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9:30
X-isle
10:45
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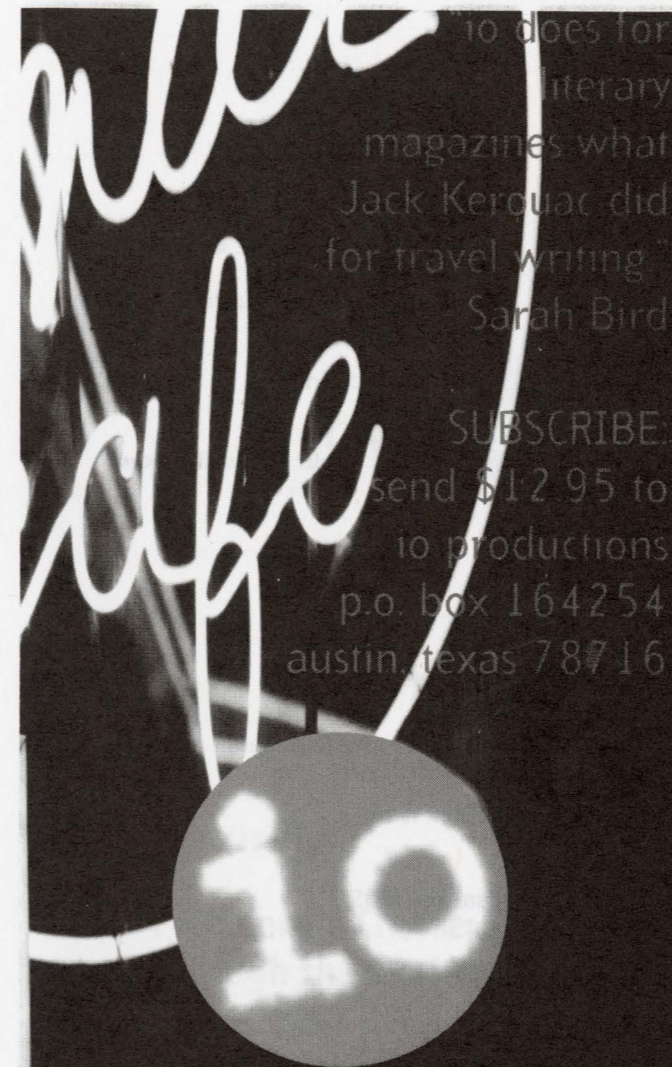
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VOL. XVII NO. 4

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Melinda Mollineaux is a visual artist of Caribbean background. She currently lives in Vancouver B.C. Shidane Abukar Arone is the name of the Somali youth killed by members of the Canadian military last year.

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Photo Brian Piitz

Reading Contemporary Canadian Art

SightLines

Edited by Jessica Bradley
and Lesley Johnstone

An anthology of 25 critical and theoretical texts written in English and French and published through the 1980s. The selection of texts is structured around aspects of critical inquiry that emerged in the 1980s and reveals the changing tenor of critical writing on art in Canada.

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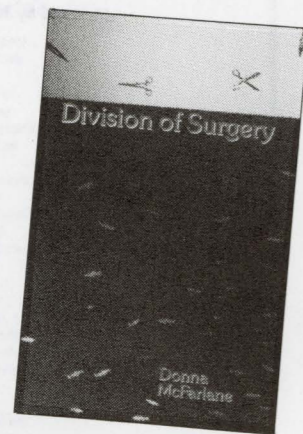
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VIDEO FROM V TAPE

Film and Video News

by Karen Tisch

New African Media

This winter, following two years of research and preparation, Full Frame Distribution collaborated with seventeen host organizations to present a nation-wide tour of contemporary works by African directors. The programme, entitled *New African Media*, featured a dynamic collection of innovative dramas and documentaries originating from Cameroon, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Niger, Mali, Kenya and Ethiopia. Directors Flora M'Mbugu-Schelling (*These Hands*), Godwin Mawuru (*Neria*) and Jean-Maire Teno (*Africa, I Will Fleece You*) travelled with the exhibition and led audience discussions in seven Canadian cities.

All of the titles included in the *New African Media* programme are now available for purchase or rental. For information contact:

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Reading Material

FUSE film/video fans will undoubtedly want to pick up *Evidence*, a special summer issue of *Take One* magazine devoted to examining the complex subject of race and representation in

Canadian cinema. Guest edited by film programmer/critic Cameron Bailey and filmmaker/critic Helen Lee, the issue both seeks out and provides evidence of the growing presence of filmmakers of colour/First Nations in our national cinema. Feature articles include *Coming Attractions*, an historical survey of Canada's "nether-cinema," *Pictures From the White Tribe*, an examination of the relationship between white filmmakers and black subjects, and *Conference Calls*, a look at "race as a special event." Reports from the regions, a producers' forum and a series of interviews with feature filmmakers round out this noteworthy publication.

Bell Canada Award for Video Art

Congratulations are due to veteran Inuit video artist Zacharias Kunuk (*Qaggiq, Nunaqpa, Saputi*) and long time producer/collaborator Norman Cohen who are the joint recipients of the 1994 Bell Canada Award for Video Art. Presented annually by the Canada Council, the \$10,000 prize acknowledges a video artist or team who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of video art in Canada. Past recipients have included Paul Wong (1991),

Robert Morin and Lorraine Dufour (1992) and Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak (1993).

The Fourth Annual Desh Pardesh

On May 4, *Desh Pardesh*, Toronto's annual festival celebrating South Asian culture in the Diaspora, kicked off with another exciting line-up of presentations and events. As in previous years, the five-day Festival encompassed a wide range of visual, literary and performing arts, with a strong film and video presence. Highlights included screenings of Michelle Mohabber's experimental docudrama *Coconut/Cane and Cutlass*, the Toronto launch of Black British director Gurinder Chadha's exuberant first feature *Bhaji on the Beach* and a four-part television adaptation of Hanif Kureishi's debut novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*. A film and video workshop conducted by Shani Mootoo and premiere screenings of new works by Ontario-based artists Neesha Dosanjh (*Is it safe to come out yet?*) and Peter Karuna (*Missing Culture*) added further excitement to an eclectic and engaging programme.

Documentary Filmmaking Celebrated

Documentary films and filmmakers took the spotlight this winter at two Toronto-based forums. In February, the Canadian Independent Film Caucus mounted the first annual *Hot Docs!*, a nation-wide competition culminating in the presentation of thirteen awards to Canadian documentary filmmakers and craftspeople. In addition to a full-scale awards ceremony, the event also included screenings of the finalists' films and a series of industry-oriented workshops. In early April, the second annual *What's Up Doc?*, presented by the National Film Board and York University, featured a similar array of events: a mini film festival, a public forum entitled *The Telling of Lives (Lies)* and an intensive weekend-long seminar for filmmakers. Dedicated to documentarian Donald Brittain, and revolving around the theme of biography, this year's conference once again took on an international focus with various filmmakers travelling to Toronto for the festivities.

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Short Fuse!

Bike path on the superhighway?

In March, CANARIE, the consortium of private and public interests engaged in developing the electronic highway, approved funding for CultureNet, an organization seeking to insure a place for artists and cultural workers in the emerging information empires.

CultureNet is a joint initiative of the Canadian Conference of the Arts and the Canadian Institute for Theatre Technology at the University of Calgary. It will be establishing electronic links between artists, institutions and organizations, and is expected to be on line by April 1995 (at a cost of \$100 per year per individual, \$200-\$250 for non-profit organizations and institutions.) The network will offer access to a number of databases relevant to those in the cultural sector.

For more information contact:
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Local Arms Length

After eighteen months of negotiations, the Toronto Arts Council

(TAC) was able to establish an arm's length relationship between itself and the Toronto City Council. It was decided in early April that City Council would approve the TAC's global budget but would neither review the allocation of funds on a case-by-case basis, nor interfere in the process of allocation. The agreement circumvents the possibility of the City vetoing decisions made by TAC juries or officers, such as occurred last summer at the Metro level with regard to the Inside Out Collective's grant for their 4th Annual Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival.

No such luck in Peterborough...

Artspace, the artist's run space in Peterborough, withdrew its request for funding under the City's Special Grants program after having been warned that their application would be "carefully reviewed" following their refusal to "apologize to the community" for exhibiting artist Karyn Ellis' work. The work, a painting on fabric celebrating International Women's Week, was installed in a display window at a central intersection of the city. Mayor Jack Doris told gallery staff that his office had received a number of complaints

regarding the installation. Although partially successful in their efforts to remove the work from public view—Ellis, in the end, decided to move the work into the gallery—the mayor and his supporters were unsuccessful in their attempts to influence or control programming decisions. The issue of public funding for culture and the arts remains an issue however as Peterborough councilors debate whether or not to completely phase out the Special Grants program over the next two years.

Average Rights?

The results of a recent inquiry into the possible disbanding of the Alberta Human Rights Commission proved hopeful although by no means definitive. After Diana Mirosh, the Alberta

Minister of Culture raised the question "Do we need a Human Rights Commission?" a board of inquiry was convinced that the commission was not, in fact, expendable. Presentations were made by a number of individuals and organizations including Mark Joslin, director of Latitude 53 Gallery in Edmonton, who reported on the homophobic responses to the *Average Good Looks* billboard installation sponsored by the gallery.

—KPA

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Public Art, Public Process

Vancouver—The Mount Pleasant Community Fence Project, sponsored by the artist-run grunt gallery in Vancouver, involves a 200 ft. red cedar picket fence enclosing a local neighbourhood garden, with each of the 400 pickets having been individually designed and carved by local children, seniors, multi-cultural groups, local artists and laymen.

The fence project is public art that includes the public in the creative process and offers participants the possibility of developing a sense of ownership and a personal relation to the community they live in. The project involved three stages of development: design, carving, and building of the fence, with the major focus being on the individual carving of pickets. Community workshops were set up in the gallery itself to allow for the completion of the pickets. Indeed, the art gallery was transformed into a fully equipped wood-working shop with chisels, wood chips, drills and sanders scattered in playful disarray.

Two artists, Pat Beaton and Haruko Okano, acted as facilitators, managing the community workshops which involved "hands-on" guidance for the par-

ticipants. (Most of the young school children's designs were made on cardboard and then transferred by the artist-facilitators to the wood picket to avoid the dangers involved in using power tools.) Many volunteers joined in to complete this labour intensive process. What seems remarkable is how this format of transferring designs from cardboard to wood increases the accessibility of the project and thus further broadens the definition of "public art" to include, regardless of age or capability, as many levels of the community as possible.

There is no doubt that such community-based participatory art projects are growing. Examples of other projects being undertaken by artists in the United States include the work of painter, Judy Baca from Los Angeles who has "orchestrated the creation of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, a nearly mile-long mural along the walls of the Tunjunga Wash of the Los Angeles River that chronicles the history of the area from prehistoric times to the present...[and] was executed by a cross section of the city's ethnic and economic groups." Another example is Jim Hubbard's Shoot Back project, a photographer from Washington,



The Mt. Pleasant Community Fence Project. Photos: Merle Addison. ©1994 grunt gallery.

D.C. who gives "homeless children cameras and film and teaches them to document their own lives, in the way they (rather than the news media) see themselves.... Hubbard is now getting photographers around the country involved in setting up similar projects in their own cities."

The Mount Pleasant Community Fence Project is a very successful move towards demystifying the art-making process and allowing a new vision of art as a part of everyday life—rather than some exclusive creative genius that only the "great" possess—to emerge. There are many art theorists such as Suzi Gablik, who wrote "The Re-Enchant-

ment of Art" in 1991, who have predicted that community-based public art projects will be the way of the future, and that the old modernist tradition of isolated artists in competition with each other will soon die out. The ease and accessibility of the fence project is, without a doubt, a method that incites and engages the creative and artistic elements that exist in all of us. Consequently, the fence comes to represent a collective and universal vision, as opposed to the segregated and cut-throat approach we maintain in relation not just to art but to most elements of our Western civilized lives.

—Charlene Mulin

Portrait of the Colonized¹ in Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach*

ROZENA MAART & SHRUTI TANNA



Rozena Maart is a writer, poet and public speaker who teaches part-time at the University of Ottawa.

Shruti Tanna is a Masters student at the University of Birmingham and has worked in the area of media for some time now. She was one of the organizers for the first Edinburgh Black Film Festival in 1993.

GURINDER CHADHA SAYS SHE has made, "...an English film, a film about Englishness, a film that ought to appeal to a universal audience." This, Chadha said in response to questions posed by both of us; in particular, one posed by Shruti about the importance of Punjabi—one of the spoken languages in this particular film—and how it forges a presence for Asian consciousness.² But which aspects of *Bhaji on the Beach* are about Englishness? As Rozena commented to Chadha, "the only thing universal about Englishness is its ability to colonize people historically and universally, and, its potential to continually colonize." It is this universality that Chadha portrays, without acknowledging that it is a portrait

of the Asian colonized as acquiescent, as shallow, stripped of everything worthy of consideration and thus having to mimic Englishness, to seek its rays of praise and approval in order to restore to themselves (and thus to Asianness) a sense of dignity and self worth.

Bhaji on the Beach depicts the lives of Asian women and the difficulties faced within contemporary urban England. The women, after being seen as located within

households where repressiveness reigns and where Asian culture in all its oppressive forms is depicted with painstaking detail, go to Blackpool on a day trip with the organizer of a women's group. It is here at Blackpool—where the lights of the beach resemble the bright lights of Bombay—that all the cultural, political and social constraints of their lives encounter the brutal realities of their unkindled imaginations. It is here that the interplay between and among Asianness and Britishness and Asianness and Englishness is played out: Sexual relations between the medical student, Hashieda, and a Black man named Oliver lead to pregnancy; the young married woman, Girda, is followed by her husband Ranjit, who wants her to return home after she has left with their young son to stay at an Asian women's shelter; a middle-aged married woman, Asha, is lured by the romance an English man, Ambrose, can offer; a middle-aged aunt visiting from Bombay seeks out the clothes and aspects of "difference" that Englishness provides and mocks the Sari while indulging in the pleasures of adornment that England offers; and, the two young Asian girls, Madhu and Ladhu, are attracted by two English lads craving the sexual spice which they believe is offered by Asian girls. And then, with the scene at a nightclub, where white male strippers not only grope and fondle the seventy-year-old woman, Pushpa, but also expose the bruises of the "battered wife," everything is brought to a halt.

The characters are never fully developed: they always appear incomplete and somewhat inadequate. Shruti sums this up by saying that "she [Chadha] has reproduced the three most common stereotypes of Asian

Facing page: Lalita Ahmed and Peter Cellier as Asha and Ambrose in *Bhaji on the Beach*, Gurinder Chadha (dir.), 35mm, 1993. Still courtesy of Alliance Releasing.

women: the sexually exotic, the rebel and the gossip." Ginder, the traditionalist turned rebel, does not fit into any one of these categories and thus gets beaten and bruised. She is, after all, the darkest skinned woman. Rozena in particular felt that this had an impact on how she read Ginder's character. "Here we see a darker skinned woman being treated as though this is her lot in life. And, the depiction of her as beaten, as the one who we identify as the humiliated, means that we cannot overlook what her devaluing is about. To me her dark skin stands out when you look at the bruise at the backdrop of this dark skin and therefore her devaluing cannot be ignored."

Simi, the rebel, feminist and organizer of the one-day summer holiday, is clearly perceived as living outside of her Asian family—unlike the women she takes out for this day trip. And, while the other women are always portrayed in relation to their men, she clearly does not have a man; in fact, nothing about her sexuality is mentioned, and thus her relationship to the other women is established as the Asian rebel who matches black leather with a rather clumsily draped Indian scarf. In an interview in the February edition of *The Asian Times*, the actor playing Simi stated that although her role was originally that of a lesbian, "[She] did not want to play Simi as a militant dyke." Simi, the good woman without a man, the secret keeper, the "clever" and patronizing feminist, sums up the sexist, patriarchal world and recites it to the rest of the women, but shows no depth as a character with respect to the responsibility she is meant to carry in the film. She is the saviour who breaks down and cries when confronted with Ranjit's violence when he slaps Girda across the face in full view of all the other women as well as his son. Thankfully, however, Asha steps in and slaps Ranjit in return and brings the violence to a halt.

When introduced to Asha early in the film we see her as overwhelmed by her world as the shopkeeper's wife. The room spins around her like the earth spins on its axis and we are reminded that this small shop is what Asha's world is—serving her husband and serving the English youth. Having viewed

this aspect of her experience, the tune "Summer Holiday" ("no more working for a day or two..."), sung in Punjabi, is suggestive of how the route to the one day of "freedom" for these women will be defined. Albert Memmi, whose writing our own title evokes, says that for the colonized there are two options: assimilation or revolt. It is a pity that here these options are but one and the same thing. For as Shruti asserts: "Gurinder Chadha tells us that freedom is whiteness; freedom is white maleness."

We see this in the romance that is so much desired by Asha, in her imagination where an English man is "brown faced," as a born-again white Asian male whose overactive tear ducts blend with rain to melt his brownness. And, we see this in the young white lads who all want their legs around Madhu and Ladhu, who just want to kiss and fondle the flesh of Asianness. Oh no, unlike Asian men, these white lads don't want to burden Asian women with babies. English colonial Ambrose wants romance not a hot-and-ready roti, and why would Asha not want this man who would take her for long

walks and serenade her? The young white flesh is ready to parade itself, to welcome Asianness by touching the forbidden fruits of colonization and expose the bruises of Asian male violence. All of this and still no sex for procreation, only for pleasure, no chores or subservience, but sex for lust and sex for pleasure. Oliver, the Black man in the film who has a relationship with Hashieda and gets her pregnant, is portrayed as childish and irresponsible, while the Asian men are all seen as demanding brutes—except for Ranjit's younger, fairer-skinned, brother. Gurinder, is this the route to Africanized Asian women's freedom?

In discussion with the film director Gurinder Chadha, we asked about these depictions and she remarked that she wanted to portray what she saw around her. Comments about what these images depict were completely dismissed. Rozena asked her about the Africanization of Asians and their relocation to England and what this process conveyed about how Asian peoples lives were defined by English colonization. "Are you suggesting that colonized peoples, like

Still from *Bhaji on the Beach*, Gurinder Chadha (dir.), 35mm, 1993. Courtesy of Alliance Releasing.



the ones you depict and say come from your own life experiences are all so acquiescent and so ready to accept their continual colonization by Englishness"? Rozena asked. To which Chadha replied, "I don't know what you're talking about. I was born in Kenya and I came here [to England] when I was very young. The film depicted my version of the life of Asians, which I see very much as English. To me, the film is an English film. The film is about Englishness." This much to the horror of many Asian onlookers, who use the term Black to describe their political identity and British to describe their national identity, and who were for the first time as an audience engaged with the cultural complexities of their intertwined lives on the public, British-produced, screen. Shruti protested Chadha's analysis of Asian compliance with Englishness and firmly stated her position on the issue of language and the places where Punjabi was spoken. "I would have liked to hear more Punjabi because it says something about Asianness and the fact that we do not only speak it out of the sight of the English but rather whether they are present or not,"

Shruti asserted. "It is something that Asian people have got and use to define ourselves in opposition to Englishness and it's really never present in the film," she continued. Chadha was rather dismissive of both our remarks...

