

FUSE

MAGAZINE

FALL 1990

Vol.14 No.1+2

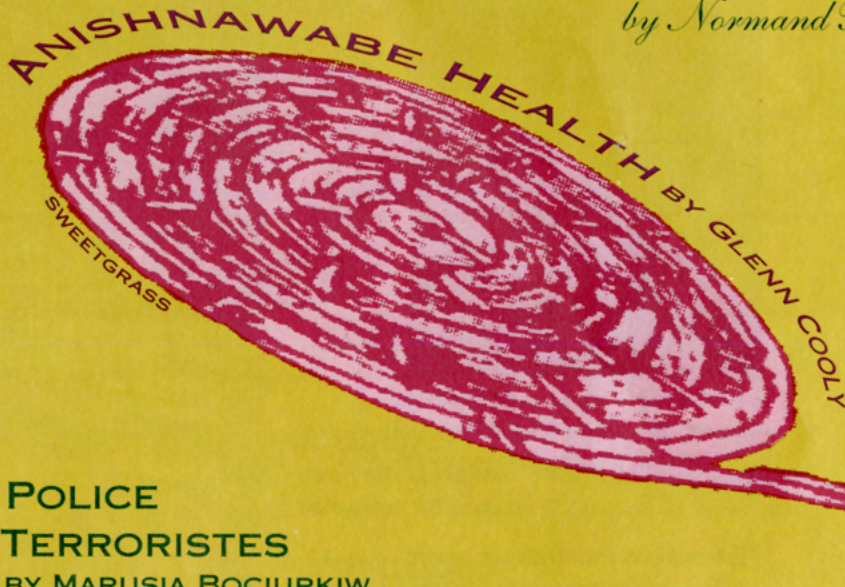
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*Jalonnement du terrain
culturel au*

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Mapping out cultural space

by Normand Thériault



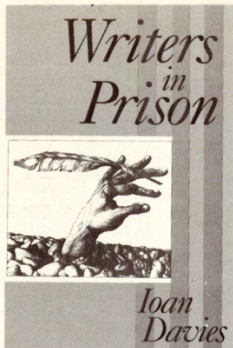
**POLICE
TERRORISTES**
BY MARUSIA BOCIURKIW

DRAWING THE LINE: AN EXHIBITION EXPLORING THE LIMITS OF LESBIAN SEX



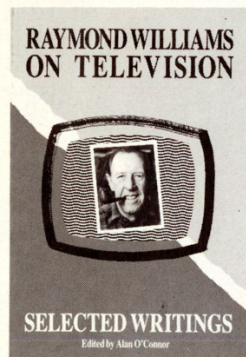
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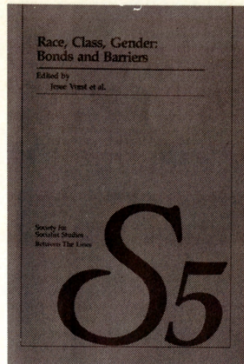


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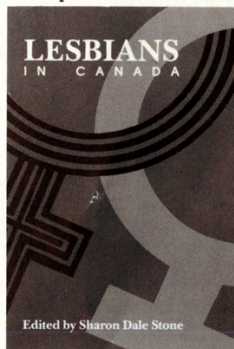
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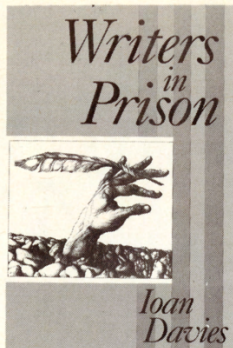
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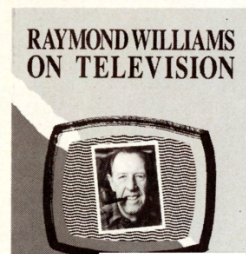
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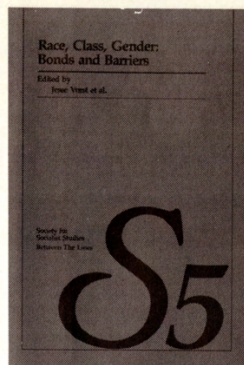


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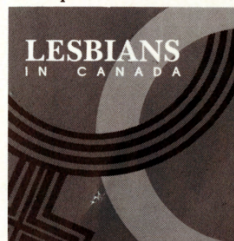
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letters

Beauty, Grandeur & Mystery

I am writing to comment on Molly Shihnat's review of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* (*FUSE* Vol. XIII no. 4). While I agree with much of her criticism about the film's structural problems I would like to comment about some issues her review raises which seem important to address along different lines.

The Mahabharata itself could be easily considered a work of "cultural imperialism." Written by the Aryans who invaded Northern India during the period of 1500-600 B.C., the text appropriates earlier pre-Aryan deities and myths of the indigenous Mohenjo-Daro and Harappan peoples of the Indus River valley region. The invaders, who were of the white race, came from Eastern Europe by way of the Kyber Pass. They were a warrior culture and a patriarchy (no surprises here). *The Mahabharata* is an attempt by the descendants of these invaders to reconcile differences between the outlook of the two most powerful classes, or castes, in India: the Brahmins and the Kshatras.

