled and worn taxonomy of everyday life. These photographs capture the melancholy aspect of the stuff we wear, and resonate with Mindy Yan Miller's performances of sweater darning that occur at various locations in the Eaton Centre in conjunction with her piece in the show entitled *Manifestos for the Mending Booth*. Though I did not see this performance, I enjoyed the prospect of shoppers having to confront the mortality of their new clothes and the reminders of the repetitive women's work woven into the fabric.

Hanging near Miller's holey sweater is a beautifully crafted confederation that would not have looked out of place in a shop window downstairs. This piece, *Inside-Out* by E. Jane Huggard, is made of layers of a sheer fabric (pale pink again, the color of transgression) that are painted with internal organs—gory heart, kidneys and a network of veins, appears as though a light within the body might have projected

these images, in x-ray-like fashion, on the screen of fabric surrounding it. At the same time, a lot of words painted half-invisibly on the fabric, like "closure," "guard," and "obscure" deny the visibility of the body that the images of organs seem to reference. Clothing, this piece suggests, is a witness to wounds and paradoxically, both masks the supposed imperfections of the wearer and inflicts wounds of its own. Another piece explores this theme more clumsily: *Messages*, Danica Jojich's three plain white garments with words lipsticked on them. A large scarf with the words "It's hunting season/some say I'm a dear/some don't care as long as they get the kill" seems like an afterthought compared with the reflective, multilevelled works by Chen, Salac-Ashford, and Huggard.

In *Perfumer's Costume*, Evelyn Von Michalofski displays a mannequin hung with phials and sacks and labeled with names of various potions: "pure pearl powder," "liquid skin," "rose water," "aphrodisiac," "tretchelynoglycol." They reminded me of a book of my mother's that I pored over as a girl, with a honey-blond 1960s beauty on the cover, called

*Natural Beauty Secrets*. Some of the concoctions you could whip up, like a face mask of eggs and strawberries, sounded pleasant, others arcane and dangerous, with ingredients like charcoal and glycerin. Struggling to memorize these potions, I slowly internalized what, according to this book, it meant to be beautiful. The cosmetics that weigh upon Von Michalofski's mannequin, like the rich but corrupted satins and furs of the other pieces, bear testimony to the self-demolishment entailed in self-adornment.

Interestingly, this is a show about clothes, and even about clothes as commodities; it is not especially about fashion. It is easy and fun to comment on how the vagaries of fashion push and prod the body into various forms that change from decade to decade: voluptuous to chestless, waif to Amazon to waif. Kaja Silverman, in "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," argues that to mix clothes from different eras (say, go-go boots with a nipped-waist 1950s housewife dress) reveals fashion's different ideas about the body and thus deconstructs the idea that there is a natural body. (Renee Baert

quotes Silverman's essay in her clever available-by-the-yard fabric catalogue.) Too easy, fashion replied in the 1980s, mixing genres with abandon and selling them back to us. Yet the violence endured by the body that is subject to fashionable discourse remains compelling.

These works are more about clothing as armour, as straitjacket, or as amulet. Similarly, in *Catalogue*, Jeannie Thib displays evening gloves in two glass-topped cases as though they were archaeological artifacts. Each is printed with an object that you might once have found in a lady's evening bag, and its name: "scissors, steel"; "comb, plastic"; "pin, bronze." For me this piece too seem like a memorial to a long-ago violence, evoking pastel-colored hands wielding these small objects in self-defence. They echo the recorded violence in Salac-Ashford's flattened dress, Chen's bristling tufts of hair, Huggard's wan words of self-preservation.

Laura U. Marks says "attitude is the best accessory."

"In the Seam/En Couture," installation view showing in foreground: *Perfectly Preserved From Queen*, Deborah Salac-Ashford, dress and Plexiglas, 1994.



# Blacklisted Danny Tisdale

The Last of the African Americans (photo installation)  
The Last African American: In the 22nd Century (performance)  
YYZ Artists Outlet, Toronto  
January 12–February 5, 1994



The Last African American: In the 22nd Century (performance), Danny Tisdale, 1994.

**kma** I liked how you made yourself the person who discovered "you." It was great how you put yourself on display and then talked historically about people like Otabenga and Sarah Bartmann. That came across as being very strong.

**DT** I'm always curious about these things and surprised that people haven't heard of them.

**kma** Yeah, I'm always surprised! There were people in the back row who were saying "Who? The Hottentot what?"

**DT** Right, right. But at the same time, I shouldn't be surprised because there's not a wealth of information out there...

**kma** ...You don't think so? Or do you think that people don't read? It's easy

to find out information about the Hottentot Venus...there's the Sander Gilman book and other things written by Henry Louis Gates. So to me it seems that people aren't reading.