Chadha's short, dismissive replies minimized many of the aspects that we feel need to be explored in film depictions of colonized peoples and the ways in which this colonization is reinforced and thrust forward cinematographically. We both feel that Chadha's screen productions of Asian women ought to be challenged, since like Shruti, born in Uganda and having lived in England ever since, Chadha has also relocated from Africa where her parents were brought from colonized India by the English who, with their divide-and-conquer strategies located the Asian as secondary colonizer of Indigenous Africans. The relationship Asians have with Africans, as Africanized Asians, has to be addressed since not only are many languages like Gujarati, Hindi and Punjabi mixed with Swahili and other African languages, these languages, in their spokenness

Kim Vithana as Ginder in *Bhaji on the Beach*, 1993.



convey the extent to which English colonization determined the identity and consciousness of Asian people.

There are difficult and memorable moments in the film, some of which are currently very much the topic of dispute in England. There is the scene where Hashieda anticipates the response of her parents and performs her acts of rebellion in a Hindu temple where she manoeuvres herself into a tight skirt and sports a cigarette in a hand with long polished fingernails assuming a rather exaggerated posture of contempt. She destroys various religious ornaments and behaves as a rebel who vulgarizes and mocks the temple as a site of religious worship. As viewers, we wanted to engage with the rebellion and understand its significance. This scene is taken from an Indian film *Pirva Aur Pinchin*, although the context is, indeed, very different here; for in *Bhaji on the Beach* we see rebellion as a performance of acquiescence to Englishness. It thus not only restores the English colonial value of Indian colonization which brought India into modernity, but because the expression of modernity by colonized people is seen as showing contempt of Indianess by prioritizing a desirousness of Englishness, it also justifies the significance of the British Raj.

Bhaji on the Beach's entertainment qualities are the songs sung, the vibrant use of colour in the form of dress, the bright lights of Blackpool and the visibility of Asianness on the British screen. Torn between these little pleasures and the deeper political issues of representation, as viewers we encourage people to see it and talk about the implications of these representations and their significance for Asian consciousness and Asian presence within Britain and the Asian Diaspora.

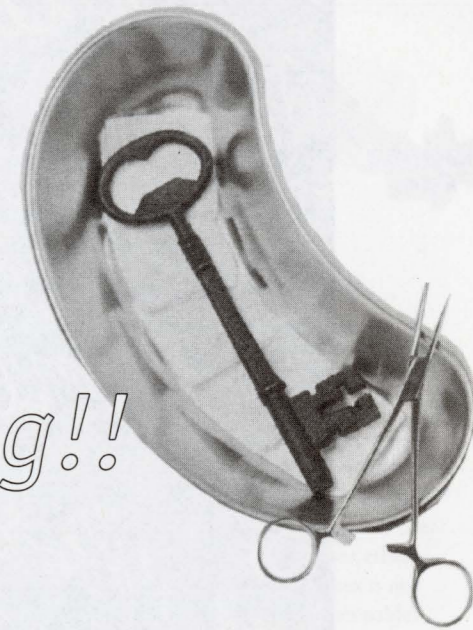
NOTES

¹ The title is taken from one of Albert Memmi's chapters in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.

² The term "Asian" is very commonly used to refer to South Asian; both are used in England and the rest of Britain to mean people who trace their heritage from India and the Indian subcontinent. For example, the identity of the Chinese is discussed under the title "Chinese" and not under "Asia" or South Asian

Multiculturalism and AIDS— *Doing the Right Thing!!*

JOSÉ FRANCISCO IBAÑEZ-CARRASCO



CLASSISM, HETEROSEXISM, AGEISM, RACISM, ableism, and many other 'isms contained in the obsessive mantra of political correctness are intimately linked to HIV and AIDS. Community-based AIDS educators are aware of these subtle connections, but do not always have the energy and time to follow the threads that weave these themes into one quilt. AIDS educators need to work within a flexible definition of multiculturalism that allows the various issues to surface, be acknowledged and be resolved. We need to go beyond the song-dance-food simulacrum of tolerance, good will and diversity, to visit those cultural gray areas where being "polite" and "nice" is not enough.

What is culture? I resist citing one single erudite definition. We *do* culture the way yuppies do lunch. This is how the African American phrase "do the right thing" acquires its complex meaning (Coco Fusco 1992). We *do* culture when we share, among other possibilities, a tradition, a language, a discourse, a set of oppressive or liberating norms (e.g. anti-sodomy laws, censorship laws, non-discrimination policies), a political stance, a set of beliefs, a lifestyle (e.g., vegetarianism, sadomasochism), a way of living (e.g., ethics, morals) and an iconography (a way of representing and seeing ourselves—gay clone, grunge, yuppie, etc.).

Sharing a culture does not mean being identical, thinking or looking alike. Not all Latinos are passionate, not all gringos are cold, lesbians are not man-haters, Americans are not necessarily tacky and obnoxious, immigrants are not any more often on welfare than non-immigrants, gay men are not pedophiles, men are not always rational and restrained. The complicated building of

stereotypes does not shelter anyone and it has to be demolished.

This is what makes AIDS work interesting and challenging. The "safer sex model" of HIV/AIDS prevention education does not carefully consider the issues of multiculturalism. "Safer sex" describes the mechanics of sex as a universal set of easy-to-follow, one-size-fits-all instructions (e.g., first negotiate, second put condom on, etc.) in a phallogocentric approach (i.e., it revolves around the male genitalia). "Safer sex" describes the identities of those involved as static and solid (i.e., being homosexual is unsafe by definition). We are not puppets or mannequins; RuPaul, supermodel of the world and drag queen sensation, would say that we are models working the social runway...*move to the right, now move to the left, ¡¡ be ahí la diferencia !!* As an AIDS educator, I need to own my definition of multiculturalism. If you need to own yours, I have one thing to say: "You better work!"

Multiculturalism is an umbrella concept. It means that desirable members of many cultures could "just get along" like Rodney King said in 1992, and live together happily ever after. It also means that it is not easy to achieve this utopia. Multiculturalism reflects the everyday conflicts and struggles between people who are different or made different by systemic operations (e.g., persons on welfare are made to feel or see themselves as "inferior").

Popular belief about multiculturalism, supported by patronizing and manipulatory social-marketing schemes of government, would have us believe that we are Salvadorians, Punjabis, Chinese, Filipinos, Polish, French, Anglos and many other cultural groups living in one blissful land. Multiculturalism should reflect the impact of the con-



stant border-crossing of peoples into what are perceived as separated and contested territories; multiculturalism should account for the experiences of migration and how those experiences are sanctioned (many times unfairly) by institutions like Immigration Canada. Multiculturalism should foster an understanding of gay couples living on opposite sides of the Canada/U.S./Mexico borders (sometimes living with HIV as well) and how immigration laws discriminate against individuals who need to reunite. In discussions regarding HIV infection, we need to look at people migrating from urban to rural areas, explain why and how transmission happens and what the impact is on our prevention, education and support efforts. In AIDS education, it is imperative to work from an inclusive model of multiculturalism.

As a Latino gay man living with AIDS, I cannot expect everyone to come to my turf and fight my battles, but I expect to foster an understanding of the histories and migrations that have brought me to this position today. I need you to hear about my working class background and the "American dream" that led me and many of my friends northbound at a time when there seemed to be no hope of destructing a murderous dictatorship installed more than a decade ago in my country. I need you to hear how lonely and difficult those first years were and how each one of us got infected with HIV because there had been little to no information available. I need you to hear about the many immigrants who die in the most tragic invisibility (sometimes even unreported by inept physicians or ashamed relatives).

Multiculturalism is about "families of origin" (Mom & Dad) and "families of choice" (lovers, friends, allies). Multiculturalism recognizes the existence of many cultures and looks at their value. A friend of mine wrote that "some cultures can be called 'better' than others to the extent that they create and sustain conditions for human beings which are more pleasant, more just and more productive...In this sense a culture based on slavery is 'worse' than other social forms" (de Castell 1990). I could not say it better. This is why most AIDS educators working in a multicultural environment react strongly against the "moral majority," "neo-Nazis," "family right groups," "extreme right" and others who define themselves as holier-than-thou, advocating for the destruction of homosexuals, the exodus of "foreigners," and the containment of the "Asian invasion," and other "final solutions." One ominous sign of their impact is the growing language of inclusion these "new right" groups have adopted in order to seduce the conservative segments of the "ethno-cultural" population (see Cindy Patton in *Fear of a Queer Planet*, Michael Warner, ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Some groups' interests are better served by augmenting the distances between the struggles for lesbian and gay and civil rights; for some it is "divide and rule." This is not to say that all struggles are identical or comparable but that their common themes (anti-discrimination, employment equity, gender equity and intersections (lesbians of colour) are a source of strength for political action.

I have heard people describe racism as an innate capacity of hatred, reminding me of the nature/nurture debate about homosexuality. Were we born like that? We all develop "good" and "bad" attitudes and behaviours based on some biological potentialities, however, this is not an individual process but a development that happens at the core of a collectivity of human beings. We have created and institutionalized systems and structures that promote hatred and make the actual reasons invisible to us. Have you wondered who benefits from your intolerance and prejudice?

AIDS educators should understand that no one is essentially or exclusively homosexual, ethnic, good or bad, and that people inhabit many worlds at the same time. Unfortunately, connections between HIV, homosexuality, alternative sexual practices, and ethnic background are not well understood yet. Any individual can simultaneously be a member of an ethnic group, a disabled person, a union leader, a manager, a student, a parent, a lover, a hockey player and a gay man. Living in parallel worlds, sometimes at odds with each other, is extremely difficult. Marlon Riggs' brilliant documentary *Tongues Untied* explores issues of HIV/AIDS, racism, homophobia and internalized homophobia within the African American community. Crossing from one country to another puts immigrants at risk. Mexicans have produced AIDS educational videos—*Si fuéramos Angeles*, 1992 and *Mal Paso*, 1991—to show the risks faced by many immigrants in the U.S.

These are random examples of work that explores complex HIV/AIDS-related issues not always present in prevention education. How much of this has been done in Canada? How far ahead have we gone from the government's National Consultation Meetings in 1989 and 1990 that produced a glossy bilingual (French and English) report? I see with dismay that ethno-cultural is becoming trendy lately. I wonder whether there were immigrants in Canada before the '90s. Resentful? Yes!! Our impact, our voice, our power in Canadian society is still minimal—AIDS education is just a reflection of that. We are still molding our HIV work with Anglo cookie cutters, doing "safer sex"

workshops, printing posters with young studs (black or Asian this time), writing brochures about being "proud" and "out" and translating, almost literally, a language about safety that does not describe our realities (i.e. negotiation of safer sex, eroticizing the condom).

Funding agencies put community-based groups between a rock and a hard place; we have to reproduce what they think is effective (and cost effective). Community-based groups should take more risks because we may be the only ones willing to do different forms of AIDS education. For instance, while doing HIV work in a grassroots AIDS service organization in Chile, I realized that most of its leaders had a history of political involvement. The same can be said about those doing AIDS work in the Latino community in Vancouver. In these groups it is implicitly understood that education is not always "safe."

Forms of HIV/AIDS prevention education premised on multiculturalism help us understand that not everyone is totally "gay" or "promiscuous" or "racist" but that we do culture and by doing it everyday differently we constantly take risks. ACT UP's slogan Silence = Death compelled many HIV-positive people to take action, producing a slogan that reflected their experiences of immigrants and people of minority groups: Change = Risk. The safer sex model of AIDS education fails to tell us this.

One simple way of making ourselves aware of our lack of cultural awareness is to follow a simple test: write down six names of well-known Asian Canadians, First Nations people, openly lesbian and gay people, and Canadian women or men living (or who lived) with HIV/AIDS. How many can you come up with? What is the meaning of this? Multiculturalism in AIDS education fights prejudice, homo/xenophobia, and invisibility. In multicultural AIDS education we fight for visibility on several fronts. We work hard, constantly asserting that being Canadian does not mean being Anglo, being Canadian is not the same as being American. Some groups in society do not want "special rights" but deserve "equal rights" and usually start their work from a disadvantaged posi-

tion. Furthermore, we understand that genders are not identical but equal, that sexual orientation is not only a lifestyle, that the well-being of immigrants and illegal immigrants does have an impact on our reality.

As an AIDS educator, when I think that my workshops, testimonials, brochures and political work need to be "multicultural," I do not target one colour or language. I find the "black and white" approach to multiculturalism racist and self-defeating. I find that multiculturalism might be stuck on the "black or white," "heterosexual or homosexual," "us or them" binaries.

People tell me that I am a "good" HIV-positive person because I do community work and educate others. What about those who do not feel the call to be activists? Are they out there spreading AIDS? No, they are most likely struggling to take care of themselves. Our work needs to be resourceful, flexible and accessible. Accordingly, at Grupo VIDA, the Latin American committee for HIV/AIDS Prevention Education, our mandate is to educate people who will educate others thus producing a ripple effect *como la piedra caída en el agua que hace muchas ondas*. The content of AIDS work has to come from those people we presume to be representing.

When I think "multiculturally," I think of the endless intersections of issues for those left at the margins (homeless white people, Latinas in prison) and I think that *nadie está libre de polvo y paja*. I see that in Vancouver, immigrant workers continually get the run around from physicians when they request to be tested for HIV. Men and women who do not speak "good" English do not get the promised "pre-" and "post-test-counselling" (usually used as a metaphor for basic information). Ministry of Social Services and Housing workers do not have the time (or take the time) to inform people living with HIV/AIDS about their options and possibilities. Doctors still communicate with "patients" using obscure and threatening jargon such as "CD4s," "t-cells" and "anti-viral drugs." "Safe sex" posters and brochures for gay men still show made-by-Nautilus bodies that do not represent people I know with cellulite, pimples and ugly hairdos.

In multicultural AIDS education we need to examine those guidelines that speak of containment (quarantine, prison, abstinence, "just say no" and "high = high risk"), which have not stopped people from having unprotected sex; we need to avoid "safer sex" models that emphasize Anglo rationality (i.e. twelve-step programmes), Protestant ethics, and heterosexist ideologies (i.e. if sex is not for reproductive purposes, it is abominable) as the safest ways of looking at the world. Multicultural AIDS education goes beyond the body to making the connections between physical and mental health, spirituality, poverty, well-being, ethnic background, etc.

This job is hard (and underpaid!!). On more than one occasion I have had to bite my lip to not speak out against homophobic remarks at AIDS-related workshops where I have chosen to not be "out." More than once I have not expressed my anger when a gay man comes up with a racist (or misogynist) comment or joke. My explanation of multiculturalism is strategic. It does not condone racism, sexism or classism; it seeks to understand many realities.

Some basic strategies to respond to offensive remarks: don't ignore (the remark); engage and explain; don't be afraid of possible tension or conflict; be aware of your own attitudes and limitations; strive towards understanding, not guilt; be a role model; be non-judgmental, but know the bottom line. These are a few starting points that are quite useful to facilitate better relationships.

On a personal level, I am not able to live outside the contradictions of multiculturalism. An HIV/AIDS prevention education that does not acknowledge my horror and my fears is not, in my view, a worthwhile education. As a gay man, as a man living with AIDS, as a Latino, as a Canadian, I exhibit on the map of my body the marks of history, migration, treatment and pleasure. My body is the evidence of a journey. Multiculturalism is a tool—a compass—that helps me find my way. It is one of the few ways I have of understanding my life and that of others.



New Video Realities In A New East Europe A Personal Report

NINA CZEGLÉDY

Nina Czegledy makes videos, mostly documentaries. She participates in cultural exchange programmes between Canada and Europe, and is a contributor to several Hungarian art magazines.

NOVEMBER 1993, WHEN I STEPPED FROM A train onto the streets of fog-bound Dessau in the former East Germany, saw the beginning of my participation in three international video events held in East Europe: "OSTranenie, Shattered Myths, New Realities" in Dessau, East Germany, "EX ORIENTE LUX" in Bucharest, Romania, and "Meleg, The First Budapest Gay and Lesbian International Film and Video Festival" in my native Hungary.

"OSTranenie," a festival of video installations, screenings, performances and presentations, was held at Dessau's newly refurbished Bauhaus Building—the only bright spot in a desolate, post-communist twilight zone. The festival (whose title comes from a Russian word meaning "estrangement") was organized by Canadian Stephen Kovacs in collaboration with Inke Arns. "OSTranenie" signified a fresh East European vitality and the emergence of a new media scene which combines the work of ex-dissident conceptual artists, young computer wizards, social activists and rock-video neophytes.

The most striking feature of the festival was its video installations and performances, which occupied space in the exhibition hall, the lobby, the staircases and two external sites.

In Gustav Hamos' interactive installation, *The Hammer on the Anvil*, a small black and white monitor rested on an anvil, with a hammer beside it. From the monitor a young man kept asking for someone to "free him," screaming ever louder as if to incite the viewer to act—even, in the response hoped for by the artist, to smash the monitor. Hamos was artist-in-residence at Toronto's Trinity Square Video, in 1988.

In *The Supper at Last*, Croatian artist Dalibor Martins envisaged a table as "a scene of sacrifice...a surface of memory." Thirteen place settings were projected onto a six-metre long table by three projectors suspended from the ceiling, and through thirteen audio channels the "voices" of a number of twentieth-century icons were heard. The video for this installation was produced at the Western Front in Vancouver, with the active participation of a number of Canadian artists, a fact that emphasizes the Canadian connection with this and the other festivals.

Outstanding for its sheer elegant simplicity was Jozef Robakowski's Videofilm *Maszyna/lidle line*, which consisted of a film strip, marked and scratched, then looped through a motorized bicycle wheel, and projected onto a monitor. The installation reflected Robakowski's long-term fascination with small cinema objects, and his feeling "...that video art needs some new (non-political) infusion and energy to revitalize it."

Polish artist Barbara Konopka was nominated at "OSTranenie" as one of five outstanding emerging artists. Her dramatic sculptural video installation, *Peripatetic Energy*, consisted of a tower with four monitors on top, and was based on the Slav myth of Svarog, a four-headed god of fire, sun and war.

The Big Hysterical Curve, by Grate Cord-Hinrich and Birgit Richard from Germany, was one of the most enjoyable performances of the festival. Shrouded by a translucent cylindrical contraption, with partly overlapping video images, the performers played freely improvised music based on the work of musicians from Hungary, Poland and Russia.

Facing page: Alexander Patatics, installation at "EX ORIENTE LUX," April, 1993, Bucharest (Romania).