It is true that the peoples of the Indian sub-continent have suffered possibly more invasions than any other cultural group. Today, 100 years after the founding of the Indian nationalist movement, to see a British production company mounting a production of *The Mahabharata* in London is not so much "cultural imperialism" to me as it is an homage to lasting value of this sacred text of Hindu culture and primordial text of world literature. It might even be considered an honest attempt at setting the score straight—recognizing the value of India's spiritual heritage in the West today, in a modern Western idiom.

It is important to note that Brook's adaptation is not the only film record of *The Mahabharata*. There have been more than several Indian film and television productions, which can be rented or purchased in any Indian grocery store in the West. But the question is—how many Westerners go into Indian grocery stores? *The Mahabharata* is so popular even today that there is an on-going soap opera type adaptation of it which brings the Indian sub-continent to a virtual standstill when it is aired each day on Indian television.

Some of my East Indian relatives tell me that the Indian mentality does not include the idea of copyright and every Hindu scholar and religious leader over the last 2000 years has re-written *The Mahabharata* from his or her own individual perspective. There have been a lot of really hacked up versions of the text by Westerners and Indians alike, but all these versions try to be faithful, in some way, to the original text. I myself am fond of the comic book versions of *The Mahabharata*, particularly those published by India Book House in Bombay which I purchased a couple of years ago in a bookstore in Montréal. This material is very available to Westerners—if they have the desire to find such work.

Finally I would like to comment a bit on the integrity of Peter Brook's approach to his work on this classical vedic spiritual text. Having followed Mr. Brook's career and development as a filmmaker and director, I think he has made a sincere effort at trying to bring these very difficult Oriental texts to Western audiences, such as in his stage adaptation of Attar's *The Conference of Birds* or his film of Gurdjieff's book *Meeting With Remarkable Men*. While I have often found the Elizabethan-like style of his approach to non-Western source materials to be somewhat hokey, this perception on my part may stem from my own particularly North American point of view. In his critical writings, one finds that Mr. Brook has done his homework and has "paid the price"—I don't think he could be considered a cultural imperialist. While he can be and is criticized for the end product, he crosses cultural boundaries in what I feel are valid and appropriate ways. But in this vein, his work is definitely experimental. We should note that the market is very small for this kind of film in non-Oriental cultures, even today with all the talk of the "New Age."

For me, the important question here is: How does one introduce these myths and cosmologies into popular culture? Is distortion inevitable, unavoidable and perhaps even necessarily acceptable? I think this has always been a difficult question for Westerners who see divisions between high and popular culture, the sacred and the profane, the revolutionary and the traditional, the rich and the poor, the oppressed and the oppressor.

letter continued next page >

errata

On p. 36 of "Black History & Desire," (*FUSE* vol. XIII no. 5) Molly Shihnat's interview with Isaac Julien, the line "a mane, a face, a mind..." should have read "a name, a face, a mind..."

The following information should have accompanied "Published and Be Damned" by Marlene Nourbese Philip (*FUSE* vol. XIII no. 6): Marlene Nourbese Philip submitted this piece to the *The Globe & Mail* where an editor received it favourably and suggested some stylistic changes. Philip made those changes on the understanding that *The Globe* would publish the piece. However when the piece was submitted to the Arts Editor, the latter objected to the arguments. *The Globe* paid Philip a kill fee for the piece.

The Western mentality is more than likely to see division, difference and disagreement—we're always trying to fix something. The Eastern mind often functions on basic principles of unity, convergence and the rightness of what is, which is probably why so many Eastern traditions have not been able to always withstand the pressure of the Western world. Is there any way to save the beauty, grandeur and mystery of these Eastern ways in the context of the consumer-oriented, pragmatic, positivist, scientific rationalism of the all-consuming West? Obviously a plurality of voices is needed here, in all cultures and traditions, which also reflect and draw upon other cultures as well.

Sincerely, Alex Roshuk

Comic Book Mahabharata

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on my review of *The Mahabharata*. I would like to respond to several points you make in addition to commenting on the overall tone of your letter.

The Aryans you mention can hardly be described as simply "of the white race." Such statements further the completely bankrupt notion of racial purity and blur the distinction between the meaning of the word "Aryan" in a contemporary and ancient context. The Aryans that invaded India were descended from Indo-Europeans who had migrated into Greece, Asia Minor and Iran. Subsequent to those migrations they became known as "Aryan." Their physical resemblance to "he-man"—blond hair, blue eyes, white skin—was negligible if not non-existent. The current evidence on the Indus Valley civilization dates it from circa 3000 b.c. to 1500 b.c. I am not a scholar of ancient Indian history, however all the sources I have consulted draw only a few conclusions about what was happening on a cultural level right after the Aryans invaded. All the sources make the following two points. When the Aryans invaded, the Indus Valley civilization was already on the decline, and the Aryans settled in India and inter-married.

The events described in the *The Mahabharata* and in *The Ramayana*, the other Indian epic, took place between 1000 and 700 b.c. The earliest surviving versions date between 1 and 500 a.d. Are you suggesting that such records should be read as *historically accurate* in the *literal sense*? As Indian historian Romila Thapar and others have suggested, this can be done only in the event that supporting archaeological evidence can be found. In some instances this has indeed occurred, but thus far not to the extent that would support all of the conclusions you make vis à vis the relationship between the Aryans and the Indians. Given the time frame here between the invasion and the writing of the text, I am not sure *The Mahabharata* could be called a work of "cultural imperialism" on the part of the Aryans—inter-marriage and cultural exchange under however hostile conditions had already been taking place for at least 1500 years.