**DT** Exactly, exactly. I think they don't read and they don't take advantage of information that's out there. And I think sometimes they just don't make the connection, because information is out there. They hear it, they see it, but they're not making the connection.

**kma** This also seems to come from lack of responsibility. Last night you talked about responsibility and how in the year 1993, people had the money to...

**DT** ...do things themselves. And that's something that I really wanted to in-

clude because some people think that there's no money in the community and that we're a community of victims. But there's two sides to every coin. We see it everywhere. People have the clothes, they have the money, they have the car. You know, and my question is "What are we doing with it?" What are we spending it on, is what I should say.

Responsibility also reflects our interactions and perceptions of the differences within our community. I'm always getting into arguments with other brothers and sisters about the gay issue. I had an argument with someone before I came out here. The whole scenario was and is that most of my friends are gay. And so they were making the typical analogy that well my friends are gay, so then there's something wrong with me. Then they'll bring up the Bible...and I think "Why are you concerned with that?" You know, like don't these people have their own things to deal with in their own lives? Why make projections?

**kma** And I think it has a lot to do with people not being able to see beyond their own oppression. They can't see how they're affecting somebody else.

**DT** Right, right. It's the majority. At least in my experience. It's the majority in the States and especially in Harlem. As liberal as we are, we can be very conservative.

**kma** What do you think about some of the work that's coming out? Like when you talk about responsibility I think about some of the movies released. I was talking to a friend in Oakland, and we were discussing some of the movies that have come out, and I was saying that I felt that even though there were problems in some of the films, at the same time I think that there's a "class thing" that's coming up from the Black middle class. That they're having a real problem seeing certain aspects of Black life on screen.

**DT** You're talking about the films?

**kma** Yeah. Like when you look at a film like *Menace II Society* or *Boyz 'n the Hood*, you see that a lot of youth are trying to talk about their situation. And

the important thing that my friend in Oakland was saying was that she really liked seeing the projects in which she was raised in one of those films. I think it may have been *Straight out of Brooklyn* she was referring to. She was saying that that's how life was. She felt that an aspect of her life experience had been affirmed, although she did feel that some of the filmmakers had been irresponsible in not showing possible solutions or bringing more depth to the situation.

**DT** Right. I would have to agree with that. And I guess part of it is that these filmmakers are young and that they are looking at the immediate situation that they are in. And that situation that they're in doesn't reflect anything to do with women. It doesn't reflect anything that's outside of their world. And for the most part all that they know is the world they are in. And that they're not having the conversations that we're having. They're not going to have a conversation with somebody, for the most part, who's gay, or who's female or who's male and has a different perspective because I think they can't relate to it. It's not real to them. And it didn't become more real to me until I had more experience under my belt.

**kma** Is that how your earlier work was? Did you feel like it was narrow in any way?

**DT** No, I was lucky because my parents never gave me a lot of "don'ts." It was always just take people for who they are. Don't judge people on their face value, judge them on just who they are as you meet them and talk to them. And that has always served me well. I have trouble with other people who don't agree with that, and who don't have that perspective. But I'd have to say that my mother has always given me that kind of perspective.

**kma** Have you heard of this guy named Homer Jackson from Philadelphia? He did this show on sneakers. And there's this one youth who did a piece on a kid being killed for his shoes. There's a connection between Jackson's project and your show here. I thought it was in-

teresting looking at the cultural significance of the eight-ball jacket, the Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben's boxes, the scarves from the Bloods and the Crips, a poster for House Party...and thinking if we did disappear and people were looking back, trying to get a sense of who we were and what we were about...

**DT** ...and what we were reflecting. And that's the thing. Because of the space in the gallery, because of the budget, this show almost becomes a snippet. There's so much work that I have at home that is not here.

**kma** How big is this show?

**DT** It could probably take up a space three times this place. But it's like editing. How do you still get the point across, but still have less pieces.

**kma** Well, when did you start working on this?

**DT** About a year and a half ago.

**kma** And how did the idea come about?

**DT** It really came about through a lot of different things. Depositing myself within the title *The Last of the Mohicans*. Reflecting about what was going

on with my neighbour who's on crack—she's got three kids. Not so much that she's not taking care of the kids, but that she doesn't take care of herself. The teenagers are at fifty percent unemployment, but they're making \$2,000 a week selling drugs. And then there's what's not happening between us and then what does. What we do to each other. The main thing is that we don't talk to each other, whether it's male or female, we don't dialogue. It's about trying to find connections and start putting the responsibility back on us. So it doesn't always turn out to be a popular conversation.