Arguably the most popular screenings at "OSTranenie" were those featuring the work of prize-winning Slovenian artist Marina Griznic. In *Three Sisters*, an impeccably edited twenty-eight minute tape which won first prize at the 1992 Bonn Festival, Griznic and her long-time collaborator Aina Smid presented current documentary war footage from Croatia, integrated into an imaginary video story about history, war and love. In *The Woman Who Constantly Talks*, five women spoke incessantly, using their own words and body gestures to voice the myths, lies and fears about the lost territories of their bodies.

When asked about the present situation in her home country, Griznic articulated her relationship to the war. "Here I sit in this cafe, telling you stories, while people die there all the time. My position is obscure, I am free to travel and it is only through my work that, I feel, I am able to talk about the situation. I am very angry that nobody is doing anything about the crisis, but for me, work is my only weapon."

By far the most enterprising group of participants in "OSTranenie" came from Russia, where, as Konstantin Mitenev (whose "video ballet" *Screen Dream* premiered at Dessau) emphasized, "it is still difficult to show videos...most of the screenings are private or informal." Mitenev and his partner Nina Vlahova produced *Screen Dream* at St. Petersburg's Biolooid Factory in 1992. It was shot on Betacam and edited at facilities rented from Russian TV, a feat which remains a mystery to me.

In general the Russian works, both disturbing and lyrical, were presented in a style which was lively, funny, contradictory, sometimes serious and mostly unpretentious.

Roman Gruzov exemplifies a brand new kind of Russian artist: cynical, innovative, well-informed and absolutely up-to-date on the international rock scene. His frenetic short rock-video tape, *Messer fur Frau Muller* was shot in the backyards of St. Petersburg, which he persists in calling "Leningrad." To my curious inquiries about this reference to his native city, the bejewelled, punkish looking artist replied with a grin: "I am a conservative—besides, how do you know how long it will be called St. Petersburg?"



From *Aus der Schlinge der Zeit*, Barbara Konopka, video-performance, 1992, Poland. Photo József Robakowski.

Two years ago I met Vladislav Mamyshev, a Monroe-impersonator who has created quite a stir in St. Petersburg and as far abroad as *The New York Times*. Together with Yuris Lesznyik he has staged video performances and produced the legendary *Pirate TV* video series. None of this prepared me for the brief and extremely powerful *A bad mark again*, which dealt with sadomasochistic relations in Soviet families. The tape, produced by Mamyshev and Timur Novikov, was a vivid evocation of how fathers punish their sons for bad school marks.

Aleksandr Kuprin's work reflects the often shocking stories of Russia's most marginalized people. *Samozachvat*, a love story, takes place in Moscow's "dead city," a supposedly empty quarter inhabited by squatters; *Ostrov (The Island)* visits a house full of ancient but formerly well known actors.

In addition to screenings and installations, *Handshake*, the interactive "info-terminal" was a well-attended practical feature of the festival. Joachim Blank manned this electronic communication experiment. "This is a non-commercial worldwide InterNet project," Blank explained, "with virtual participation from East and West. Through this venue we seek to establish a forum for electronic art by asking questions such as: How do people work and survive in East Europe as artists? What do we mean today by electronic art, and what does it mean for artists? What are the connections between conceptual art and electronic information?"

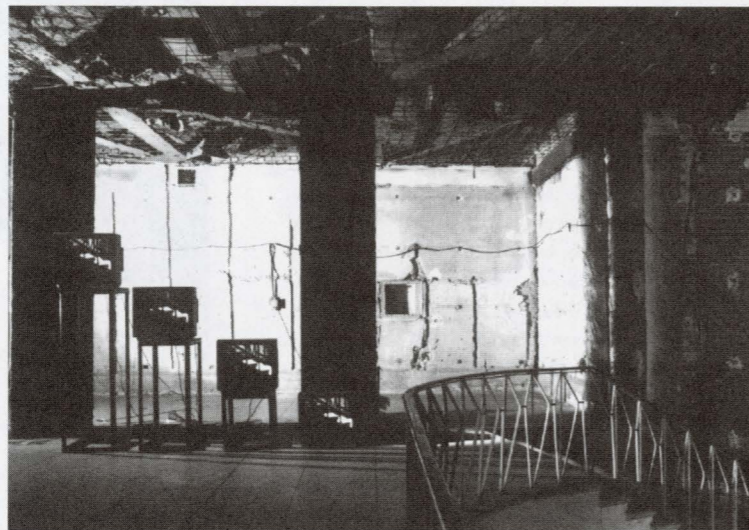
A mid-winter of deep snow and ice greeted my arrival in Bucharest. The airport arrival hall reminded me of my youth in Stalinist Hungary—suspicious officials, uncleared roads, unheated interiors, unkept washrooms... But the "EX ORIENTE LUX" organizers and participating artists were all very friendly and hospitable, inviting us into their studios and showing us the town. Despite aborted renovations, the unheated cavernous interior of Dalles Hall—formerly a contemporary art centre, damaged in the 1989 revolution—served as exhibition space for ten complex video sculptures, and for platform presentations.

"EX ORIENTE LUX" was the first ever video event in Bucharest. The festival was initiated by the New York-based Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts, which extended its operations in 1992 and established a network in thirteen East European countries. The Bucharest Centre, which opened at the beginning of April 1993, facilitated "EX ORIENTE LUX." "The equipment was most difficult to obtain, as there exists no industrial sponsorship for this type of exhibition in Romania," said Corrine Fery-von Arx, Festival Co-Director. "In the end, the Soros Foundation bought all the necessary equipment, and loaned it to the Festival for the duration of the exhibition. After the show, all of it will be donated to schools and various institutions by the Foundation."

Despite a dearth of experience in Romania, where video art has been virtually



The Woman Who Constantly Talks, Marina Grzinic, video, 1993, Slovenia.



Urban Medium, Judit Egyed, video installation at "EX ORIENTE LUX," April, 1993, Bucharest (Romania).

nonexistent, over thirty artists sent in proposals for installations, and in July an international jury selected twelve projects. Keiko Sei (a Prague-based Japanese media artist) and Gert Lovink (Holland's video wizard) were hired as consultants to discuss each project in detail with the artists and to provide technical advice. While some of the participants had used video previously to record performances, none had created an installation. It is to the credit of both Lovink and Sei, but especially to the Romanian participants, that the quality of the work displayed in Dalles Hall permitted comparisons on an international scale.

On a Saturday afternoon I met with some of the Romanians to discuss their individual projects and their present situation as artists in Romania. "Before the revolution everybody was forced underground.... The avant-garde is theoretically more accepted now, but in reality nobody is interested," commented Alexander Patatics.

"Ours is a post-revolutionary Romanian political art and *Draculand*, our installation, is a reality park...unlike Disneyland, where you go only for pleasure," explained Jozsef Kiraly, one of the founding members of the *subREAL* multimedia group. At the entrance to *Draculand*, one was confronted first with

advertising icons full of sexual allusions, and then with violent close-ups of barking wild dogs—a dangerous feature of Bucharest's backstreets. The installation also contained historical images of the bloodthirsty Erzsebet Bathory and Dracula.

"When I started to work on [my] project, I analyzed the medium of video and how it reflects situations in two dimensions," said Judit Egyed, whose background is in sculpture, and whose video work is both personal and powerfully expressive. In *Urban Medium*, her prize-winning installation, four monitors were arranged in stepwise fashion, displaying close-ups of feet moving up and down a turn-of-the-century staircase.

Another artist, Dan Perjovschi, probably reflected the experience of more than one participant when he said: "This was the first time I have worked in this medium, not as a recording device, but as an art form. I have gained confidence, and now it feels natural to graduate from computer to video."

The public presentations at "EX ORIENTE LUX" proved to be very popular. On four consecutive days, from morning to night, hundreds of artists and students filled the unheated building to listen to artists and curators from all over the world, including

Margaret Morse, Dieter Daniels and Woody Vasulka.

Following my own presentation of *Shifting Paradigms, Modèles Mouvants*—a compilation of work by Canadian women artists—a young Romanian woman approached me with a shy smile. After several confused moments she called over her friends, all art history students, and one of them acted as translator. "We want to thank you especially," she said. "Information about feminism is very limited in Romania, and we know only of radical feminist art. It was a revelation for us to see the lyrical and philosophical videos by Canadian women artists."



Between November 26 and 30, 1993, the newly refurbished Toldi Cinema of Budapest hosted "Meleg, The First Budapest Gay and Lesbian Film Festival" (where I presented a Canadian and U.S. video art programme, curated by myself and Chris Hill of Hallwalls, Buffalo). The literal translation of "Meleg" is "warm," the colloquial Hungarian term for gay. While film and video presentations were central to the schedule, the event also included two full days of conferences, a gay community meeting and other events con-

cerning AIDS awareness. On Sunday afternoon an AIDS march took place. And on December 1, free anonymous testing was provided at three Metro stations, courtesy of the Hungarian AIDS Foundation.

The festival was organized by the legendary Bela Balazs Experimental Film Studio (BBS), which, according to director Gyorgy Durst, has "always worked on projects which were not necessarily to the taste of the average citizen." Durst continued: "This festival is about acceptance of 'others'—precisely because this is right now the most urgent issue. Over forty films and videos will be screened...films and videos which can never, or very seldom, be seen in Hungary."

The concept of the festival, which included twelve international presenters and was the first of its kind in Central Europe, originated with its coordinator, Adele Eisenstein, who arrived in Budapest two years ago from her native New York. In spite of initial public enthusiasm for her idea, support and funds proved hard to obtain—partly due to the intense stigma that homosexuality still carries in Central Europe. The assistance and cooperation of foreign cultural institutions became essential to the realization of the project. "Homosexuality is still very much a taboo subject in Hungary, and in the whole region, and with these films, we would like to convey the message that one should be allowed to express one's self, without fear or persecution," said Eisenstein.

"Meleg" opened with a gay community meeting on Friday November 26, followed on Saturday by conferences on Media & Minorities and AIDS. Derek Jarman's *Blue* opened the film programme, followed by Cyril Collard's *Les nuits fauves*. On the second night, the much acclaimed *Paris is Burning* by Jennie Livingston was shown, as well as the rarely screened *Un chant d'amour*, by Jean Genet. A retrospective of Barbara Hammer's work, including *Nitrate Kisses*, drew a large audience, and *Before Stonewall* was presented in person by Greta Schiller.

One of the most intriguing films, Rosa von Praunheim's *I Am My Own Woman*, received a standing ovation. The German docudrama related the story of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a man who lived as a woman

and survived both the Nazi era and government persecution and ridicule in post-war East Germany. After the war, Mahlsdorf single-handedly restored the ruins of a bombed mansion, turning it into an elegant museum. The exquisite simplicity of von Praunheim's style emphasized the deceptiveness of Mahlsdorf's serene personality, which masks the iron determination necessary to endure such terrible hardships.

In spite of a funding lack that prohibited subtitles or translation, the festival auditorium was packed, with people sitting on the floor, in the aisles and spilling out into the lobby. Estimated attendance for the six-day period was between 4,500 and 5,000 people, and several film screenings had to be repeated. Media coverage included programmes on Hungarian television and radio stations, reports and reviews in Hungarian dailies, weeklies and monthlies, in addition to several English papers.

December 1 was marked by a special screening of AIDS-related films and videos. According to journalist Peter J. Lang, "It is conservatively estimated that in Hungary there are more than 2,000 people who are HIV positive or living with AIDS, and there is a tendency to regard the disease as a minor homosexual problem. However, heterosexual infections are rising and since 1990 the number of AIDS cases [has] doubled in Hungary."

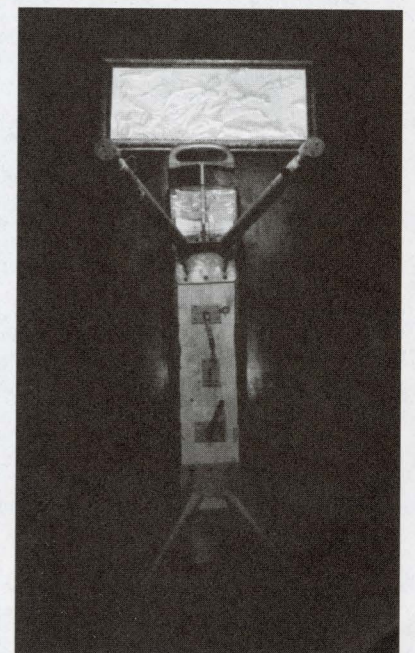
Amazing Grace, a haunting love story by Hungarian-born Amos Gutman, was set in Tel Aviv. Like Collard, Gutman died of AIDS earlier this year. Yann Beauvais from France introduced three experimental AIDS films and Anne Thew from Britain presented *Cling Film*, a superbly edited film with a throbbing soundtrack. Canadian and U.S. videos included *Second Decade* and Public Service Announcements. The day ended with Frank Franca and Allen Frame's *Electric Blanket* slide show, first shown in New York in 1990 and reorganized at every showing to include photos and text from the local community.

There was a noticeable shortage of Hungarian gay films on the programme. According to Adele Eisenstein, the few films she could find were of poor technical or artistic quality and would suffer from com-

parison with the professionally produced Western films. In addition, Hungary's gay community is extremely closeted. When organizing the festival's opening-night gay community meeting, Eisenstein found that many leaders of local gay organizations refused to attend unless she banned photographers and video cameras, and this policy was maintained throughout the festival. Anxious to avoid unpleasant incidents, the organizers hired hefty bodyguards who took turns guarding the cinema entrance. Happily, no incidents were reported during the six days of screenings which went on from five PM to midnight, followed by a mass exodus to the Angel club, where some of the drinks were free!

Though we sometimes look from our sheltered Canadian videoscope towards Western Europe, we often forget the East. But East European video and film events have a clearly compelling, irresistible buzz. It would be of mutual benefit to expand our horizons and engage in the kind of artistic dialogue that would promote reciprocity and strengthen understanding between the video and film communities of East and West.

Draculand, subREAL, multimedia installation at "EX ORIENTE LUX," April, 1993, Bucharest (Romania).



They demanded a witness.

I wanted not to see.



Shidane Abukar Arone

CLARA SACCHETTI & TODD DUFRESNE

President's Choice Through the Looking Glass

Loblaws, Nichol, & Specular Consumption

Food which [sic] is worth eating is worth discussing.¹

Far from heightening our awareness of food in its diverse social contexts, the everyday consumption of food usually makes us mute to anything but its price, taste, caloric value, and other such niceties. Yet food has a sordid history of its own and has always been close to the centre of capitalist ventures, including, for instance, the insatiable search for spice which encouraged Columbus to search out a new trade route to the Indies. Although we no longer follow Claude Levi-Strauss's dictum that "food has to be good to think with before it is good to eat," we cannot avoid finding or even inventing meaning around which to frame the consumption of food. For food, like everything else in popular culture, absolutely reeks with potential meanings—even if, in the end, our conceptual grasp of food flitters away just like flavours on our fickle taste buds.

With this in mind, we have chosen to "read" the highly visible success of Canada's "President's Choice" (PC) products of Loblaw Cos. Ltd. After all, the President himself, Dave Nichol, understands that food has meaning, and that meaning can be developed, marketed, packaged, and mass consumed. To this end, we describe in some detail the socio-economic climate of big business, since sheer profit is an integral part of the cultural pie at Loblaw. In any case, business culture is a dimension of popular culture.

We have organized our analysis into four sections. In the first we examine the popularity of PC products, establishing them as a significant socio-economic phenomenon in Canada and abroad. Next we turn more directly to the person of Dave Nichol, showing how his private "memories" invade the public imagination as both the source and confirmation of a mutual, mass delirium. Third, we outline the financial scandal which may have precipitated Nichol's surprise retirement in late November 1993. And finally, we explore the issue of "image colonialism" at Loblaw, arguing that consumption of PC products is conditioned by the contentious appropriation of the exotic Other.

Marketing Loblaw: "What has your grocery store done for you lately?"

This marketing slogan, circulated by Dave Nichol, gained popularity during the 1980's and early 1990's. Designed to promote the genius of our Canadian-made PC products, it has become the hallmark expression of the Loblaw family of grocery stores. Taken on its literal level, it may well be a question worth reflecting upon. For without doubt, the Loblaw chain of supermarkets does offer an impressive selection of unique and novel products. These products include, for example, a full compliment of distinctive sauces and marinades marketed under the "PC Memories of..." trademark²; a variety of prepared gourmet foods for the true gastronome ranging from "designer" cannelloni,

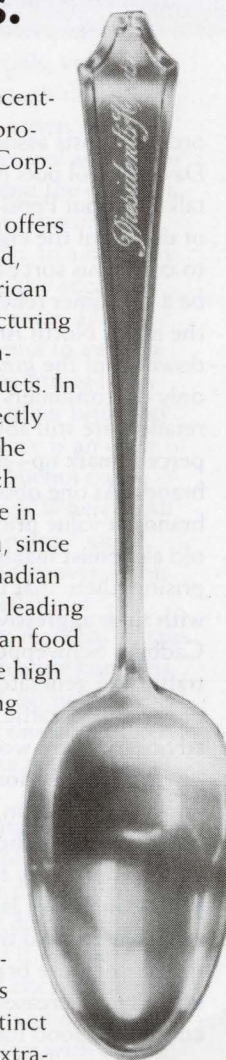
lasagna, marinade chicken sections, gourmet ham-burgers, chicken Kiev, stir-fry vegetables, and so on; a whole array of environmental and "Body Friendly" products (the "G-R-E-E-N" line); an entire selection of low sugar, low fat and all natural "Too Good To Be True" products for the avid health enthusiast; a newly introduced line of specialty wines

("Memories of Napa"); and finally, the recently distributed "PC Premium Draft Beer" produced by Hamilton's Lakeport Brewery Corp.

In the spirit of hyper-consumerism, Loblaw Cos. Ltd. "does" more because it offers more than the average grocer. To this end, Loblaw has "revolutionized" North American grocery retailing by successfully manufacturing and marketing what is variously called in-house, store brand, or private-label products. In many cases, these products compete directly with national brands and win, as with "The Decadent Chocolate Chip Cookie" which Loblaw claims is the most popular cookie in Canada. This is a fairly remarkable claim, since the cookie is sold in only 17% of all Canadian grocery outlets while "Chips Ahoy!", the leading national brand, is sold in 98% of Canadian food outlets. Other products contribute to the high earnings of the PC product line, including an assortment of breakfast cereals, PC cola, and the PC Szechwan Peanut Sauce. On occasion, the PC Cola and Peanut sauce outsell their national brand counterparts in some stores: namely, Coke, Pepsi, and the various ketchups.