I found the overall tone of your letter patronizing and condescending. When cultural products of this kind are produced by people of European origin for a Western audience, a number of questions and problematics cry out for closer examination. For example, your letter does not question why you and Mr. Brook et al do not find Indian culture "understandable" in its present or historical form as presented by people indigenous to India. Nor do you question your own need to "save (sic) the beauty, grandeur and mystery" of the Orient in communicating its culture to the West. In fact, your words (understandable, beauty, grandeur, mystery) in a historical and contemporary context continue to be some of the key words used to locate Asian culture in an orientalist discourse that fixes every aspect of the culture (including Asian people) as exotic, mysterious, and ultimately irrational—"irrational" only because the "rational" Western mind cannot "understand" it/them. I question

your use of the word "save" in this context. That some people of European origin should find it necessary/desirable to "save" Indian culture reminds me of that zeal adopted by European missionaries who came and continue to come to India to save us, the "savages," from our "barbaric" ways. I can assure you India has no need of Westerners in "saving" her culture. Indeed Indian culture lives—and not in galleries, museums, religious rites and archaeological sites alone.

Beginning with the first European colonizers, India has been bombarded by Europeans, artistic and otherwise, who have disfigured, distorted and appropriated Asian cultural forms and texts. Who is looking at whom and how? What is the motivation for the looking? And why is that a few exceptional people can draw on traditions outside their own, combine that material with their own, and create beautiful and meaningful work that still preserves the integrity of the aspects taken from that other tradition and yet other people cannot? A few chasms of difference lie gaping between Mr. Brook et al making a film version of the text and a commercial Bombay producer who has grown up with a living masterpiece making a film version, despite the number of and kind of liberties each may or may not take with the original text.

Finally I must say I commend you for having a mind so Western in outlook as to have that all-important colonial trait—arrogance. The copy of *The Mahabharata* you are "most fond (sic) of" and recommend to Western readers is the comic book version! In a sense Brook's film could be described as the cartoon version of *The Mahabharata* for, like *The Ten Commandments*, it portrays "grandeur" and "beauty" but, aside from the obvious difference in medium, is totally different from the text.

Your comments on the "Eastern" and the "Western" mind fix both as almost polar opposites, each sliding into a pit of enforced homogeneity based on the fact that the mind in each case is either "Eastern" or "Western." I take particular offense to your suggestion that "so many Eastern traditions have not been able to always withstand the pressure of the Western world" because of the way the Eastern mind "often functions." Are you saying it is in whole or part because of the Eastern mind's "functioning" that India was colonized?

In conclusion, not enough questions have been posed around a Westerner's motivation(s) in focusing in on certain kinds and facets of Asian knowledge and ignoring others. This myopia has pervaded the Western vision when it looks at knowledge indigenous to the rest of the so-called Third World. The Western interest dwells on Asian mysticism, astrology, astronomy and holistic healing, for instance. Seen by Western eyes as imbued in Eastern "mystery, beauty, greatness" and "divine wisdom," few of these areas of knowledge are seen as sciences, as technologies developed over thousands of years. Instead the shroud of "mystery" and "irrationality" cloaks all. I believe that part of this lack of acknowledgement comes out of the anti-science perspective which once again we see gaining currency in the West. There is almost a crass rejection of the contribution Asian culture has made and continues to make in the sciences and the place pure science and technology hold in Asian culture.

I am certainly not trying to change your opinion of Mr. Brook's film. Rather I am trying to communicate some of the necessary questioning that has to continue around it. "Honest attempt[s] at setting the score straight" do not come in this form if such a thing is even possible. Two hundred-odd years of British colonialism cannot be forgiven or forgotten in the act of a British director making a film, any film, about any aspect of life and culture in India. I find it disturbing that perhaps you believe this may even be possible.

Molly K. Shihnat

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INTERVIEW



ELIJAH HARPER,
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ADDRESSES A CROWD
OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE
AND THEIR SUPPORTERS
AT THE ASSEMBLY OF
FIRST NATIONS "OUR
SPIRITS WILL NOT BE
BROKEN" UNITY MARCH,
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Negotiating Self Rule

ELIJAH HARPER: the man who stood up—the lone Indian in the Manitoba Legislature armed with an Eagle Feather and the backing of Aboriginal people across the country—effectively quashed the most significant and far-reaching constitutional amendment to be proposed since Canada became an independent nation in 1982. The dignified honour and intelligence with which this task was carried through has forever altered the perception of Aboriginal people in the eyes of Canadians. The dramatic event has also brought Aboriginal people together in a unified stand of pride in their heritage and conviction to the struggle of achieving recognition of their rights. Indeed, this calling to unity came just in time as weeks later the Sûreté du Québec and the Canadian Armed Forces were surrounding Mohawk barricades in Kahnawake and Kanesatake. And Elijah was there too.