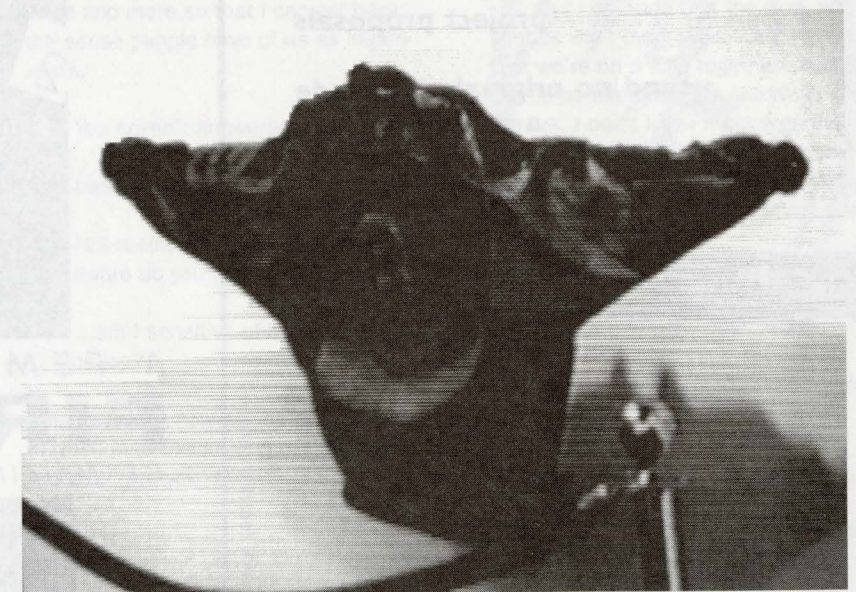
**kma** Were you always doing installations? What other type of work do you do?

**DT** I originally started doing drawings back in the early '80s. And then in '86 I graduated from Parsons with my MFA, got into my '63 Chevy Nova and drove to New York. It was too classic to believe. And in New York I didn't know anybody. I lived in my car for a week...

**kma** ...in New York?

**DT** Yeah. You see, I didn't know what was going on so...

The Last of the African Americans (installation detail), Danny Tisdale, 1994.





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kma ...ignorance was bliss!

DT Exactly! I got lucky because a week later I found this apartment that was \$128 per month in Harlem. So I'm at home, what did I do? I worked for *Interview* for three years as advertising production manager...

kma ...magazine?

DT Yeah...had to pay the bills somehow.... Well, early on when I was in California I had to find a way to pay the bills...

kma ...yeah, well that's a good way to pay them!

DT I was a Business Management major before I was an art major so I had always been in tune to the dollars, and making it work so I could do my work.

kma But that's important. Last year I met Christopher Estridge, a Black gay artist from New York. He was living in Toronto last summer and he was saying that a lot of artists should try to figure out the business side so that they don't get ripped off, so that they'll be capable of making an alternative living from their work.

DT That's majorly important. That's what I ended on when I did the artist talk today. You have to figure out a way to produce your work so that you can do the work that you want to do, without sacrificing your vision for the dollar. I realized I could do design work, freelance, pick the days I want, and the rest of the time I can do my craft.

kma What are you working on now?

DT I'm always doing publishing projects where I can use text and images together. Although when something's really hot, I end up going in the opposite direction. I would like to blur the line between use of the computer and fine art, but not in the sense where everything is coming out of the computer.

kma So...last night you got attacked as an American. And I want to know how

conscious are you of being a Black American.

DT In a way I know what that means, and in a way I don't know what that means. I was really surprised by that.

kma When you made the comment about being the last African who happens to be African American...well...considering that America is positioned as the centre of the world, that was deep.

DT Well it caught me off guard. First I look at myself as an African and then as an African American. I just happened to be born there. But I understand that there's a perspective someone would have looking from the outside in, because America is definitely all the things people say it is. And Americans are very proud, especially from a media perspective, that they can dominate somebody else. And they try to do that. Very isolationist, but at the same time they want to propagate their own propaganda. That's why I want to get out of the U.S. more and more so that I can get back the sense people have of us as imperialists.

kma You haven't answered my question.

DT I haven't?

kma Not really. How conscious are you, how aware do you feel...

DT ...am I sensitive of being an African in America?

kma Yeah, but how do you see yourself in relation to Blacks who live outside of America? Are you really aware of the difference?

DT No. No, I'm not. That's why that threw me off. That's why I made the statement that if I was in Canada...

kma ...you'd be the last African Canadian.

DT And then somebody said that...

kma ...you wouldn't.