Unlike national brands that spend millions on celebrity advertising, marketing costs for store brands are minimal. As such, private-label products have the distinct advantage of sparing the consumer the extra-

Yet food has a sordid history of its own and has always been close to the centre of capitalist ventures, including, for instance, the insatiable search for spice which encouraged Columbus to search out a new trade route to the Indies.





ordinary costs associated with most recognized brands. As Dave Nichol puts it: "When a person looks at Ray Charles talking about Pepsi-Cola they're probably paying a couple of dollars of the eight dollars they pay for a case of Pepsi to cover this sort of advertising.... I think there is going to be a consumer rebellion to all the advertising expenses of the major North American retailers and it could be the downfall of the great branded companies."³ As a result, not only do consumers get better products for less money, but retailers are still able to sell some PC products for a thirty percent mark up—double what they make on national brands. As one observer puts it: "They've created premium brands at value pricing with higher margins. It's like the old alchemist making gold. It's quite a feat."⁴ It is not surprising, then, that Loblaw angered many manufacturers with their aggressive new approach. As Doug Tough from Cadbury Schweppes Canada complained, "We draw the traffic and generate lots of profit for them...[and] then they prey on that traffic."⁵ Nichol's response is typical: "My advice for them would be to make better products."⁶

The perception of a "better" made product is clearly an important factor in creating a market for private label brands. Prior to the Loblaw initiative, store brands were usually viewed by the public as low status goods; the ugly yellow and black labels, combined with inconsistent quality, conjured hard times and product rationing. As a result, the sale of store brands increased during economic downturns, but decreased during subsequent upturns. Usually considered food for the poor and disenfranchised, consumers generally kept their distance.

However, Loblaw and Nichol have changed North America's view of store brand products forever, if not their food habits. Rather than simply copy national brand products, Nichol's PC line distinguished itself by introducing new and innovative products. As columnist Jeffery Miller notes, Nichol and PC have taken "the grocery business straight from 'Leave it to Beaver' to 'Thirty Something'... [W]hat we have here is a renovation of not just our bellies, but of our minds." As such, PC in-house products became highly credible purchases for the "upwardly mobile and in the know,"—in other words, the yuppie baby-boom generation. As some suggest, Dave Nichol has kept "his finger on the pulse of baby boomers' gastronomic desire."⁷

The "yuppification" of private label products has made Loblaw a huge corporate success. Although this usually goes unnoticed among those of us who are neither customers, fans, nor stock-holders, product development, profits, and corporate expansions have been massive. In 1984 Loblaw launched the PC label with just under twenty items. Between 1984 and 1994, this number increased to over 1000 items. During this same period, dollar sales for these products in North America grew from \$20 million to a staggering \$900 million.⁸ These figures are even more impressive if we compare them to the dismal performance of Loblaw prior to the introduction of their private label. Until the first generation of in-house products called "No-Name" appeared in 1978, Loblaw suffered annual losses of up to \$50 million.⁹ But with help from the new PC products, gross sales increased to \$7.9 billion in 1988 and \$9.2 billion in 1992. The net income for this same time period illustrates an incredible earning record with figures ranging between \$40 and \$104 million.¹⁰

The popularity of the PC line is also evidenced by its wide distribution. Within Canada, PC products are available from coast-to-coast. For example, in the Maritimes Canadian consumers find PC products in markets such as Capital, Save-Easy, The Real Atlantic Superstore, and No-Frills. In Central Canada they are found at Loblaw, SuperCentre, Zehrs, No-Frills, Mr. Grocer, ValuMart, Fortinos, and Hasty Market. In the Prairies, stores such as The Real Canadian Superstore, O.K. Economy, Economart and Super-Value carry the line. And finally, PC products are found in British Columbia at The Real Canadian Superstore, Extra Foods, and Super-Value. As you can see, the line really travels. Loblaw has even established free-standing "boutiques," the first prototype being a 2000 square foot outlet in Terminal 3 at Toronto's Pearson International Airport. Presumably, PC products are now a convenient carry-on export.

The success of the PC product line is not confined to Canada alone. Indeed, since the 1985 launch of the PC line in the United States, this home-grown concept has become the most popular private label south of our border. As a deliberate strategy to capture part of the enormous

U.S. food market, Loblaw has exported their private label to at least one major supermarket chain in each of the 10 largest U.S. cities. As such, PC products can be found in stores in Manhattan (D'Agostino), Pennsylvania (Acme), Northern Ohio (Sparkle Markets), Virginia (Harris Teeter), Louisiana (Real Superstores), Michigan (Kroger), Illinois (Jewel) and in New England (Big D). In total, PC products can be purchased in thirty-four states across the U.S. What is more, PC products are also distributed outside North America to New Zealand (Woolworths), Bermuda (The Marketplace), Singapore (Cold Storage Retail), and soon to Hong Kong.

Projected to hit the \$100 million mark in U.S. sales alone this year, Nichol's entrepreneurial expansion into the U.S. is described by some as a "Napoleonic" thrust into America. But such language merely repeats Nichol's own rhetoric from the *Insider's Report*, where one finds copious references to the great men of history. From these citations we are reminded that Dave Nichol, leader of the glorious PC line, is perhaps not so different from Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Napoleon, Lincoln, and so on. In the next section we thus turn more directly to Nichol's personality and to what we are calling "specular autobiography."

Specular Autobiography, or The Decadent Dave Nichol

After a degree in business administration at Western, a law degree at UBC, graduate studies in law at Harvard, and a three year stint at the business consulting firm of McKinsey & Co. in Toronto, Nichol was recruited in 1972 by Western pal Galen Weston to help save the family business, Loblaw Cos. Ltd. Initially appointed in 1985 as president of Loblaw Cos. Ltd, Nichol was subsequently put in charge of the newly created Loblaw International Merchants where he developed the successful PC product line, the Dave Nichol *Insider's Report* and his very own public profile.

Among his fans within the printed press, Nichol has been called a "business visionary,"¹¹ "superstar grocer,"¹² "marketing guru,"¹³ "gregarious gourmand"¹⁴ and less believably, "heartthrob of the shopping-cart set."¹⁵ More critically he is known as "Mr. Ego,"¹⁶ one of the toughest bosses to work for in Canada.¹⁷



According to Weston, the young Nichol was "brash, arrogant, opinionated—he hasn't changed a bit." But one thing everyone agrees upon is Nichol's consuming passion for food; he is sometimes referred to as a food

"cultist." Thus it is perhaps not surprising that the six foot, three inch, 230 pound Nichol is also known by waiters at *Les Frère Troisgros* restaurant in the Rhone Valley, France, as "*Le monsieur avec deux estomacs*."¹⁸

As Nichol puts it, his vocation is also his avocation. It is probably no accident, then, that Loblaw's PC prod-

uct line reflects Nichol's personal autobiography. It is not just that he is everywhere plastered on posters, life-size cut-outs, commercials, late-night infomercials, videos, *Insider's Reports*, a cookbook, and so on. Though this is certainly true, his autobiography is literally written into such mediums in the form of anecdotes and personal asides. For example, Nichol often waxes nostalgic about the moment "Where It All Began" apparently, on his grandmother McGuigan's farm in Cedar Springs, Ontario. In a typically overstated gesture, Nichol commemorates the occasion with his PC "Memories of Cedar Springs" sauce. On the recipe card he writes: "It took only a spoonful to evoke a flood of images. I closed my eyes and I was sitting in my grandmother's kitchen with Boyd and the other hird [sic] hands.... See if you don't agree that this sauce is an elixir of fond memories." As if this wasn't enough, Nichol commemorates yet another beginning, a second "Where It All Began," with his PC "Memories of San Francisco" sauce: "When I was in Law School in Boston..." Moreover, in his new cookbook we are exposed to a "Miscellany of Passion"—a full listing of Nichol's favourite markets, restaurants, fantasy dinner guests, dishes, and creature comforts (i.e., "a great shower," "a featherbed," etc.). So pervasive is Nichol's personality in the cookbook that one almost forgets he is selling products; in one recipe he actually calls for nine PC sauces!

Nichol's identity operates at the gravitational centre of his marketing world. Like the "Memories of..." sauces and the cookbook, the *Insider's Report* is what he calls "a very personal statement of mine about food."¹⁹ Yet despite its autobiographical nature, or perhaps because of it, the *Insider's Report* has been an extremely effective and cheap marketing tool for Loblaw's in-house products. It even enjoys a certain cult following among educated urbanites with an eye

Although they cost about \$20 000 to produce, one (PC) video sold 50 000 copies at \$5 each. In a reversal of the usual order, customers are directly financing the costs of advertising at Loblaw.

for pulp journalism, absurdity, and cheap gourmet dishes. Repeatedly referred to as a cross between *Mad Magazine* and the *Consumer Report*, the second issue (April 1984) was already declared "A Great Canadian Tradition Since November 1983." In fact, the *Insider's Report* is a smashing success at every level, as Nichol notes in his equally successful *The Dave Nichol Cookbook* (selling 100 000 copies in six weeks):

My Insider's Report has been a culinary phenomenon. Famous for its comic-book appearance, it's published four times a year and is read by about 6 out of 10 Ontario households. (And they spend about four hours browsing through it!) Every year we print more than 10 million copies.²⁰

In case you're not counting, that's about 24 million hours annually spent reading not just pulp journalism, but pulp advertising—an absolutely mind boggling, even surreal statistic. As cartoon figures exclaim on the back of an *Insider's Report*: "You mean we invented the printing press for this!" Needless to say, the *Insider's Report* is reported to have the largest circulation of any food publication in the world. In a similar vein, people have gobbled up his promotional videos for PC products. Although they cost about \$20 000 to produce, one video sold 50 000 copies at \$5 each. In a reversal of the usual order, customers are directly financing the costs of advertising at Loblaw. So much for cheaper products.

As President of Loblaw International Merchants, Nichol has been free to indulge his fancy, travelling around the world in search of exotic foods. As *Marketscan* recently puts it: "A world traveller, Nichol plasters exotic labels on President's Choice sauces as if they were steamer trunks."²¹



Consequently, if Loblaw really is a "deliberately designed fantasy-land,"²² it is one built around Nichol's own self-absorbed image; these are, after all, the *President's* choices. As Nichol says: "I rely on taste—my taste. Nobody chooses the *President's Choice* products except me. And we don't do market research either. I just know what I like, and I think I know what other people like, too." Indeed, as *The Globe & Mail* suggests, "This is not exactly a democracy: the *President's* taste buds rank higher than anyone else's, and he has line-item veto power."²³

Whether Nichol knows what people really like, or is someone able to market his own desires as our



own,²⁴ is a good question. For although he eschews brand label "image," Loblaw has been successful to the extent that Nichol's image has been closely identified with their products. He might be cheaper and less visible than Michael Jackson, but he is certainly more appealing than Dave Thomas of *Wendy's* or Bob Peters of *The Bay*. To be sure, like any good salesman, Nichol doesn't just sell products—he sells *himself*.

In other words, when we purchase "Memories of Lyon," "Fuji," or "Ancient Damascus," we are also consuming Dave Nichol—a sort of ritualistic totem feast. More to the point, our mass consumption of the *President's* personal choice validates his personal taste as public, his autobiography as public mythology, his delusion as collective consciousness. Consequently, while his might be "the bite, chew, swallow that's heard around the world,"²⁵ ours is the consumption which makes him possible. Or again, although he might be King of food, we're the collection of No-Name subjects who authorize his reign, his specular autobiography, as our really real, the true gourmet.

Finally, things get curiousest and curiousest until history itself becomes just another in-house label, the exotic, just another PC trademark. If so, it's a very short distance from the exotic to the quixotic. But before we turn to Nichol's "image colonialism," we need to consider briefly Nichol's recent retirement. After all, what's an autobiography without a seductive trace of scandal and intrigue?

"Trader Dave" Cott in the Act?

Since Nichol is so closely identified with Loblaw, retailers have long worried that his departure would hurt quality control and customer loyalty. In what the *Financial Times* calls his "uncharacteristic humility," Nichol plays down their concern during a 1991 interview: "I'm the person everyone sees. And I do take credit for everything. But the role I play within the company is in fact less than my public posturing would have you believe."²⁶

As it happens, Nichol has recently stepped down from Loblaw and the situation may be worse than anyone could have guessed back in 1991. Rumour has it that Nichol, in collusion with Cott Corp., benefited illegally from insider trading—an ironic twist on the theme of "Trader Dave" made popular in the early *Insider's Report*. Although speculation surfaced in the press after his retirement in late November 1993, apparently there was a certain buzz in business circles long before. In fact, Nichol stepped down in order to preempt a *Globe & Mail* story about his possible retirement and the circumstances surrounding it. As Nichol put it: "Just like my product [I like to] be there first."²⁷ While signing copies of his cookbook and new bottles of wine, Nichol has denied all wrong-doing, claiming that the departure was not only friendly, but that Loblaw "did

everything they could to persuade me to stay here as a full time employee."

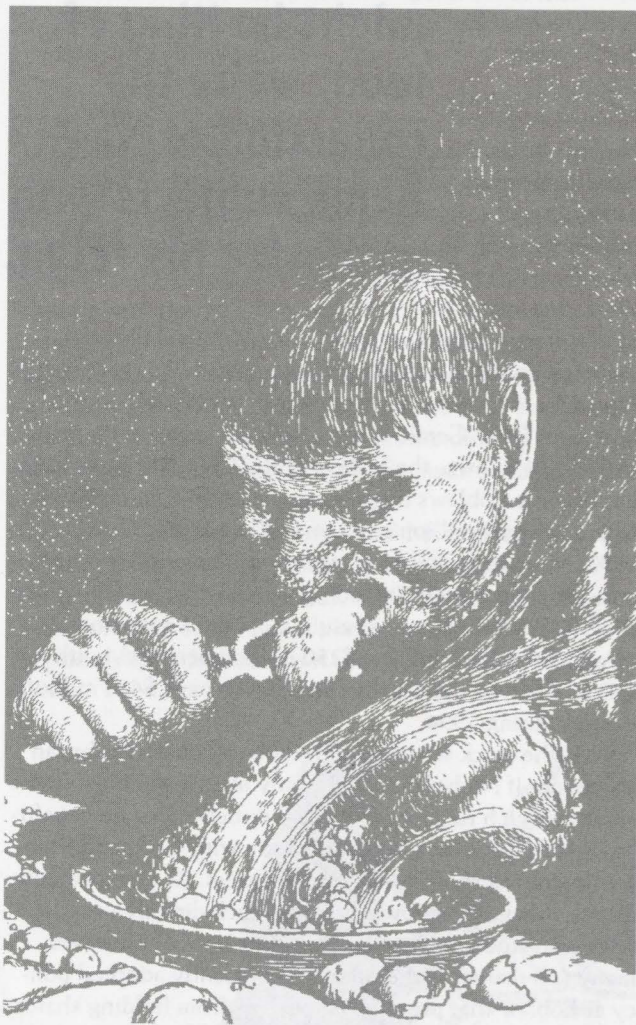
According to Nichol this past December, "The current rumour is that I made \$100 million on Cott's stock and it's hidden in a numbered account in the Cayman Islands."²⁸ Whatever Nichol's involvement, Cott stock holders have made a bundle over the past few years. According

to one source, Cott Corp. was once "a marginally profitable company that made cola that tasted like motor oil."²⁹ Urged by Nichol to make a better product for their PC line, Cott CEO Gerald Pencer signed a twenty-year deal with Royal Crown, the makers of RC Cola.³⁰ In turn, Cott has become Loblaw's biggest supplier at \$75 million a year, where it sold 4 million cases in 1990 and 10 million in 1992. More importantly, Cott now produces store brand cola for other outlets, including Sam's American Choice at WalMart in the U.S. As a result, Cott stock rose from a measly \$4 in June 1991 to \$250 in October 1993 (with splits). Analysts expect the company to have \$488 million in sales during 1994.

As the stock went through the roof, observers began to wonder if Nichol engaged in any insider trading. Nichol chalks up such rumours to a jaded disbelief that he benefited directly from his close association with Cott, and from self-interested short sellers on Bay Street. As he repeatedly insists: "I have never owned Cott's stock directly or indirectly; no stock options, no phantom stocks." However, many still marvel at the timing of a recently adopted policy at Loblaw that prevents employees from holding shares in its supplier companies. For his part, Nichol claims the policy is an old one that has only now been made public. Yet he has not adequately explained why it was made public during such a sensitive time. Moreover, some observers have trouble reconciling Nichol's great success at Loblaw with his departure—especially in light of Nichol's past insistence that "this is the greatest job in the world."

On the other hand, certain aspects of the "scandal" could be greatly overstated, grounded as they are upon

While his might be "the bite, chew, swallow that's heard around the world," ours is the consumption which makes him possible. Or again, although he might be King of food, we're the collection of No-Name subjects who authorize his reign.



false assumptions that Nichol has really broken from Loblaw. As we noted already, Nichol severed ties with Loblaw proper long ago with the creation of Loblaw International Merchants—but nothing really changed, except their profits. As Nichol recently put it: "Since I'm not leaving Loblaws, nothing has changed, except I now have the freedom to work for who I want, when I want, where I want." It could be, then, business as usual at Loblaw. Despite all the fuss, his office remains with Loblaw on the ninth floor of 22 St. Clair East, Toronto.

Behind the facade of Nichol's "memory" lies not Ancient Damascus but modern Seattle. So much, then, for "authentic" exotica! Moreover, this very same image is also used to promote an altogether different product—"Memories of Marrakech."

Remember Image Colonialism?

Though we usually don't give it a second or even first thought, consumption is always a matter of social and political import—especially when our feasting rituals are so deeply influenced by the advertising industry. Let's, then, take a closer look at how the marketing campaign for some of the PC products appropriate certain images in order to sell commodities.

This kind of image appropriation is most clearly found with the "Memories of..." product line. As you might have gathered, these products consist of a wide assortment of marinade sauces and glazes characterized by fabulously enticing "Memories of...": "Kobe," "Montego Bay," "Fuji," "Hawaii," "Hong Kong," "Thailand," "San Francisco," "Gilroy," "Sonoma," "Cheddar," "Asiago," "Reggiano," "Szechwan," "Bangkok," "Singapore," "Canton," "Kyoto," "Cedar Springs," "Lyon," "Jaipur," "Dijon," and finally, "Ancient Damascus." Memories ad nauseam. Following Roland Barthes, it is entirely legitimate to "read" these images or "Memories" for their deeper significance. In this spirit, Barthes writes:

Pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a lexis.... We shall therefore take language, discourse, speech etc. to mean any significant unit of synthesis, whether verbal or visual: a photograph will be a kind of speech for us in the same way as a newspaper article...³¹

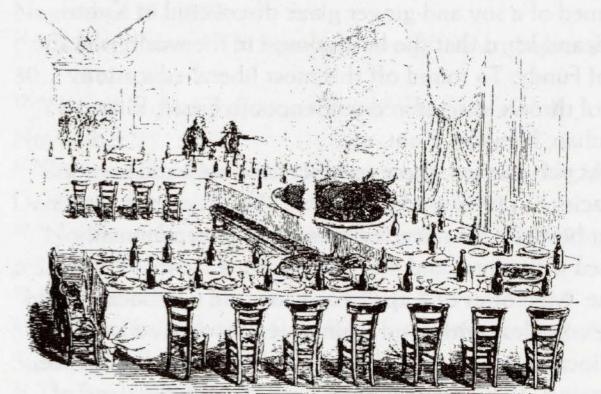
Thus we should consider the "lexis" of photographs and images used to promote PC products as a "kind of speech" or text.