This interview was conducted in Ottawa on September 5, 1990 in the studios of CKCU-FM. It was then aired the following evening on the weekly Native radio program "Spirit Voice." While the interview was on the air, Elijah Harper was already in Dorval, Quebec, just miles away from the Kanesatake Mohawk community, participating in the Six Nations Confederacy negotiations to bring the impending crisis to a peaceful and honourable end. That evening Harper was on the phone with the Army General in charge asking for permission to enter the surrounded treatment centre in Kanesatake. Two days later, on September 8, Harper found himself behind the wires at the treatment centre where he received letters from Mohawk children addressed to Prime Minister Mulroney and his children. Accompanied by two Mohawk children, Harper was then on the way back to Ottawa where he delivered the letters to the Prime Minister's residence. The next day, Elijah Harper sat on a plane heading back to Winnipeg where he had one day to campaign for his reelection, on September 11, as MLA for the Rupertsland riding.

GREG YOUNG-ING: Could you explain a bit about your background?
ELIJAH HARPER: Well, I'm from Red Sucker Lake Reserve in Northern Manitoba and I was born in a longhouse in the bush. I was

raised by my grandparents in a community which was very isolated. They raised me in the traditional Cree way. I spent a lot of time on the traplines and in the fishing camps in my younger days. Then I went to residential school when I was nine years old. I quit school when I was 16 years old and I went back home to go trapping. That was really good for me because all the things that I learned in my younger days came back to me. The following year I went to the University of Manitoba where I studied anthropology. Now I wonder why I studied anthropology. But anyways, after university I worked for the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood for about four years until 1978 when I was elected chief in Red Sucker Lake. Then I was elected to the Manitoba Legislature in 1981.

YOUNG-ING: Why did you get involved with provincial politics in Manitoba?
HARPER: I've always been interested in politics and I was always interested in providing some sort of community leadership. Even

BY GREG YOUNG-ING

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when I was young, I used to organize games with the other kids on the Reserve. I was also the president of my junior high school. At the high school level, I helped to organize a lot of social activities with the student council. And when I was at the University of Manitoba, I helped to establish a Native student counselling office and a lounge for Native students. I also worked actively with other Native students at the University to push for more Native Studies courses, and now the University has a Native Studies department. So, I've always been interested in advancing the causes of Aboriginal people in any way that I can, and running for MLA was another way that I thought I could do that.

YOUNG-ING: You've probably been asked this one enough times before, but how does it feel to be the only Indian in the Manitoba Legislature?

HARPER: I often say that it feels like Custer must have felt. But seriously, it is a difficult feeling. Sometimes I feel that Native issues are not being taken seriously and when the day is adjourned I was the only one who had spoken to the issue from a Native perspective. Being the first treaty Indian elected as an MLA in Manitoba, I often feel like I'm speaking to an empty house. I certainly would look forward to having more Indian people in the Legislature, hopefully after the upcoming election on September 11th. And that's part of the frustration that I've gone through. But I just keep telling myself that it's a good thing that I am there and I hope that I am paving the way for other Aboriginal people to get involved.

YOUNG-ING: Could you briefly describe your perspective of how the events which lead to your stand against the Meech Lake Accord came about?

HARPER: When the Meech Lake Accord was first drawn up in 1987 I was



the Minister of Native and Northern Affairs and Howard Pawley was the Premier of Manitoba. At that time, I indicated to him that I didn't support the Accord. But shortly afterwards the NDP was defeated through a non-confidence motion and we were thrown out of government. The Conservatives then got in power and they introduced the Meech Lake Accord into the Legislature. Even then, I stated publicly that I was against it and that I would vote against it. But because of the timing of the events that were played out over the summer, it was left to the eleventh hour and that gave us an opportunity to frustrate the process. The Manitoba Chiefs had told me that they wanted to kill the Accord and I indicated to them that I would do my best to support that initiative. So we began to work on developing a strategy. To put it simply, as things went along, it became evident that we would succeed by using the parliamentary rules to stall the passage of the Accord. So we just did it.

YOUNG-ING: What was the general message that you were trying to get out by blocking the Accord?

HARPER: We were saying "No" to the federal government's benign

neglect of Aboriginal people. We were saying, "Enough is enough" and also that the Meech Lake Accord did nothing for Aboriginal people. As a matter of fact, it threatened to entrench a process in which Aboriginal people would have had extreme difficulty in achieving any constitutional amendment to accommodate their needs. Of course, the failure of the First Ministers Conference on Aboriginal Constitutional Matters in 1987 was still fresh in our minds. And we were not about to sit back and let the Meech Lake Accord destroy our chances of achieving constitutional recognition in the future. As Aboriginal people, we want to be recognized in the Constitution as founding nations and as a distinct society. We were not included at all in the Meech Lake Accord and that caused a lot of anger, disappointment and frustration for our people. So together with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Aboriginal people of Manitoba and the support of the Aboriginal people in Canada, we took the position and carried it through.

YOUNG-ING: What would you say to the people of Quebec about your stand against the Meech Lake Accord?