DT So I don't understand that. Can you explain that to me?

kma I think what she was trying to say was that because American mentality sees itself as the centre, the be-all and end-all, and that Canadian identity does not, that it wouldn't be very likely for an artist from "up North" to claim to be the last African proper.

DT I see...that was the only thing that surprised me, but I imagine if I went to London or Paris then maybe the same thing would happen.

But I do hope that the work accomplishes what the goal is. That we see that we're on a ship together sailing in the same direction. It's like Noah and the Ark. I don't know if it's a generational perspective, a gender perspective...but some people will be on board and jump on the boat, and some people will be left behind.

kma Do you have any last words? I'm ending this interview now.

DT Well, I could only say that my last words would be that...

kma ...as the last African American...

DT ...well, as the last African American I would never have any last words!

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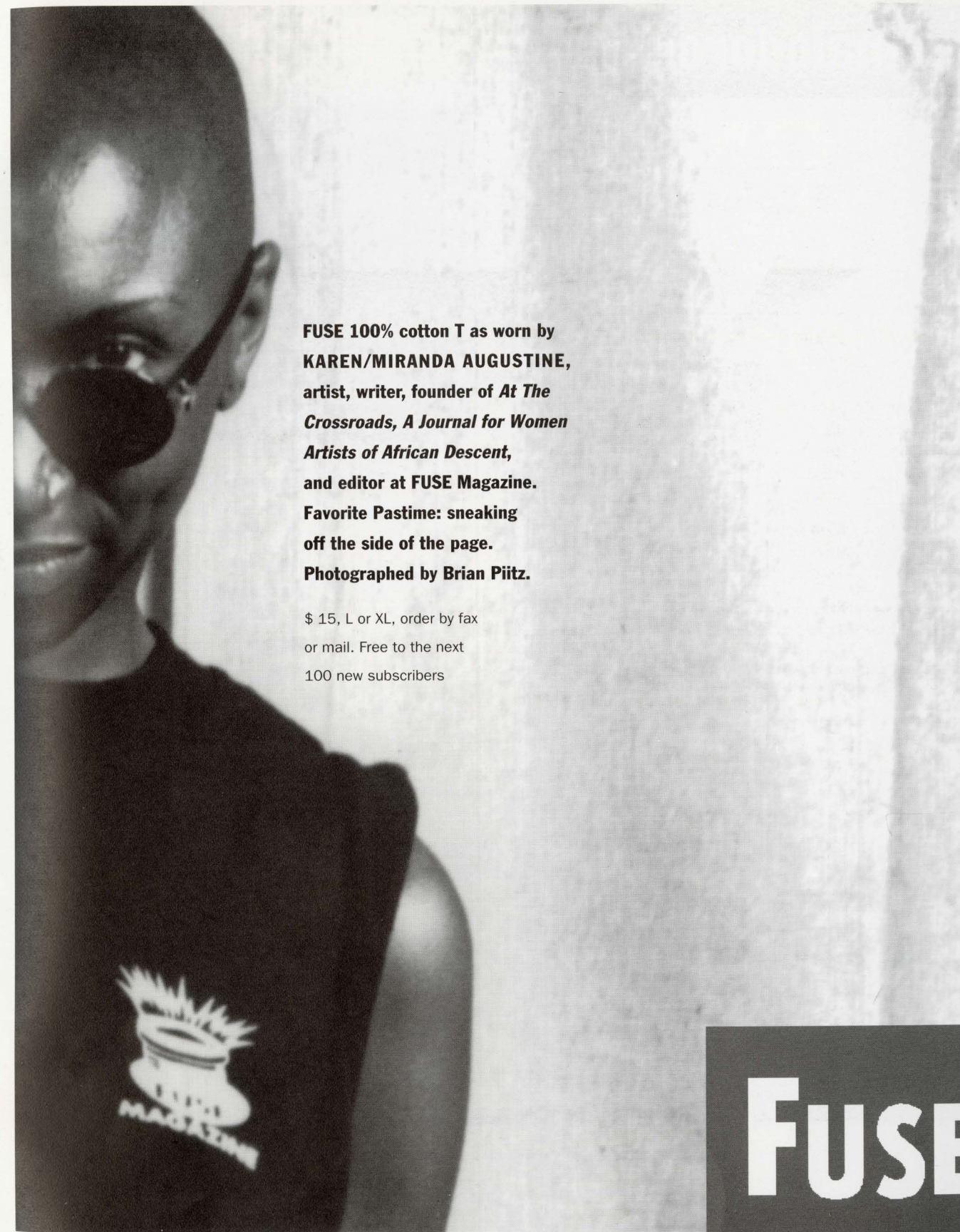
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