Take, for instance, the packaging attached to a pomegranate sauce introduced in 1992 entitled "Memories of Ancient Damascus." The marketing of this item employs a portrait of a Muslim woman whose face is covered by a blue veil. Under our curious and insistent gaze, this image plays into a stereotypical view of the Orient. It is a part of what Edward Said calls "orientalism."

Ironically enough, though, this sauce was found in Seattle, Washington. Thus, behind the facade of Nichol's "memory" lies not Ancient Damascus but modern Seattle. So much, then, for "authentic" exotica! Moreover, this very same image is also used to promote an altogether different product—"Memories of Marrakech." Instead of evoking images of the Middle-East we now venture with Nichol to North Africa, to places like "Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia—and now Canada!" The same image, the same veiled woman, for two different products representing two different geographical locations, four countries. In Canada, it seems difference is washed away in the assumption that all Islamic countries are alike.

These ad-ventures, operating as a kind of culinary travel, have become a defining feature of the "Memories of..." product line. Through the very act of consuming these products we are left with the sense that we can recapture and re-invent, if not exploit, the authentic flavor of diverse and far-away places. We too can experience, in the comfort of our homes, wondrous voyages to France, Japan, China, Jamaica, India, Africa, Syria, and so forth. In short, we too can become *seasoned* travellers. As Nichol suggests, "cooking at home... can transport you to any place in the world."³² All we require is the appropriate "memory" and a virtual-reality trip is ours for the taking, with Nichol as our nostalgic tour guide.

In fact, Nichol rounds off the trip with various fragments of cultural and historical information about food, a sort of "thin" description characteristic of some ethnography. This type of historico-anthropological knowledge is provided "free" to the Loblaw consumer through the *Insider's Report* and PC recipe cards. Through these various advertising devices, we too can become amateur ethnographers and historians; like Nichol, we too can become cross-culturally educated. For instance, in one *Insider's Report* we learn about the Hungarian and Viennese origins of the French baguette; discover that the favourite mushroom of Japanese and Chinese cuisine is the shiitake mushroom; and find that couscous is a traditional ingredient in many North African dishes. In another, we find that "Ching Chun Bao" is a Chinese beverage originating from the Ming Dynasty in the fifteenth century (developed for the Emperor Cheung Zu), and learn about Brillat Savarin, a





nineteenth century French gastronome, whose celebrated cheese is an essential part of any "epicurean epiphany." In yet another edition we are familiarized with "Gravalax," a Swedish dish of marinated salmon traditionally served with sweet-and-sour mustard; learn the location of the "best" olive oil in the world (in Spain from the Nuñez de Prado family estate near Cordoba); and are advised of the reasons for England's reputation for producing the best sweet peas in the world, including factors such as English variety, English soil and harvesting processes. By the twenty-fourth volume of the *Insider's Report* (of which there are currently twenty-nine), we hear about an Italian flatbread found at the Splendido Hotel in Portofino (Italian Riviera); are informed of a soy and ginger glaze discovered in Kyoto, Japan; and learn that the best salmon in the world is in the Bay of Fundy. To round off this most liberal education, Nichol throws in scattered references to Freud, Einstein, McLuhan, Newton, Kant, etc.

As you can see, these products not only add savory delicacies to our everyday diet, but they bring the Other to our homes. Consider, for example, the ceremonially painted white, red, and black face from a Japanese opera on the "Memories of Kobe" marinade; the Caribbean island scene complete with sand, palm trees, resort hotels and two "local" men on the "Memories of Montego Bay" sauce; the "native" Polynesian woman, draped with a garland of whitish-yellow tropical flowers, who stares out from the "Memories of Hawaii" label; or the oriental dragon on the "Memories of Singapore" glaze.

At last, through all this excessively thin description, we consume less the product than its specular image, less the contents than the advertising on the bottle or box. Consumption is always conceptual-consumption that tells us more about ourselves than any "other" culture; more

about mass delirium than fond memories. Finally, then, let's be clear about this rich textual scene. These gross stereotypical conceptions work to both sensationalize and domesticate Otherness. For although these images invoke notions of the authentic Orient, the real Caribbean, the true Africa, and so on, they in fact betray themselves as nostalgic "Memories" of our own invention. As Nichol once said: "We're not happy with today's world. We want to go back. We want something traditional to hold on to, something that doesn't last for just Andy Warhol's fifteen minutes." The Other, then, is really a tasty morsel of our own imaginings which we consume and master. Or again, we eat, digest, and excrete the Other in order to validate our own self-image as stable, secure, eminently unified. Nichol services this need by making the indigestible digestible for our all-too sensitive North American palates. In this sense, PC products are just placebos masquerading as the real thing. As for the elusive "real" thing, well, it always slips away, evading all capture and consumption.

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NOTES

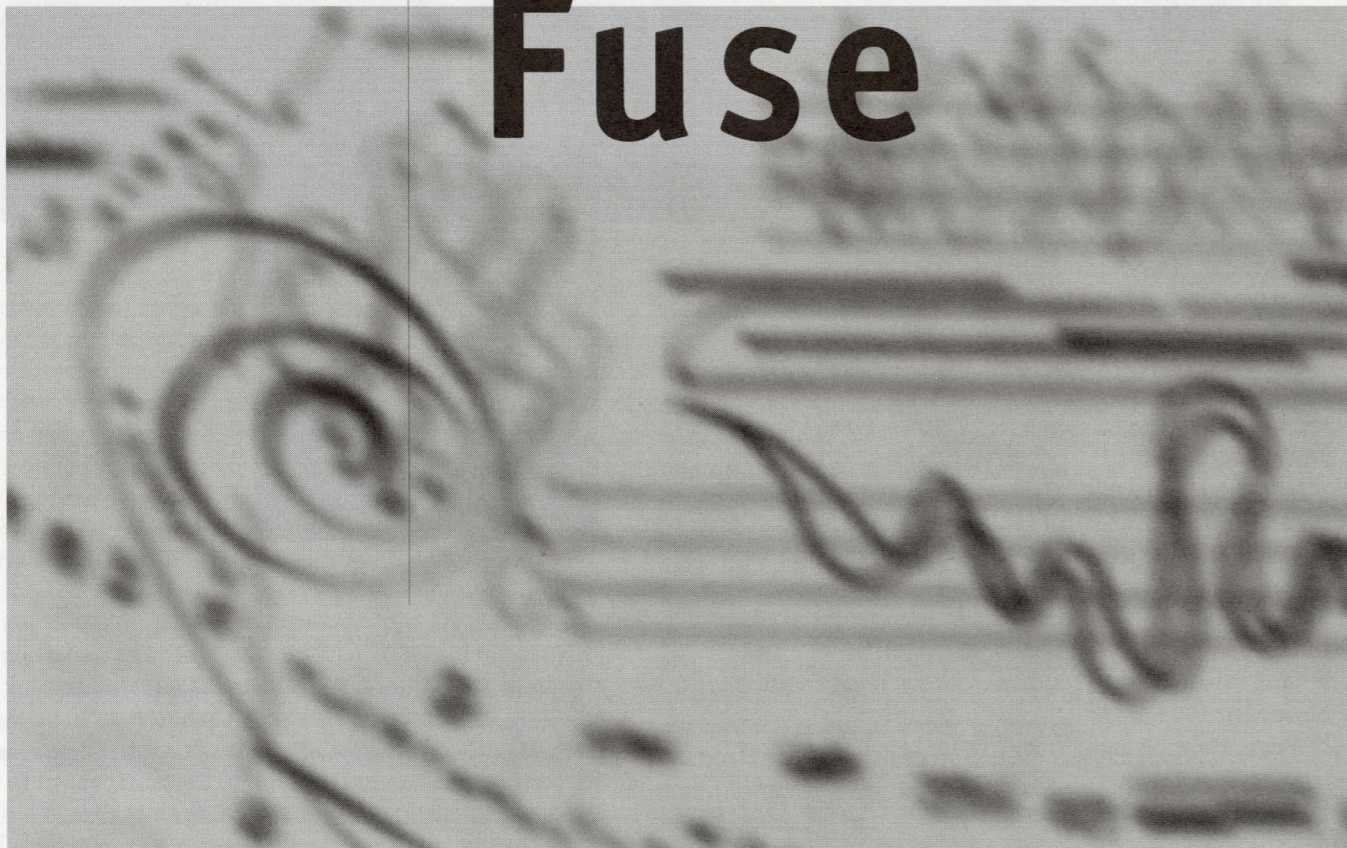
- ¹ *The Dave Nichol Cookbook*, (Toronto: Loblaw Companies Limited, 1993) p.23.
- ² 1.8 Million bottles of these "PC Memories of..." sauces were sold in 1993 alone.
- ³ "Dave Nichol's Brewhaha," *Business Journal*, March 1993, p.20.
- ⁴ "Cloud Hangs over President's Choice," *The Calgary Herald*, December 18, 1993.
- ⁵ "Private Labels invade Brand-Name Territory," *The Financial Post*, May 25, 1988.
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- ⁷ "Dave Nichol: Too Good to Be True?" *The Toronto Star*, January 23, 1993.
- ⁸ "Chief's choice to be own boss," *The Toronto Star*, November 23, 1993.
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- ¹⁴ "Pitch, Panache Buoy Fancy Private Label," *Marketscan*, January 27, 1994.
- ¹⁵ "Inside Dave Nichol," *Canadian Business*, October 1987, p. 44.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.151.
- ¹⁷ "Golden Palate," *The Financial Times of Canada*, September 30-October 6, 1991.
- ¹⁸ "Picasso of Palate Teaches Pilgrim Haute-Cost Cuisine," *The Toronto Star*, February 1993.
- ¹⁹ "A Nichol for Your Thoughts," *The Globe & Mail*, November 18, 1993.
- ²⁰ *The Dave Nichol Cookbook*, 1993, p.24.
- ²¹ "Pitch, Panache Buoy Fancy Private Label," *Marketscan*, January 27, 1994.
- ²² "Cheapest Will Survive in Superstore War," *Eye Weekly*, February 20, 1993.
- ²³ "First he Chews, then he Chooses," *The Globe & Mail*, November 25, 1993.
- ²⁴ "Inside Dave Nichol," *Canadian Business*, October, 1987, p. 46.



- ²⁵ "First he Chews, then he Chooses," *The Globe & Mail*, November 25, 1993.
- ²⁶ "Golden Palate," *The Financial Times of Canada*, September 30, 1991.
- ²⁷ "Nichol Moved to Scoop Globe," *The Globe & Mail*, November 23, 1993.
- ²⁸ "Rumours That he Made Money on Cott False, Nichol Declares," *The Toronto Star*, December 14, 1993.
- ²⁹ "No-Name Power," *Financial Weekly*, March 16, 1993, p.32.
- ³⁰ *Financial Weekly*, March 16, 1993, p.32.
- ³¹ Barthes, Roland. "Myth Today" in *A Barthes Reader* (ed.) Susan Sontag. New York: Hill & Wang, 1973. p. 95.
- ³² *The Dave Nichol Cookbook*, p 20.

UPCOMING
SUMMER 1994

Fuse



Music

Special Theme Issue on Music:

- an in-depth interview with
Digable Planets by James Oscar.
- Lynn Crosbie writes about
Courtney Love.
- Victor Baines Marshall interviews
music columnist Greg Tate.
- Tamai Kobayashi on
Taiko Drumming.

Plus book reviews, columns
and much more.

Ineluctable Studies Collective Autobiographies of the Knowledge Class¹

CLIVE ROBERTSON

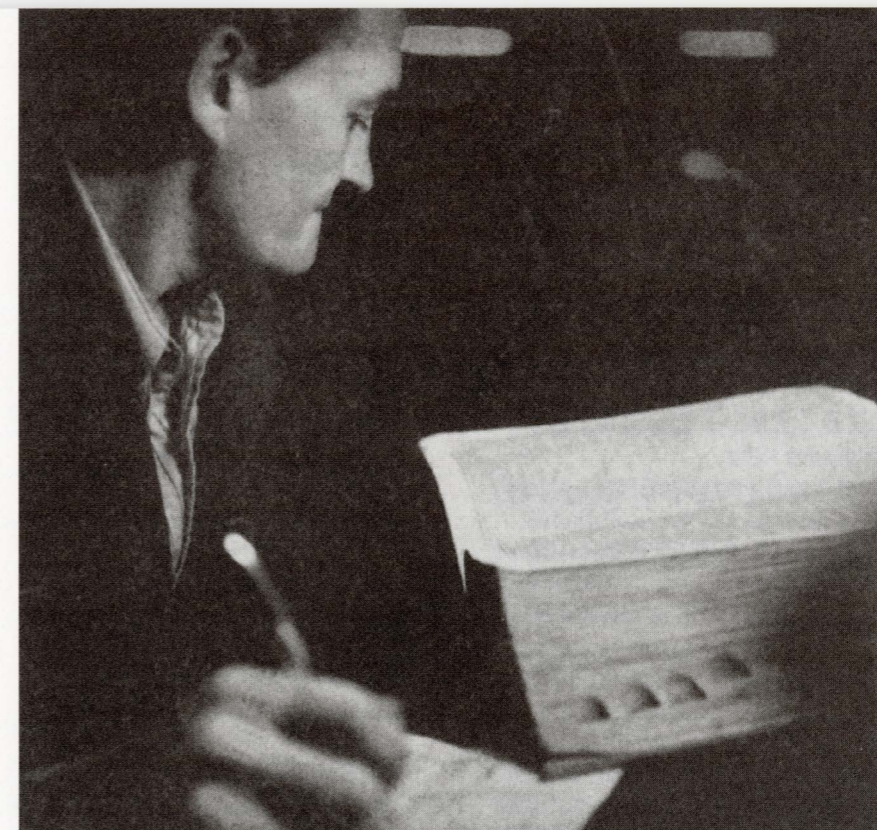
If we were looking for a world's fair slogan to describe what cultural studies has been since its beginnings in post-war Britain, we might choose: "understanding the construction of everyday life...in order to change our lives for the better."²

In some senses, Cultural Studies is a fictional subject. A self-described anti-disciplinary practice shaped by a variety of methodologies, it exists as a nomadic project that has hovered between sociology, literary, media and popular culture studies. Now, through historical re-readings, we get to belatedly celebrate cultural studies as the overnight "disciplinary" success that took almost fifty years to happen. It is worth remembering, however, that many of the progressive objectives and accomplishments of the earlier stages of the cultural studies project—such as *general* adult education—are only partially recovered in the current academic marketing boom.

Ironically, in the very English-speaking societies where cultural studies seems to have gained the most academic muscle (including Canada, Australia, the U.S. and Britain), its engagement with cultural and artistic practices has contributed to theory's colonization of such sites. And so now that Art is seen to be just another *transitive* text, for community-related cultural workers (including artists who engage with their own forms of empirical and theoretical practice) artistic life proceeds, shakily, under a new, sometimes faceless, theoretically oriented management.

It is interesting to watch as different occupational groups (journalists, community artists or academics) frame themselves as being oppositional to a dominant culture in terms of knowledge production. Will Straw suggests in his contribution to "Relocating Cultural Studies" that oppositional politics has cohered under the "sign of the cultural." Who gets to read or wave such a sign now accentuates tensions between contemporary academic, artistic and social activists even where there would otherwise be (or have been) shared agendas. Despite complex affinities of race, gender, sexuality and class, communities of vocation or occupation still defensively bind together—often around entrenched cultural habits. In the same way that anti-poverty activists often have difficulty evaluating alternative art practices as marginalized sites of resistance between high art and mass culture, so, in turn, alternative cultural producers are suspicious of any members of the professoriat who claim marginal status as artists or intellectuals within the larger political frameworks of academia.

The misreadings are multi-directional, mirroring the variety of debates that inform but are not necessarily known to the various participants. Cultural studies scholars tend to be amazingly naive about the difference between the magic and the pragmatics of artistic practice. Conversely, artists—who tend to believe that cultural studies courses through their very veins—are mostly unaware of the theoretical lega-



cies and acumen that cultural studies brings to the mix.

Graeme Turner's book *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* was, when it first appeared, marketed as "the first introductory survey of this burgeoning field." From an Australian perspective, Turner reveals the mechanics of British cultural studies both in terms of themes (language, semiotics, Marxism, individualism, and discourse theory) and categories (text and textuality, audiences, everyday life and ideology). Through the work of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall and others, Turner traces formative intellectual interrelationships both within Britain and elsewhere. As a historiography, Turner's account of the development of cultural studies can be compared and contrasted with American Lawrence Grossberg's more technical, less "normative" one, which appears in the more recent "Relocating Cultural Studies."³

In their introduction, the editors of *Relocating Cultural Studies* write: "in our view, the purpose of engaging cultural studies is not to learn an intellectual history or a particular set of skills. It is to learn the value of politically engaged intellectual work in understanding how forms of aware-

ness are mediated by and contribute to the social and cultural life in which they occur." The mostly Canadian essays in this collection are grouped together into three parts: Wars of Positions, Power and Empowerment and Cultural Studies and the Local. The collection is scrappy, with the editors properly asking self-reflexive questions including: "...at worst, does it [cultural studies] function primarily to assuage the political conscience of those (predominantly white, bourgeois and male) who are conscious of difference and differences in power?" Several contributors get to re-gender the question in an adapted Eastwoodian vernacular: "Well punk, does it?"

Geraldine Finn's essay, "Why Are There No Great Women Postmodernists?" argues that there is an intellectual process at play which is "producing postmodernism as a master discourse and discourse of mastery, whose mastery is accomplished through the active and systematic disappearance of women in general and feminism in particular..." (p.123) and that the old male canon has been pumped up into "a new pantheon of proper names and authoritative texts revised to include...Barthes, Benjamin, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Derrida, Lacan, Lyotard...etc." Finn's corrective strategy is

proposed in sections titled "Good Social Theory" and "Bad Social Theory," and concludes with a reprint of a bibliography containing writings on feminism, theories of reading and postmodernism by women. It is regrettable however, that this important bibliography was not amended to include some of the considerable amount of writings by Canadian women artists and cultural activists and related feminist writings about Canadian art practices.

In a parallel spirit, Elspeth Probyn, in "True Voices and Real People: The 'Problem' of the Autobiographical in Cultural Studies," observes that autobiography has found "overnight popularity among some male theorists" and reminds us that "the memory of being excluded on the grounds that the personal is not social scientific knowledge lingers. The very male voice that is now being rendered 'personal' served in part, to exclude feminist work from critical discourse." Probyn then proceeds to re-examine "the voice as strategy."