HARPER: I would say that we were not saying "No" to Quebec. In fact, the aspirations of Aboriginal people are basically the same as the aspirations of the people of Quebec. We want the ability to maintain our language, to enhance and protect our culture, and to control our future. Those are the same aspirations that the people of Quebec have and, as Aboriginal people, we certainly understand that. But we also expect Quebec to be able to understand where we are coming from. Our stand was certainly not directed against Quebec at all. It was not an offensive stand; it was defensive.

YOUNG-ING: As we look back, we know that there was also a similar process going on in Newfoundland. Do you believe that the Accord would have passed if it were not for your stand against it in Manitoba?

HARPER: Based on information that I have received, I would say that it is likely that the Accord would have passed if it were not for Manitoba not being able to approve it. Of course, we will never know that for sure. But certainly if Meech Lake had been passed in Manitoba there would have been a tremendous amount of pressure on Newfoundland, because then Quebec could have said that it was a rejection by English Canadians. I think that would have given Quebec more moral authority to say that they are going to separate or form some sort of sovereignty association. But the Accord was not stopped by any part of mainstream English Canada. It was stopped by Aboriginal people.

YOUNG-ING: What would you say generally about the treatment of Aboriginal people in Canada?

HARPER: Well, if you look at the history, the Canadian govern-

ments have been trying to assimilate the Aboriginal peoples in this country. The policies are very clear about that. They are policies of integration and genocide and they are alive and well today. And when you look at how the governments are handling the current Mohawk crisis, it is certainly difficult not to realize that.

YOUNG-ING: What type of relationship do you think should exist between Aboriginal peoples and Canada?

HARPER: To answer that I would look at the visions of our forefathers. When we signed treaties, our ancestors visualized that we would share our land and resources with the new people that came onto our land; that we would co-exist and respect each other's freedom and not try to dominate one another. But the newcomers did not live up to the deal and now we have a situation where the Canadian Government has a dictatorship over the lives of Aboriginal peoples on a day-to-day basis. That has got to stop. We have to establish a new relationship where Aboriginal peoples can have control over their own lives and determine their own future.

YOUNG-ING: Do you think the Aboriginal people's stand against the Meech Lake Accord is related to the events this summer at Kanesatake and Kahnawake?

HARPER: All I can say to that question is, "I hope not." In our stand against the Accord we were protecting our own interests. We were certainly not denying any other group of people in Canada any rights which they deserve. But at the same time, other people's rights were not going to come about at the expense of our rights.

YOUNG-ING: As we speak, what appears to be the last Warrior encampment in Kanesatake is surrounded by the Armed Forces. What do you think is the solution to the crisis between First Nations and

Canada, and especially between the Mohawk Nation and Canada?

HARPER: With the Army being sent in, I believe the only option available at this time is to get Canada and Quebec back to the negotiating table so that we can reach a political resolution. I don't believe this should be resolved through military force. For us, as Aboriginal people, force will bring deeper resentment and more mistrust. And we don't want that kind of legacy left behind for our children because they are the ones who will have to bear the burden of this. My children and non-Native children are going to have to live with each other in this country, and I hope they can do it peacefully. A negotiated political solution, no matter how long it takes, is the only solution that will be in everybody's interest.

YOUNG-ING: How do you think the events of this summer will affect the relations between First Nations and Canada?

HARPER: I think it depends on the outcome of the situation. It depends on whether it is going to be resolved by force or peacefully. If it's resolved by force, I think it will set back some of the advancements that have been made between Aboriginal people and Canada. If it's resolved peacefully, we will more likely be able to live with each other in a more co-operative manner. I just hope that the Canadian government doesn't use force to settle this issue, because then we will be back to square one and there will be a lot of healing to be done. ●

Greg Young-Ing is a member of the Pas Indian Band (Cree Nation-Treaty 5) in Manitoba. He has worked with the Aboriginal Youth Council of Canada, the National Indian Education Forum, the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association of Canada, and as co-producer of "Spirit Voice," a weekly Aboriginal radio program on CKCU-FM in Ottawa.





PROTESTING POLICE ATTACKS ON LESBIANS AND GAYS IN MONTREAL.

Police: Terroristes

BY MARUSIA BOCIURKIW

"I have it in my mind that dykes are like indians/... they were massacred/lots of times/they always came back/like the grass/like the clouds/they got massacred again." —Paula Gunn Allen

"Some Like Indians Endure." *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988)

MONTREAL — Natives and queers in Québec found they had a few things in common this summer as police converged on the defiant Mohawk community of Kanesatake, Québec and aimed guns and riot sticks at lesbians and gays in Montreal.

The convergence of right-wing strength and lesbian/gay-bashing is manifesting itself across Canada: In B.C., right-wing groups protested the Gay Games; Lesbian and Gay Pride Day in Ottawa was marred by harassment from homophobic groups. In Toronto, a community-based "queer-bashing hotline" has been organized to document a rise in beatings and attacks.

The recent wave of police attacks on lesbians and gays in Montreal began with a raid on a private party in the early morning of July 15. Police, claiming to have been responding to an (unverified) noise complaint, converged on partygoers without warning, swinging riot sticks, pushing people onto the ground and hitting people, causing many to be bruised and scarred. That night, over 250 community members marched through Montreal's gay ghetto on St. Catherine Street and sat down in the street in a symbolic reclaiming of public space. Police were conspicuously absent, perhaps in preparation for the next days' events.