Besides Lawrence Grossberg's already mentioned piece, entitled "The Formations of Cultural Studies: An American in Birmingham," the *Relocating Cultural Studies* collection contains essays by Gail Guthrie Valaskakis ("Postcards of my Past: The Indian as Artifact") and Jody Berland ("Weathering the North: Climate, Colonialism, and the Mediated Body"). Will Straw offers an account of the Canadian institutional response to cultural studies and related networking encounters ("Shifting Boundaries, Lines of Descent: Cultural Studies and Institutional Realignment"), while John Shepard provides a reexamination of Canadian music practice in "Value and Power in Music: An English Canadian Perspective."

And last, but not least, Australian Tony Bennett's essay "Useful Culture" develops the idea that "relations between government and modern cultural politics are ones of mutual dependency" using the "modern art museum" as a way of illustrat-

British Cultural Studies: An Introduction
by Graeme Turner
London: Unwin Hyman, 1990

Relocating Cultural Studies:
Developments in Theory and Research
Edited by Valda Blundell,
John Shepard, Ian Taylor
New York: Routledge, 1993

A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader
Edited by Antony Easthope, Kate McGowan
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992

The Cultural Studies Reader
Edited by Simon During
New York: Routledge, 1993

Roll over Beethoven:
The Return of Cultural Strife
Stanley Aronowitz
Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993

ing political debates "whose axes are simultaneously policy and textual ones." Bennett's position on cultural policy theory (and the culture critic as "cultural technician") has been contested elsewhere as being an example of resistance to new-right thinking by a return to statism, as a misreading of Foucault and as a slippery path upon which intellectuals will be tempted to dilute criticism in order to play the moderating expert in public policy debates.⁴ That latter critique also echoes past moments in cultural studies history when British practitioners turned away from earlier American empirical mass communications research and its market research applications, or, in Canada, in the moment in the '80s when cultural studies moved away from communications studies as that discipline became increasingly professionalized in response to government and media organizations' need for communications graduates.

Overall, despite the strengths of individual essays, *Relocating Cultural Studies* demonstrates how "cultural studies" does not automatically deliver an adequate subject focus, which other more closely related materials—e.g., by subjectivity or by local context—would provide.

A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader and *The Cultural Studies Reader* have different editorial strengths. *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* is a collection of essays and extracts "required for the study of both high and popular culture together." With useful summaries of materials published at the end of the book, the selections are grouped into sections: Semiology, Ideology, Subjectivity, Difference, Gender, Postmodernisms, and Documents in Cultural Theory—each prefaced by an editorial introduction. *The Cultural Studies Reader* is twice the thickness of the other book and is sectionally organized around: Theory and Method, Space and Time, Nation, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism, Sexuality, Carnival

and Utopia, Consumption and the Market, Leisure, and Media.

A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader editors Easthope and McGowan acknowledge in their too brief introduction that their book only represents the textual wing of cultural studies. (The sociological wing was closed for renovations?) A more important problem with their introduction, however, is that in it they miss the opportunity to situate for their intended student audiences the operative relationships between critical theory, cultural theory, cultural and communication studies. Does critical theory still signify the Frankfurt School as a particular site of struggle around high and mass culture, and does cultural theory here refer to a similar intervention and moment on behalf of popular culture? If so, does this make cultural studies the conjunctural field and, if not, which folders subsume which files?

Finally, to make a to-scale sense of the historical mappings of the dormant volcano of a mega-project like cultural studies, it can be useful to read the above titles through a general but informed intellectual history. American Stanley Aronowitz' *Roll Over Beethoven: The Return of Cultural Strife* is recommended as a welcome antidote to the containment of cultural liberalism (e.g., Robert Hughes' *Culture of Complaint*). Aronowitz, a sociologist working in cultural studies, provides for the open interconnections between the origins of cultural studies, British cultural studies, cultural politics of the Popular Front, cultural study in postmodern America and the authority of knowledge.⁵ After the endless "wars of position" that you may not even have heard of, let alone fully comprehended, you have to love the promise of a happy ending. As Stanley Aronowitz optimistically predicts, "we are (also) on the verge of a large-scale restructuring of legitimate intellectual knowledge. In this restructuring, the notions of 'discipline' itself would

yield to elective affinity." So that in the future "curriculum reform would be replaced by a kind of 'permanent revolution' because no regimen of learning could survive the elective affinities of the collaborative. [And] clearly, there would be room for those who wish to examine the traditional disciplinary canon but, as in any educational enterprise, it would no longer enjoy the status of received wisdom."

Clive Robertson is a performance artist and writer who teaches at Concordia University in Montreal.

NOTES

¹ "In short, one recent movement in cultural studies is to write collective autobiographies of the knowledge class. Here we have the beginnings, within the humanities, of a discourse which calls into question the division of intellectual labor into disciplines, especially humanities and social sciences with their unique incommensurable knowledge." Stanley Aronowitz, *Roll Over Beethoven* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press 1993), p. 228.

² Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies* (London: Unwin Hyman 1990), p. 227.

³ Raymond Williams warns against both the over-reliance upon the significance of published texts when mapping a history of intellectual work, and the cultural habit of denying such work's existence unless it is accompanied by national publication and/or university sponsorship. see Raymond Williams, "The Future of Cultural Studies" *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso Press 1989).

⁴ Simon During, "Introduction" *The Cultural Studies Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁵ Aronowitz' earlier book, *The Politics of Identity: Class, Culture, Social Movement* is similarly useful for those interested in class mediations to cultural identity.

Books

In Her I Am
Chrystos
Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993

Stone Butch Blues
Leslie Feinberg
Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1993

In *Her I Am* by Chrystos and *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg are books by working-class writers who came out femme and butch respectively in the 1960s. And two women for whom the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s was anything but liberating. As Chrystos writes in the introduction to *In Her I Am*:

The rejection of this very sexual culture by feminist Lesbians has marred my relationship with Women's Liberation from the beginning. My life rarely exists in Lesbian texts—a current exception is the excellent book *Stone Butch Blues* (by Leslie Feinberg) which often had me in tears.

In Her I Am is a gorgeous book, inside and out. A flat black cover, with a hand in black lace cupping a single white rose wraps a collection of erotic poetry and prose from a Menominee writer whose earlier books flashed a fierce political core ignited by the streets of America and the corridors of academia, by jails and social workers, nuthouses and Johns. Chrystos' first two collections, *Not Vanishing* and *Dream On* (both published by Press Gang) marked a path of resistance fuelled by love and desire, yielding to lyricism when writing of lovers and friends, things lesbian and Aboriginal, things wild and creator-made. Here and there, as in "Sestina for Ilene" or "Idyll: Four Days" there are gestures in the direction of the elegant and

A New Red Dress and Dad's Blue Suit Writing Butch, Femme and Gender Freedom Into Feminism

ANN DECTER

challenging erotic collection that arrived in 1993: *In Her I Am*.

As the title suggests, *In Her I Am* contains forty-six poems that move through the reader like a slow-hand easing in, a smooth cunt opening, a deep mind probing. This collection is never simply autoerotic, though it certainly does not withdraw its warm invitation to sexual pleasure—alone or otherwise. It is always of and about lesbian living as a sensual body of knowledge, and sex, not as enticing body parts, but as a vital interaction in a context that extends beyond hot and wet. Chrystos takes her women as she finds them, takes us home to the elements, teaches us to read passion as we breathe it. Her work rumbles with the quaking of truth emerging through the parched surface of accepted understanding, it quivers like an orgasm of knowledge rippling in concentric circles.

Gradually, poem by poem, Chrystos builds a discussion, descriptive and polemical, of butch/femme. It is at once a celebration of freedom to choose and a challenge to domination. In poems like "I Bought a New Red," "We Pretended She Was a Young Boy" and "Hold Me Down" she asserts femme pleasure, a pleasure taken as deliberately as any other, and one that is grounded in the lesbian. Chrystos also challenges roles, playfully teasing butches about orgasm and possessiveness. She claims that "All the Best Butches/roll over in the dark but sometimes pretend they

don't/Like my fist when they've had their way and mine."

Chrystos closes with two prose pieces—one on lesbian s/m and one on the process of *In Her I Am*—which offer the reader a transparency of the writing body, and how-to-read instructions that can overlay her work. Chrystos is not unaware that through giving herself free rein she has done more in this collection than offer exquisite turn-on poetry. She has mapped a self-determined sexual liberation, a liberation drawn from practice, not theory, a liberation imbued with ethics, compassion and respect for its subject.

Stone Butch Blues, to which Chrystos refers in her introduction, although seeded in the same temporal and social ground, is a very different literary message. This compelling first novel by Leslie Feinberg traces the harrowing journey of "he-she" Jessie Goldberg, from an impossible childhood in 1950s Buffalo to a possible adulthood in New York City decades later. It is a tale of gender oppression, an account of the life of a person who does not fit neatly into gender configured as either/or, male/female. Nothing I have read offers such a direct challenge to the oppressiveness of the practice of dichotomizing humanity into male and female. The character of Jess Goldberg embodies a profound resistance to forces incessantly working to eradicate he/r* ability to live, to stay sane, to love. And love s/he does, amazingly. Though at first the book seems motivated by an

incredible will to live—despite repeated arrests, police assaults, firings, peer suicides, homelessness—it is actually fuelled by the will to love, walled behind a sheltering barricade of stone butch.

With the exception of an opening chapter in the form of a letter to a lost lover, *Stone Butch Blues* is written as a chronological narrative: from Jess' birth in southwestern desert, through a schooling in Buffalo, to he/r donning of the robes of butch in the bars and factories where s/he comes of age. And with he/r life so often at risk, the reading is gripping. From earliest childhood, the issue of how others interpret gender plagues Jess. "I'm sick of people asking if she's a boy or a girl," he/r mother complains. When he/r parents find he/r, at eleven, dressed in he/r father's blue suit, Jess is deposited in a psychiatric ward without a word of warning. The straight world is bent on either humiliating Jess into submission to its gender ordering, or annihilating he/r. He/r existence violates an imposed ordering, but Jess, and others who shimmer between rigid categories of male and female, are naturals.

At fifteen Jess goes to a gay bar and finds peers for the first time in he/r life:

What I saw there released tears I'd held back for years: strong, burly women, wearing ties and suit coats. Their hair was slicked back in perfect DA's. They were the handsomest women I'd ever seen. Some of them were wrapped in slow motion dances with women in tight dresses and high heels who touched them tenderly. Just watching made me ache with need. This was everything I could have hoped for in life.

That first night extends into years of life in the butch/femme, drag queen, hooker community of Buffalo. During these years s/he learns what makes a butch a good lover—"respecting a femme. It means listening to her body"—and works with oth-

er butches in the Buffalo plants. Feinberg carefully portrays Jess realizing that there is no external protection, and, that cops—who specialize in physical and sexual abuse of drag queens and butches—are the biggest danger. Well-constructed writing reveals Jess building an internal wall of protection, tasting what can turn a "he-she" into a stone butch, a lover who can give pleasure, but is not comfortable opening he/rself to receive it.

The letter that forms the first chapter of the book addresses the feminist movement of the early 1970s, oppressive and exclusionary for butches (and many other women):

They drove us out, made us feel ashamed of how we looked. They said we were male chauvinist pigs, the enemy. It was women's hearts they broke. We were not hard to send away, we went quietly.

Feminism draws a line Jess cannot cross. S/he decides to cross another imposed line and pass as a male, a journey that is harrowing and fascinating and suffused with a piercing loneliness.

This is a tightly-written book rooted in a deep understanding of human vulnerability. With the exception of the haunting style of the letter that forms chapter one, the writing is unnoticeable at first, terse and quiet, lying carefully in the palm of the story. But as the story moves forward, the writing allows itself to become more present, the style takes on the nuance of Jess' youthful vow to be "Strong to my enemies, tender to those I loved and respected." There are times when Leslie Feinberg writes with an authorial wisdom that is breathtaking.

While this novel is firmly planted in the butch/femme configuration of lesbian identity, it shifts topics by the end. As a child Jess knows her preference for things labelled masculine, before she discovers her lust for women. From a Roy Rogers out-

fit to her first Harley, from DAs and chinos to being beaten for trying to use women's public washrooms, the underlying issue is gender oppression, the underlying identity is butch. This is an inside view of the butch women Chrystos sketches in her erotic poetry. *Stone Butch Blues* is a testament to the power of fiction to communicate, the power of narrative to foment political change. This novel is nothing less than an essential document of gender freedom.

*I use s/he and he/r as pronouns for the character Jess as a way of expressing in writing this novel's assertion that gender cannot be divided into male and female and that Jess is a gender outlaw.

Ann Dexter is co-managing editor for fiction and poetry at Women's Press in Toronto. Her novel *Paper, Scissors, Rock* was published in 1992.

Ben Smit

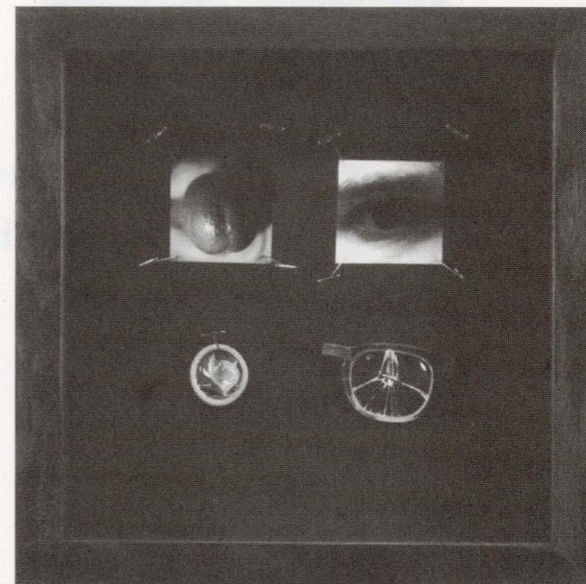
Cold City Gallery, Toronto
April 1 – April 23, 1994

CHRISTOPHER EAMON

As much *Honcho* as "Father Knows Best," Ben Smit's new work at Cold City produces an unsettlingly ambivalent effect by seeming at once intimate and completely artificial. But there is another deeper, contradiction at work, one that contemporary Western culture grapples with constantly, and that bares upon the political sphere in countless ways: the tension between the reproductive and the non-reproductive. Here, this tension is evident in the relationship between the narrative of paternalism and the lack of any specific reproducible narrative at all, in the story of ecstasy for ecstasy's sake.

In the *Analogue* series, prostheses and prophylactics are placed in deep glass and wood cabinets, along with photographs of penis heads and eyeballs, safety glasses and baby bottles. Pinned to the back of the boxes with dissection pins, the various elements—photographic and material—combine to form specimen displays of such things as a pinned-down condom, or, a safety-glass lens shattered where it is pierced by a pin. In *Hunk o' Burnin' Luv*, the image of a man's chest with flaming nipples is coupled with another completely useless object, a red penis-shaped candle—presumably useless, that is, for either procreative purposes or heterosexual pleasure.

Smit's use of the term "analogue" implies a relation, both in visual content and in approach, to some of the writings of excommunicated surrealist Georges Bataille. Bataille's essay "The Solar Anus" provides a methodology based on similarity and parody, laying the theoretical groundwork for his idea of the "pineal eye." The



Analogue #11: Fail Safe, Ben Smit, mixed media, 1994. Photo: Brian Piitz.

pineal eye is formulated as a sort of cock-eye-head, which expresses an expenditure without exchange, the basis for an erotics of life and death. Whereas Bataille wanted to complicate (even collapse) the traditional privilege of the top of the human body over the bottom, Smit makes his body-analogues more directly analogous, as if to say "an eyeball is to a penis, as a mouth is to an asshole." For him, the extent to which a comparison of these various body parts is important is the extent to which they are *already* considered alternately productive or unproductive, a locus of knowledge or of waste; that is, the extent to which they are imbricated in a system of knowledge and value. Bataille's insistent refusal to create a coherent system of values based on productivity makes his ideas especially relevant for interrogations of *the arch* system of our time—the family, and, appropriate reference points for other work—such as Smit's—that appears to be similarly motivated.

While not really suited to a family outing, the exhibition ostensibly draws from Smit's experience as a father. The main gallery space includes a large-format photograph of the artist, cropped at the neck, with a photo of what could be his children hanging around his neck, as well as one of a woman hanging by a chain off his erect

cock—a mother? his wife? In the back room of the gallery, a tiny pine coffin sits alone on the floor. The element of death suggests a regressive, though thoroughly pervasive, link between sex and death—a hint of straight male anxiety, perhaps, or maybe a suggestion of the "burdens" that exist in stark contrast to a fantasy of unadulterated raunch. At the same time that it is about narrative—progeny, the power of "pure cock" and its attendant

"responsibilities"—the exhibition is complicated by its own attraction to a lack of the functional, which results in an obscuring of the reason the condom must be pinned and the eyeglasses impaled.

The really interesting aspect of this work is how it reinforces the cock as symbol of procreation while the means of its realization are, in part, objects which impede reproduction: dildos and condoms. The narrative of male sexuality and fatherhood is placed up against *jouissance* or functionless sexuality. Smit's boxes and photographs aggressively forefront the sexualized imagery of men in a way that seems really "gay." (We don't see men and dildos presented within the same frame, in this way, within "straight" sexuality very often.) The show also brings to mind a number of gay artists who draw, stylistically, on aspects of gay culture (Robert Flack, Andy Fabo, Robert Windrum, Felix Gonzales Torres, Tom of Finland, etc.). And this, I think, is due to the way the work can't help but also make visible the naturalized "straightness" of a heteronormative culture.

Christopher Eamon is a film programmer and a FUSE editorial collective member.

Pierre Molinier The Precursor

Travelling exhibition curated by Wayne Baerwaldt
Toronto Photographers Workshop, Toronto
Circulated by Plug-In Gallery, Winnipeg
April 2–May 7, 1994

ELAINE CAROL

Pierre Molinier (1900–1976) was a fascinating artist who led an extraordinary life, which he ended in a suicide ritual. His art was informed by his obsessions: transvestism with a narcissistic androgynous twist, esoteric knowledge tinged with Satanism, polysexual perversions and a quest to create the utopian image of the ideal hermaphrodite through a series of provocative photographic portraits. Molinier considered his surrealistic, figurative paintings to be his primary medium and the photographs, which he took throughout his life a means of working out the fetishistic rituals he created in the privacy of his Bordeaux boudoir-studio.

Inspired by the brilliance of Molinier's oeuvre and range of influence, Wayne Baerwaldt has curated a major historical exhibition of 78 photo-based works. Molinier's work bridges the 1950s Parisian surrealist movement; body, performance and pop art of the late 1960s and 1970s; and the gender-fuck glitter-rock icons of contemporary art and popular culture. It crosses boundaries by confronting the monotony of heterosexual, bourgeois complacency.

Molinier considered himself a "male lesbian" because of his transvestism and bisexual relationships with elegant men and voluptuous women such as "le petit vampire," designer-artist Hanel Koeck—his "ideal double." Close to Molinier for the last nine years of his life, Koeck shared his fetishistic fervour. She modelled for and with him in a series of photomontages that



Autoportrait (Self-portrait), Pierre Molinier,
b + w photograph, 11.7 x 5.3 cm, 1965.

are breath-taking in their passion. "Male lesbian" is a term I normally despise: however, I find it an appropriate description after seeing the photographs in this exhibition.