On Monday, July 16, after a hurriedly organized Sunday afternoon bar meeting, 250 lesbians and gays stopped traffic in front of a downtown police station. The non-violent protest was meant to draw

public attention to police brutality and to demonstrate support for a delegation that was meeting with police officials. Demands of the delegation, that charges be dropped against those arrested, that a public inquiry be conducted and that there be lesbian/gay representation on the police minority relations board, were ignored. When those who had been arrested attempted to file official complaints, the doors to the police station were locked.

While the meeting dragged on indoors, protesters continued their sit-in under the hot midday sun. The mood was benign, almost festive. Some women passed around a watermelon; someone else bought Mr. Freezes and threw them into the crowd. Chants arose: "Police: Terroristes" and "We're here, we're queer and so are some of you!" Boys necked for the TV cameras and girls passed around

sunblock. The sudden appearance of riot police dressed in bulletproof vests, helmets and latex gloves and armed with riot sticks almost seemed like a mirage shimmering out of the concrete horizon.

Perhaps it shouldn't have been so surprising. Only five days earlier, a force of 100 Sûreté de Québec (Québec provincial police) had raided a blockade set up by Mohawks of the Kanesatake reserve near Oka, Québec in an attempt to prevent a golf course from being built on traditional Mohawk land. Armed with assault rifles, concussion grenades and tear gas, police terrorized the small Mohawk community and surrounded the reserve, blocking off all food and medical supplies. Mohawks at the Kahnawake reserve near Montreal blockaded the Mercier bridge in solidarity; groups of white racists in

Chateauguay, Kanesatake and Kahnawake mobbed the blockades, harassed anyone with skin darker than theirs and burned effigies of Mohawks. Police did not take action against these racist groups until three weeks into the conflict.

Montreal police beat up on the lesbian and gay demonstrators with only slightly less vigour than their colleagues in the Sûreté. What they lacked in equipment, they made up for in persistence. They kicked and battered as they dragged people into paddy wagons and ran after pedestrians and non-obstructing demonstrators for several city blocks. Many of the police did not wear name tags. Inside the police station, as a line-up of police kicked gay men being dragged in, some of the worst injuries occurred. Women were sexually harassed and taunted; one man was injured in the testicles.

The Kanesatake and Kahnawake incidents were reported internationally in the media. Outside of Montreal, a news blackout about the lesbian/gay-bashing prevailed. No connections were made between the two incidents in any of the media reports thus helping to isolate the two communities from one another.

This isolation was reproduced in the lesbian/gay community meetings that took place over the weeks that followed. The community was divided over organizing strategies: Would the theme of the protest march include the struggles of people of colour and women, who had long been targets of state-sanctioned police violence? Or would this march focus only on the community's own concerns? Heated arguments arose, and many racist assumptions were made. For many white gay men whose organizing experience was located entirely within the AIDS movement,

homophobia was the primary oppression and gay-bashing, the only concern. For everyone else, life had never been that simple. Moreover, this community's concerns were complicated by language issues; French/English translation and representation, and outreach to the francophone lesbian/gay community were equally unresolved agenda items.

Nonetheless, the rapid mobilizing of hundreds of Montreal lesbians and gays into an ad-hoc organization named *Lesbiennes et Gais Contre la Violence/Lesbians and Gays Against Violence (LGV)* proved to be an important moment in the history of a community long divided along gender and language lines. Some important points were made. As one woman said at a community meeting: "The police hit on us in such a blatant manner because they figure no one cares. As long as we work in isolation, this police violence will continue." Despite the protests of some gay men, a message of solidarity with the Mohawk nation was read at an LGV press conference and picked up by the media. Lesbians and gays marched at a Montreal demo in support of the Mohawks, carrying the ACT-UP banner and chanting, "Solidarité Lesbienne et Gai avec les Mohawks!"

At a rally on Sunday, July 29, 2,000 lesbians and gays marched through the streets of Montreal protesting police violence and homophobia. Solidarity marches were held in New York; London, England; St. John's, Newfoundland; and Toronto. That same day, bus loads of some 2,000 Natives and white supporters converged on Oka in a heartening show of solidarity.

For now, police are toning down their harassment of Montréal queers. In Toronto, in anticipation of further violence, a group called "Queer Nation" has formed, loosely

modelled on the New York City group of the same name, which advocates a confrontational philosophy.

State-sanctioned violence and injustice towards First Nations groups and individuals continues, and Native protests escalate. In the aftermath of the so-called surrender at Kanesatake, military and police harassment of both communities remains a problem. In particular, the violent history of the Sûreté means that people in Kahnawake and Kanesatake will

expressing their reaction to a more visible lesbian/gay agenda—well-publicized battles for AIDS funding and research, for the right to be sexual, for relationship recognition in collective agreements and social services.

But it's still true that white lesbians and gays can choose which side of the closet door they want to be on; for Native peoples, there is no going back, no stay-in. This affects the tone of lesbian/gay activism. "Purple is the colour of our bruises, and black is the colour



live in fear until their own self-governing and legislating bodies are recognized.

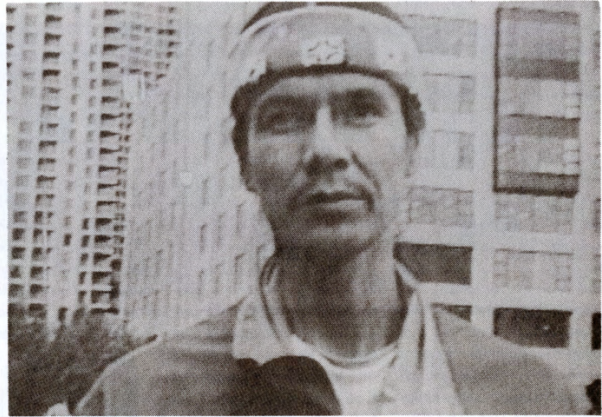
Finally, there are some important distinctions to be made between gaybashing and Native struggles. For both groups, increased visibility and defiance spells danger. The rock throwers and effigy-burners of Chateauguay are just one part of a racist backlash in Québec and elsewhere that is reacting violently to the threat of loss—of white privilege, territory and population, and a Québec sovereignty that many, unconsciously or not, see in white terms. (It's been estimated by some sources that if all the Native land claims in Québec were settled, non-Native Québec would end up with only 20 per cent of the province.) The gaybashers, too, are

of my skin," writes Montreal activist Blain Mosely (*GO Info*, Ottawa). "During the civil rights movement, the Black community had no choice but to be visible, and no choice but to fight to make gains in our struggle for equality. If being lesbian or gay meant having purple skin, our movement would be far more prepared to openly fight homophobia. . . . And perhaps, it might be more prepared to grapple with racism, as well.

The fighting and organizing are far from over. As a telegram from LGV to the Kanesatake Mohawks put it, "We are with you in this struggle. Next time, we will march together." ●

Marusia Bociurkiw is a video/filmmaker and writer living in Montréal and Toronto.

Illustration of sweetgrass plant.



Still courtesy Anishnawbe Health.

STILL FROM WIGWAMS AND FLOPHOUSES.

Anishnawabe healing

NATIVE TRADITIONS
IN HEALTH CARE

BY GLENN COOLY

TORONTO — It's a hot summer Wednesday evening in what used to be a bank branch building on Queen Street, just east of the financial district, and the annual general meeting for members of Anishnawbe Health Toronto is underway.

Close to 80 people leaf through the Native community health service network's year-end review, seconding the heavy duty item parsing that Anishnawbe Health's board of directors finished off two weeks earlier. With a thick agenda of reports by doctors, educators and social workers, and reports about buildings, budgets and programs, the meeting inches along as the temperature in the room slowly rises. But the tempo peaks suddenly, and the level of interest along with it, when an elderly man who identifies himself as Jim stands up to challenge the chair over what he takes to be a loophole in Anishnawbe Health's anti-smoking policy. "If we're going to practice holistic medicine," Jim says, "then we can't allow it at all. Holism means that we can't let people put poisons into their bodies."

Holism is the sort of word that in an urban context is all too often used without much grounding, but at Anishnawbe Health, it's the most appropriate way of characterizing what has become one of Toronto's most innovative community healthcare operations. Starting as a modest diabetes self-help program in 1981, Anishnawbe Health has blossomed into a far-reaching network of counselling, educational, medical and outreach services that

exist primarily for the benefit of Toronto's 50,000 to 70,000 large Indian, Inuit and Métis communities.

Bill Lee is Anishnawbe Health's executive director and seated in his office in the basement of St. Christopher's House on Queen Street West on a busy weekday morning, he explains the growth. The collectively-run network, says Lee, who came to Toronto in 1989 after completing a Native Studies degree at Trent University, has filled a vacuum for facilities and programs which enable Natives to take greater control over their own healthcare. The result is a synthesis of cultural practices and healthcare disciplines so that Anishnawbe Health's clients have a place they can turn to for traditional Native ways of healing and clinical medical treatment or social services within a culturally-sensitive milieu.

Natives who live in Canadian urban centres, Lee says, suffer a disproportionately high level of chronic healthcare problems due to unfamiliarity with the province's medical system, culturally-rooted reluctance to use it and discrimination by staff in medical institutions. Among Toronto's estimated 1,000 to 2,000 homeless Natives, the shortcomings in healthcare are especially acute. "Like most poor people, homeless Natives feel browbeaten so they only go to the hospitals when things have gotten really bad. If other institutions were more responsive then places like Anishnawbe wouldn't be needed."

He says in treating homeless people who come through the door, holism means going beyond immediate medical attention to find out a patient's whole story and tailoring social service assistance to his or her needs. "If someone comes in who's injured their leg because they keep falling down the stairs, we find out why they keep falling down the stairs. If it's because they're dizzy because they haven't been eating, we look after that."

During the summer of 1989, the network began taking healthcare directly to the homeless with a program called the Street Workers of Anishnawbe Toronto (SWAT). The intent, explains Clarence Southwind, SWAT's co-ordinator, is to reach people who might otherwise be unreachable. Three evenings a week, any or all of SWAT's three full-time careworkers take up to a half dozen volunteers by car to parks and vacant lots in west-end Toronto where groups of homeless people congregate. The street workers pair off and make their rounds on foot, handing out food, clothing and blankets to anyone who wants. Among the volunteers each evening are at least one doctor and nurse, who can administer first aid, and usually a couple of people who are beginning jobs at other frontline community agencies and have been sent out for hands-on training in working with the homeless.