The photographs, most of which are self portraits, are very small, (approximately 17 X 11 cm) and are framed and matted unobtrusively. The frames however encompass a much larger area (approximately 45 x 45 cm), they seem to invite the viewer to look into the photographic image.

"The Precursor" can be broken down into five main sections. The first is comprised of photographic prints that document paintings made between 1950 and 1965—including the blasphemous and scatological "Oh!... Marie, Mere de Dieu." Marrying religious to erotic symbolism, pain to pleasure, Molinier painted Mary pinching the nipples and performing fellatio on a hermaphrodite Christ, who is crucified to what could be vaginal folds or the head of a bull, while Mary Magdalene sodomizes him with a godemiché or dildo. In 1965, at the last international exhibition of surrealism, André Breton the exhibition's curator and patron of Molinier, censored this painting ostensibly because of its title.

The second consists of the remarkable performative self-portraits, taken in the last ten years of his life, in which he explored the theme of carnal shamanism. In one set of photos from this period, Molinier expresses a nostalgia for the 1940s by employing its styles and sensibili-

ties; hiding his face behind either a doll's head or black mask, as he donned wigs, corseted his shaven body, wore silk stockings on perfect calves and displayed himself in garter belt and the obligatory stiletto heels. He is often engaged in masturbation with a godemiché, which he crafted out of silk, leather and rubber.

The third section is comprised of dream-like other-worldly duotoned black and white photomontages that utilize a complex method of assemblage. Here, Molinier indulged his fetishization of legs and doll-like faces melding them together with seamless collage techniques. The collaborative work he produced with Koeck and the eighteen-year-old body artist and transvestite Lucianno Castelli make up the fourth section.

At the end of his life, Molinier collaborated with his young gay male lover and protégé Thérèse Agullo. Baerwaldt believes that this series, done at Agullo's instigation, was Molinier's work "in decline," made when he was suffering from prostate cancer. This series depicts Agullo in various states of fetishistic drag. Unlike Molinier's other work, its use of colour photography, harsh lighting and wide angle shots engulfs the aloof Agullo in an uncharacteristically sterile scene.

"The Precursor" celebrates the beauty of alternative sexuality and spirituality. Molinier must have died knowing he had achieved his objective: the creation and documentation of the ideal hermaphrodite. He leaves behind a legacy of ultimate androgyny to be taken up by a generation of artists and pop stars that includes Vito Acconci, Robert Mapplethorpe, David Rasmus and Madonna.

Elaine Carol is an artist, writer and activist who lives in Toronto.

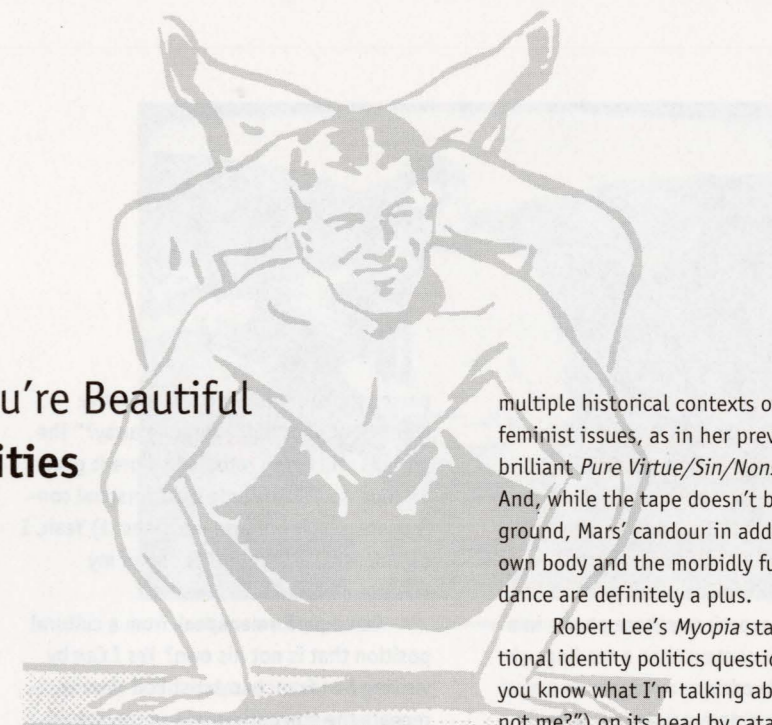
You're Beautiful Man, You're Beautiful Beauties and Monstrosities

Organized by Michael Balsler
Damn Straight, Toronto
March 26, 1994

BRENT CEHAN

Long before Barthes conceptually wrestled with the French equivalents of today's Gorgeous George, the Masked Terminator and Jesse "the Body" Ventura,¹ the metaphors attributed to our physical being not only signified the desirable, but also the culturally sanctioned. And a conviction that one's body is designated undesirable, unlovable or monstrous often leads to a desire to become someone else, inevitably with monstrous results. "Beauties and Monstrosities," curated by Michael Balsler, presented an evening of mostly gay video and performance that corresponded to and challenged current theories of "the body" (not Jesse Ventura's) and "identity" (not the Terminator's) at Damn Straight, a converted warehouse and performance space on Spadina.

One strategy for the ethical representation of marginalized "bodies," a central tenant of current identity politics, has been the concept of self-representation, i.e., only those who are members of a marginalized group should speak from their particular positions. Performance and video are uniquely suited to respond to this issue because they are both cheaply produced and consumed, draw large audiences and give artists an opportunity to be visually and verbally articulate. In performance, the body's position, the audience's response (and identification), as well as the performer's own voice (and ego) are inescapable, and video is obviously kin to



the medium that constructs mass culture—television.

But spring is in the air and I've assigned myself the task of producing opinions on complex work from a variety of voices that aren't my own and that sometimes violate these tenants. Speaking personally, when I am on stage positioned as a "gay man" (or when I pro-wrestle as "Snake-handler Cehan"), much of what constitutes my identity isn't proscriptive, but performative: creating an identity and a social context around it, in the very act of doing it. "Beauties and Monstrosities" featured pieces not only about defining personal identity (two pieces involved ripping off latex masks) but also about defining an audience.

David Findlay's *Gender, Lace and Glass* has been reviewed in FUSE before,² but his ode to a pornographic idol (which doubles back on the artist and the viewer)—"a monster assembled from the fantasies of a million men" serves as a touchstone for many of the subsequent works.

Mz. *Frankenstein*, by Tanya Mars, tells real horror stories about the billion dollar business of convincing women that their bodies are deficient, defective and in need of surgical alteration. The tape takes the form of an ad for the diabolical "Relax-acisor," an aggregation of wires and electronic pads that makes the user both subject and object of torturous "self-improvement." What I missed in this recent piece were Mars' characterizations that layered

multiple historical contexts over complex feminist issues, as in her previous work, the brilliant *Pure Virtue/Sin/Nonsense* trilogy. And, while the tape doesn't break any new ground, Mars' candour in addressing her own body and the morbidly funny scissors dance are definitely a plus.

Robert Lee's *Myopia* stands the traditional identity politics question ("How do you know what I'm talking about if you're not me?") on its head by cataloguing the structural difficulties of communicating to an unknown audience. The barrage of *nouvelle vague* techniques preventing the audience from illusory identification with bummed out "beautiful people"—shot against seductive yellows but always out of focus or suddenly blocked by a jump cut to a passing bus—corresponds to the lovers' own blind egocentrism. Like the soundtrack that starts out sounding like an orgasm, but that turns out to be a sneeze, the lovers' attachments to each other are based on merely physical phenomena. The video's title never leaves the screen and, depending on the spectator's focus, is simultaneously visible and invisible, eventually becoming both video burn and a constant self-advertisement.

The closest thing to a characterization of Lee's own directorial voice seems to be the character of the SM phone-sex worker who short-circuits her clients' responses because she's really pissed off, but all the other actors featured are less characters than vehicles for Lee's consistently hilariously deadpan aphorisms. For those whose passions run to deconstructive cinema, the tape's nihilistic satire of short-sightedness is counteracted by the kinetic speed of the one liners and *Myopia* itself.

While two of the performances utilise autobiography as a strategy, the third questions autobiography. Courtney McFarlane's *Catharsis* poems range in subject matter from dance-hall homophobia to personal portraits to the reasons he writes.

Each poem addresses the intersection of gay and Black issues with its own distinct cadence: retelling, listing, assembling experience, pulling out new and alternate details. Although McFarlane classifies himself as a poet (BGM, Jamaican-born, Canadian-raised, African-identified), it would be interesting to experience these poems in a more theatrical context than a reading, given his ability to critique a voice even as he evokes it. The prime example is a poem in which two men discuss the skin colour of their chosen partner as "just preferences."

David McLean's work-in-progress *Dysfunctional Travelogue* is loosely structured by the performer's memories of growing up in Newfoundland and anecdotes of the tour of his previous one-man show *Quarantine of the Mind*. Accompanied by videotape images various outdoor sites (which, incidentally ought to be better integrated into the performance), the monologue avoids the problems of "representing gay male experience" by simply retelling it while casually connecting with the evening's "body and identity" theme. In every city he visits, McLean is surrounded by pandering assholes who know him better than he knows himself. The piece serves up gossipy road stories on gay cruising areas, theatre (e.g., Stratford's Brian Bedford and his Kellogg's All Bran), and insights into touring a solo performance on AIDS. (One theatre manager hopes his piece will be one of the funny ones.)

Strewn throughout is McLean's personal narrative of trying to escape Newfoundland and his macho stepfather, as well as the tale of a redhead McLean falls for, just before the guy gets involved with someone else. What begins as a road tour accompanied by Joni Mitchell's *Amelia*, an Airheart tribute equating falling in love with crash-landing, ends asking a question uncomfortably close to home: "What happens when you combine a longing (and aversion) for a 'stable relationship' with a

personal history in which the decisive moment of your life is running away?" The piece is still being retooled before it goes on tour, so I'll conclude with personal confessions which will lose me dates: 1) Yeah, I can identify. 2) "Hejira" is one of my favorite albums.

Can a performer speak from a cultural position that is not his own? *Yes I Can* by visiting San Francisco artist Phil Horvitz, repeats the story (first told in the autobiography of the same name) of the car crash in which Sammy Davis Jr. lost his left eye. The story is recounted at first, sensitively, in the voice of Davis, then again, as a "flaming queen" character, underlining the similarities and differences in cultural positions. Horvitz questions the issue of "appropriation of voice" by lip-synching Vegas tunes, admixtures of jazz and Broadway music performed by Davis and other "rat pack" alumni. But rather than just mouth the words, he sometimes sings along and sometimes just gestures to the music. He begs the question: At what point does appropriation become commentary and vice versa?

As a gay Jewish man, performing the role of a Black Jewish man who emulated Frank Sinatra, Horvitz successfully problematizes any straightforward identity assignments. But the piece demands a critically engaged audience, especially given its oblique intentions and extremely inflammatory images: two childhood pictures of Davis, Black and yet in Black face, frame the performer. Later, as Horvitz lip-synchs to Liza Minelli's rendition of *Mammy*, meanings shift from a maternal image to a gay Garland tribute to Jolson's racist parody, to a simpering fag with a mother complex.

The piece seems to articulate the links between homophobia and racism while simultaneously critiquing the misappropriation of racial metaphors for sexual identity. But it is hard to tell whether Horvitz is articulating links or, in fact, misappropriat-

ing identity himself. Are the *Mammy* and "Old Black Magic" sequences meant to be offensive, indictments of the offensive, or both? When the "flaming queen" repeats Davis' line about the symbolism of his success, is the Liberache analogy intended? The piece ends with *Man in the Mirror*—as sung by showbiz heir and ultimate identity-crisis symbol Michael Jackson—a not entirely convincing self-acquittal, suggesting that what you see in Horvitz' semiotic collisions are what you bring to them. The piece asks important questions—far more than it answers, including those about its own methods.

"Beauties and Monstrosities" became part of a growing performance scene in Toronto. The thirty-day period around it, saw performances by Bill Lazelle, Pomo Afro Homos and two different Shake Well productions.³ It is heartening to see the development of a "marginal" art form which not only covers familiar questions in new ways, but also which sits on the border between the analysis and *production* of its own social contexts.

NOTES

¹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

² *FUSE Magazine*, vol. 16, no. 5+6 (summer), pp. 62-64.

³ Thanks to YZ which sponsored one of the Shake Well shows, the Lazelle show, and co-produced the Pomo Afro Homos with AYA.

Brent Cehan does a great Ethel Merman.

Still from *Mz. Frankenstein*, Tanya Mars, 15:30 min., video, 1993.



Video

Dennis Day Auto Biography

Video Screening: YZ Artists' Outlet, Toronto
February 9, 1994

EARL MILLER

In his videotape, *Auto Biography*, Dennis Day questions the conventional reading of autobiography as truth by building his autobiography around a primarily fictional narrative, which reads as a fragmented series of nostalgic recollections. His childhood memories are altered to portray a satirical fantasy, of living an openly gay adolescence in a quaint, isolated Newfoundland fishing village. Through his reconstitution of his own history, Day infers that the formation of his identity as a gay male is built in part upon a subsequent resistance to a past history dominated by a homophobic culture.

Auto Biography begins with the narrator, "Dennis," speaking in front of his clapboard family home, introducing it as a "gay house." Humour is immediately incited through the reversal of the privileged mainstream with the marginalized gay youth. In the sections of the tape where such inversions are not present, "Dennis" experiences the mishaps of being an outsider while participating in the socially acceptable, straight activities intended for young rural men: church, hunting and fishing. While on these hunting and fishing trips, his gay identity makes him vulnerable to the hostile exterior forces of his homophobic family and environment. A bullying sister throws stones at him as he tries to "blend in" standing in the middle of a pond fishing, dressed in a striped suit, make up and a hat. As a hunter he stalks through a wintry landscape shooting, with a toy gun, at the words "pansy," "faggot" and "queer,"



Still from *Auto Biography*, Dennis Day, 15:00 min., video, 1993. Courtesy V-tape.

which have been sculpted into the snow. Such scenes are played out as surreal slapstick comedy sketches; for example, a priest gives out Dorito chips and Coke during communion, while the parishioners leave toy miniatures of household appliances in the collection plate.

Gay identity in Day's tape is primarily formed by fantasy as opposed to reality. Alternating with satirical slice-of-life events are other scenarios stemming from the realm of the imaginary. Day's fragmented fantasies are often connected by the continual appearance of a sexual alter-ego, signifying the pleasures of the body. As well, there are first love scenes and boys-only pajama parties. Then there are Day's parents who have been switched with a lesbian couple. Such a reversal, by directly opposing dominant culture, emphasizes the real situation of homophobic exclusion.

Auto Biography does not present a seamless utopian inversion of mainstream society. Such an ideal model would wrongly serve as an ontological daydream, which could propagate the passive acceptance of societal norms by using the realm of the imaginary simply as a coping mechanism. Instead, Day reacts against the real by proposing a direct interjection into it. Its ontological opposite, is an uninhibited gay childhood, is intercut with aspects of the less than perfect real: homophobia, dysfunctional relationships, the hypocrisy of religion, consumerism and the media.

Throughout his tape, Day implies that gay identity is heavily influenced by both gay and straight commercial media. Images

from pornography, consumerism, fashion and television play a central role in Dennis' fantasies. At points Day has satirically manipulated such media references. For instance, he has presented homemade television graphics for the tiresome and popular sitcom, *Married with Children*, altered to read *Married without Children*. Throughout *Auto Biography*, a strategy for the empowerment of the marginalized is outlined by Day's subverting and undermining the communications systems of dominant culture. Also, by playing in this highly artificial field of media codes, he references the deceptive nature of memory itself. Day uses the typically commercial technique of chroma-keying actors performing in studios onto natural backgrounds, to present memory as an edited, fictionalized construct as opposed to the essence of one's own history.

Day clearly illustrates that memory is not so much constructed by the constraints of the past as it is by a future resistance to these constraints. By presenting opposites to such conventions, he effectively politicizes his own lived experience. Through this strategy, he reveals dominant culture's exclusion of gays as a process which begins early in one's childhood. Day also asserts that gay identity is constructed from the tensions between the politics of dominant and marginalized communities, a premise that is the crux of *Auto Biography*.

Earl Miller is an independent writer and curator living in Toronto.

Talking Cock: Lesbians and Aural Sex

CYNTHIA WRIGHT INTERVIEWS SHONAGH ADELMAN

Although a number of theorists have suggested that lesbian sexuality is outside the economy of phallogocentrism, that position has been critically countered by the notion that lesbian sexuality is as constructed as any other form of sexuality within contemporary sexual regimes.

— Judith Butler, 1992

C: Historically, lesbian pornography has been primarily made for men's eyes. Over the last ten years, there has been a proliferation of lesbian porn made by women that directly confronts this tradition. So, how do we make erotic lesbian images without assuming the male gaze?

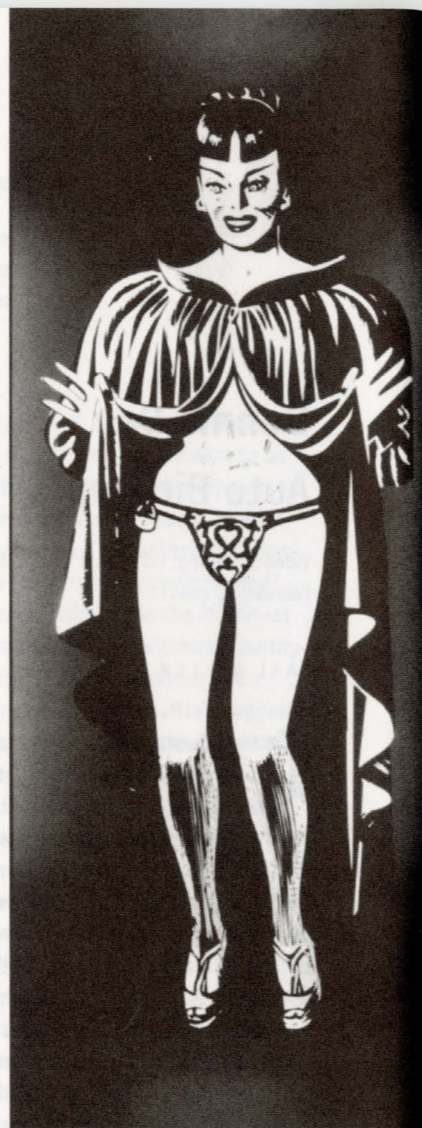
S: I think it's unavoidable. You can't make an image that can be safeguarded from what's been constituted as "the male gaze." But if you don't assume that patriarchal, heterosexual connotations fix the meaning of the image, it allows the viewer some room for counter-readings. Let's just say, I'm starting from the iconoclastic position that everything has been produced for a lesbian gaze rather than a heterosexual male gaze. Just like the recent reappropriation of the term Queer, these images can be turned around or read against the grain.

C: Certainly one strategy of lesbian porn has been the exact opposite—back to nature, representing lesbian sex outside "male" urban spaces and purifying it. This distinguishes these images from the commercial realm in which lesbian porn for men

has traditionally circulated. It seems to me you play with several things: the heterosexual, patriarchal tradition of these images, their commercialization and how our desires get produced and organized by them. Women have been reluctant to admit to coming to lesbianism while looking at *Playboy* or *Vogue*. The images of women in *Teledonna* come from various historical sources. How did you choose them?

S: I was already confined in my selection because I was using black light, and line drawings give the optimum effect under black light. I also wanted to use the iconic form of line drawing because it reduces the representational image to the minimal amount of information. So already that narrowed it right down. I was looking for a broad range of representations that had either a strong stereotypical or anomalous character. Yet my choice was circumscribed by the historical context and forms of line drawing available.

For instance, I had a hard time finding line drawings of women of colour and those that I did find, like the Hottentot Venus, were too racist to use. Although I could reappropriate and recontextualize sexist pin-up or medical illustrations, I found it difficult to know how to reverse the racism while recuperating the eroticism of racist images. And I don't think it's just because I'm white. I wouldn't use an anti-Semitic image either. The problem I encountered is partly an effect of the appropriative tech-



Expose from the "Teledonna" series, Shonagh Adelman, mixed media installation, 1993. Photo: Paula Fairfield.

nique I used. If you are mining historical archives, then you're constrained by prevailing cultural codes: representations of sexuality have generally not been understood as racially organized.

C: Given that these images are already culturally inscribed, how does *Teledonna* relocate them from a lesbian standpoint?

S: On the sides of the boxes there are telephones with recorded phone-sex monologues, some from commercial lines and some homemade. Although I recorded a lot of them as dialogues, I edited them into monologues so that they would directly provoke, address and potentially arouse the listener. The phone sex resituates the images in a context of lesbian desire and opens up the potential for evoking female

eroticism in a way that hasn't been done visually. Male pleasure has classically been signified by the cum shot, whereas there is no definitive visual signifier of female orgasm.

C: Given that the industry is largely geared to men, how then did you approach the commercial phone-sex lines?

S: Initially I wasn't sure where I was going to get the phone sex. One possibility was to take monologues from commercial lines but most of the stuff we taped was boring and formulaic. Although a lot of people really responded to the dominatrix monologue because she doesn't directly address the listener. So in a way it's safe because it doesn't put you in the potentially uncomfortable position of getting turned on in

public. Instead, she talks anecdotally about what she does to men. She takes a kind of pedagogical role. Similarly, many lesbian sexperts and publications educate and reassure women. Like Annie Sprinkle inviting the audience to look at her cervix through a speculum—it demystifies sex and sex trade work.

C: Turning to the "non-professional" women, why did they agree to do phone sex? Did they make the tapes with their lovers? Were some interested in making a point about censorship?

S: Yes, some were politically motivated to make a statement about censorship. Many of the women who agreed to do phone sex already have a history of producing some kind of pornography. Some women were a

lot more open about expressing complex desires and fantasies, others followed a more conventional script. A few brought their sex toys and masturbated during the phone sex. And that's quite different—to hear someone actually have an orgasm rather than hearing a simulated one. It turned me on while I was taping it.

C: I think you're making a false distinction between performance and "actual sex." After all, you're asking women to make a piece of pornography. For some, the performative aspect is what turns them on—it's transgressive. This brings up the question of the productive process of making pornography for public consumption. Can you talk about the making of the tapes?
S: The mechanics of producing the phone sex tapes, the fact that I was aware of

Shonagh Adelman

Teledonna

A Space, Toronto

January 8 – February 19, 1994

JANICE ANDREA E

T*eledonna*, Shonagh Adelman's recent exhibition at A Space, is an installation constructed to explore the relations between power and desire. She begins with the premise that desire is socially constructed and socially regulated. By placing what most viewers would identify as a personal and intimate subject into a public context, she succeeds in examining the role of the gaze in the production of meaning of this "skindeep" matter. The viewer is also a voyeur. And, because of the auditory

element of this installation—the viewer/voyeur is invited to participate in the production of meaning by lifting each of the telephone receivers to hear recordings of "phone sex"—this gesture marks an act of free will to be included within the framework of this event. In this museum context, the passive role of voyeur is transformed into an active one underlined by the significant gesture of *reaching to listen*, which indicates a curiosity to discover, to know more than what appears on the surface. In addition, this action draws attention to the mediating role the viewer performs in producing meaning from this auditory voyeuristic experience. It also indicates that the desire *to touch the telephone receiver* triggers an exchange when this act occurs. Upon lifting the receiver to her/his ear, the viewer listens to an aural text which, in turn, stimulates an erotic

response (or one of moral indignation depending where you are positioned on the Butler debate). By framing this installation in a museum context, Adelman investigates the voyeur's desire for sexual/erotic stimulation, a willing exchange of *cash for sex* in visual terms. At what point does the activity of looking become an act of engagement and exchange — for knowledge, for profit?

Instead of focusing upon the artist's role, Adelman draws attention to the role of the viewer—the voyeur—who is always an agent of her/his own production of meaning whatever the context, whatever the content under consideration. In order to explore the semiotics of pornography, Adelman lifts a *cash for sex* incident out of its usual context, a consumer outlet, and locates this event in a non-economic con-

continued on page 47

Perry Hoberman
Bar Code Hotel
June 17 to July 16

Rose English
•a survey exhibition of performance works
July 23 to August 21
•Rosita Clavel performance
August 6

Jan Wade
Epiphany
August 29 to October 16

Santiago Rodriguez Olazabal
Afrocubanismo
August 29 to October 16

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ART COMPETITION WHITBY PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Ontario Government, under its Art in Architecture Program, is commissioning site specific major works of art for permanent placement in the new Whitby Psychiatric Hospital Redevelopment Project. The building will be located on the existing site on the edge of Lake Ontario in Whitby, Ontario.

An Art Advisory Committee has been established to award 11 commissions in a two-stage competition. Commissions will range from \$8,000 to \$38,000 and will include a terrazzo floor design, sculpture, stained glass and other media.

Ontario resident artists who are interested in participating in this open competition should send a letter requesting competition guidelines by Aug. 12, 1994 to:

Management Board Secretariat
Art in Architecture Program
Ferguson Block, 3rd Floor
77 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1N3
Tel: (416) 327-1984
Fax: (416) 327-1852

Guidelines are available in both official languages. Please indicate your preference.

The Art Advisory Committee Chairperson for this project is Linda Paulocik, Director/Curator of The Station Gallery, Whitby.

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having to split the dialogues into mono-
logues, to some extent limited and inter-
vened in the phone sex because I had to
ask them to hold the receiver away from
their mouths and not to overlap too much.

C: What issues emerge when women talk
dirty to other women? We think of the gaze
as male; is the voice also male? Sex talk is
outside the realm of conventional feminini-
ty. In cinematic sex scenes, we hear women
moan and groan, but do they ever actively
talk about sex or are they always evoked or
terrorized by a male voice?

S: The problems in taking an active sexual
voice are evident in the phone sex mono-
logues. There was a lot of "I want you to
fuck me" and "cock" and this and that—

evoking either male sexuality or heterosex-
uality.

C: Yes, there's a lot of "suck my cock" and
stuff like that which is not the first thing
people think lesbians say to each other. The
vocabulary and the idiom in which the sex-
ual script is articulated is heavily informed
by the history of "het" porn. If you take on
the "active" role you find yourself saying
things like "suck my cock." But of course
those are things that some lesbians *do* say
in bed. It's not like it's totally inauthentic.
For some, it's linked to butch/femme sexual
codes. But is active sexuality and in partic-
ular the butch role necessarily a replica of
the male role or masculinity?

S: Visible lesbian sexuality is generally
equated with the butch. In a way, it's easier

to create a butch scenario. This brings up
the problem of locating the femme since a
woman's desire for a woman, or even active
sexuality, is culturally encoded as male.
Though, Melinda clearly situates herself as
a femme in the phone sex monologue. So
does Elaine, although she does it by nam-
ing herself as a femme, whereas Melinda
does it in a more implicit way by taking the
position of power and narrativizing it as
though it were initiated by the listener.
Butch/femme plays with gender codes and
I think that's why the exhibition was criti-
cized by some lesbians. They felt it was
repetitive and/or male identified. Some
lesbians didn't see themselves or hear
themselves in the exhibition—they felt
excluded and that I only represented a lim-
ited spectrum of lesbian sexualities.
Inevitably that's the case. And then there

continued from page 45

text, a cultural setting, though equally rife
with conditions of exchange and currency
when erotic/sexual issues are mounted in
such a visible forum. In the gallery, Adel-
man constructs a scenario where the viewer
reaches for different telephone receivers in
order to acquire more information about
the installation. For her, this desire for
knowledge is equivalent to a desire for
arousal. When acted upon, both are
exchanges for gain.

Adelman conducts her deconstruction
of voyeuristic acts of seeing in a material
way. Through a careful, and what must have
been a painstakingly disciplined, selection
process, she employs a minimum of lingu-
istic elements. Simple, boldly outlined black
and white images, resembling comic book
stereotypes of *real women*, selected from a
variety of historical homoerotic representa-
tions of lesbians, act metonymically to sug-

gest multiple associations and familiar
responses. All are triggered by sparsely
framed, lone referents, flat and absolutely
devoid of any alluring features that typical-
ly dominate pornographic representations
of women's bodies. Such deliberate strip-
ping of each representation, each female
figure, suggests that each functions as a
signal, an indexical referent, to the viewer.
Likewise, there is a far more important sig-
nifier required for producing meaning here
that is not immediately apparent but neces-
sary to discover. Here, Adelman ironically
undermines the foremost role such a visual
sign holds historically and traditionally in a
museum context, particularly when a
woman's body is portrayed. Instead, of
being an objectified representation, a com-
modity with *lure*, Adelman sees that each of
her unsentimentalized subjects performs an
active, directive role in the viewing—or is it

meaning making—experience that occurs
here. What the viewer/voyeur encounters,
then, is unexpected and certainly uncon-
ventional when assumptions about what
goes on in a museum setting and what any
red-blooded heterosexual male consumer of
pornographic imagery might expect to
encounter here are considered. Clearly,
what is most significant to any full, open-
ended experience of this installation is
what is least visible, or not. And it is this
gap, this toying with the unexpected, that
attracts and disturbs viewers. Its interrup-
tion. Its incompleteness. Its intervention with
the status quo. The message is carried by a
different medium, a telephone recording of
lesbian "phone sex," for example. Thus,
Adelman cleverly constructs a destabilizing
event for the viewing subject, one that

continued on next page

are those who simply don't get anything out of phone sex, it doesn't invoke desire for them.

C: Some lesbians have been interested in thinking about lesbian sexual culture via gay male porn and sexual practice although, in general, it hasn't worked the other way around. So it interests me that gay men came to your show and found it pleasurable.

S: Some gay men applauded the explicit sex. A lot of the monologues conjure gay male sexual practices. Some men got into the perversity of lesbians talking about cock. For heterosexual men, it depended on where they were located, who their communities were: some thought that it was disgusting, some felt they weren't

addressed by the work and others got into it. Likewise, with straight women; some thought it was a negative commentary on heterosexuality, and others may have subsequently come out! Generally, the phone sex was interpreted either as a critique, as a parody or as a more complex statement about using gender codes to act out power relationships in a sexual dynamic. The other thing that we didn't touch on is the way the exhibition destabilizes the distinction between low culture and high art and how this affected its reception. Different audiences brought various expectations depending on whether they anticipated seeing art or porn—pornographic art or artistic porn.

C: Ultimately, the exhibition dives directly into the question: can there be a separate

space for lesbian desire? The boundaries around lesbian sexual desire and practice are fundamentally unstable since, on some level, they are organized by the heterosexism of the culture and by heterosexual images. That's a question that lesbian feminism hasn't explored in much depth partly because there's been an overriding imperative to mark out and define a distinctively lesbian sexuality, which has been politically important. But in the end, it's not possible to bracket off lesbian desire and this raises a lot of provocative questions for lesbians personally, politically and sexually.

Shonagh Adelman and Cynthia Wright are two members of the third sex.

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resists the socially constituted frame of compulsory heterosexuality and thereby gains its power. Adelman demystifies familiar signs and associations and, similarly, their reading(s). Through (re)mapping different patterns of erotic stimulation(s) and using different frames of references to contextualize her erotic/sexual subject(s), Adelman aptly invites her viewer to consider an analogous destabilization of society where her frame works as it does in *Tele-donna*—in three-dimensional *real* space.

If Adelman questions the heterosexual framing of dominant expectations and assumptions that operate to regulate and to construct desire, she also emphasizes the means by which its currency is rigidly maintained. Visually and visibly. The two technologies of reproduction she employs to construct her installation—Xerox facsimiles and tape recordings—display the inter-

dependent commerce of representational practices and expressions of power which define and control women as subjects for themselves, and for others. The overexposed iconic sign(al)s suspended in the glaring surface of each monumental light box connote the immediate, direct communication of blaring loud speakers and flashing neon signs, suggesting both the public and political dynamics which legitimize and reify the codes and conventions of an heterosexist society.

Adelman's reliance on a strategy of deconstruction to redress the representation and position of women subjects dominated by a heterosexist linking of desire with power, suggests that her project is aligned with cultural feminism, especially what might be seen as reclaiming lesbian subject(s) for lesbians. But this reading is only skin-deep, for Adelman queries the

representational and linguistic practices of what she identifies as a dominant discourse of desire, regulated and enforced through conventions and codes of dominance. For her, such intervention problematizes the processes and procedures of cultural practices which regulate and restrict different constructions of women subjects. This transgressive, and queer, outlook is tough, leads to different conclusions, invents different possibilities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

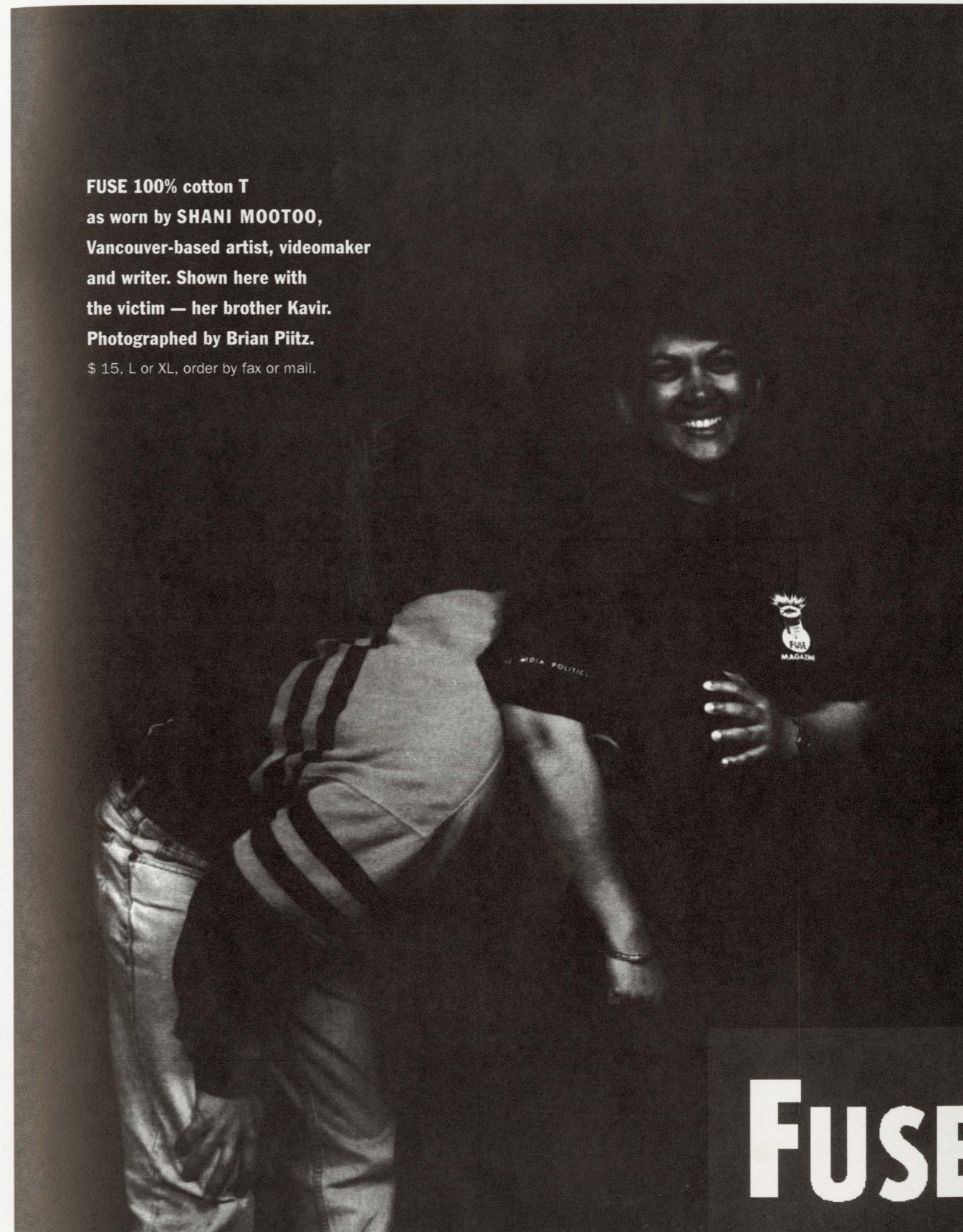
Discussions with Mary Anne Coffey were invaluable for working through and formulating this review.

Janice Andreae is a Toronto writer, artist and curator.

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Vancouver-based artist, videomaker
and writer. Shown here with
the victim — her brother Kavar.
Photographed by Brian Piitz.

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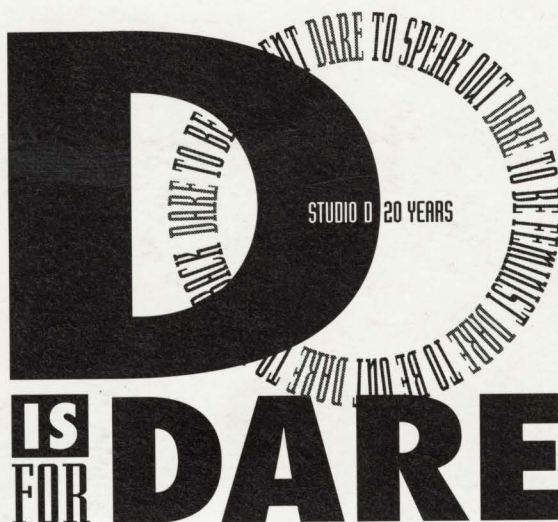
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