Anyone who accompanies SWAT must be sufficiently familiar with local agencies to be able to make referrals to detox centres and hostels, which happens in the case of homeless people who are unable to look out for themselves on a particular evening. Southwind, who describes himself and his two colleagues as former homeless alcoholics, which he says gives them credibility on the street, explains that SWAT has come to know more than 600 people on its rounds and is often able to make a decision on the basis of a personal relationship whether someone is in particular need of help. That number, 600, grows only very slowly, he adds, because homeless people are often mistrustful about accepting assistance. "You can't force people to take things if they don't want to. But if we go around and see the same person 10 times, maybe the 11th time they'll see us. We try to stick at it."

Among the places that SWAT makes referrals to are six of

Anishnawbe's own drop-in clinics which are located at community centres and Native residences throughout Toronto. For now, home base is the cluttered warren of offices in St. Christopher's House, but in October Anishnawbe relocates into the Queen Street East bank building where the annual general meeting took place. By the time it opens its doors, the building will be transformed from a one-story box into an attractive three-level centre that Lee becomes animated about as he describes it.

It's designed for Anishnawbe's special requirements with spaces for meetings, counsellors, therapists and childcare. Alongside doctors' offices are rooms for traditional healers, whom Lee says need a special area to store herbs, medicine bags and pipes. For group ceremonies, the large mezzanine will be equipped with a firepot that can be raised and lowered from the ceiling and a medicine wheel, a healing symbol that will be painted on the floor. If all goes according to plan, a solarium will be installed on the top floor so that herbs can be grown year-round.

One experiment Lee may try at the new centre is putting to work a *boozhoo* (pronounced "boo-jou," with a soft "j"), an Ojibwa personage who acted as a greeter in traditional villages, showing new arrivals around and finding out what they are there for. Lee says such a person might work well in the centre's waiting room as a supplement to receptionists. The *boozhoo* would welcome patients, converse with them to find out what their needs are, decide whether they need a doctor or a healer or some other practitioner and lead them to one, completing the patient's healthcare paperwork in a more user-friendly way. "There are ways of gathering information that are less confrontational and oppressive. That's one of the reasons why a lot of people, Native and otherwise, don't go to other institutions."

Lee says the new centre will allow Anishnawbe to do what it's doing now, only better. While current facilities and programs accommodate approximately 1,000 people, the new centre may eventually draw as many as 7,000 people a year. Part of that increase will come from among what Lee describes as middle class Natives who have largely shied away from the current location.

The new centre will also house Anishnawbe's educational programs on diabetes, alcoholism and AIDS. Since last spring, a full-time AIDS prevention worker, Daphne Johnson, has been making safe sex presentations to local Native groups and lending assistance to a group of workers who have visited the reserves to teach Natives planning trips to urban areas how to reduce their risk to exposure. The instructional videos that Johnson uses in her work at present don't deal with the topic specially from a Native perspective, but Anishnawbe Health has begun producing what will be among the first tapes to fulfil that role. Ted Myerscough, who directs and edits videos for Anishnawbe Health using Trinity Square Video's facilities, says he expects to complete one early in the fall. The AIDS video, along with a planned one about alcoholism, will be used like the existing tape on diabetes, which is shown at community centres, conferences, healthcare workshops and Anishnawbe staff meetings.

Myerscough, who currently works with the direct assistance of camera operator Joe Beardy and Ryerson film student Marjorie Beaucage, has also directed two Anishnawbe Health videos that have been shown to gallery audiences. *WigWams and Flophouses: Housing Rights and Native People*, a tape that local artist Judith Doyle helped with, was screened during the summer at the Power Plant exhibition *Housing—A Right*. *Soul Spirit* is a narrative account of a

Native man who surmounted the problems of urban homelessness and went on to become a community elder. Both tapes were shown at a special screening at the Power Plant, August 14, and were followed by a panel discussion on Native issues.

Funding for Anishnawbe Health's programs and for its new health centre comes from numerous public and private sources but primarily from the Ontario Ministry of Health. The network also receives support from an advisory board that includes representatives from several community and professional groups. Though almost all of the non-medical employees and a majority of Anishnawbe's directors are Natives, its three staff doctors are not, something that Lee attributes to a shortcoming in government policy. Out of Canada's 345,000 working healthcare professionals, only 317 are Natives and only 17 of those are doctors. "That doesn't say very much about the commitment of this government to help Native people with their aspirations."

Lee describes the staff doctors at Anishnawbe Health as highly receptive to its healthcare philosophy, adding that the network benefits by cultural interchange. A Chinese herbalist, who was brought to the annual general meeting by a friend, may hold a clinic at the new health centre. Discussing healthcare philosophies more generally, Lee lights up a string of sweetgrass, a herb that is twisted into a flaxen braid and set alight as part of a morning prayer and purification ritual. "Western medicine is okay for what it can do," he says, as sweet pungent smoke fills the tiny office. "But traditional Native healing is empowering and enabling. . . it's not giving control over your own health to somebody else." ●

Glenn Cooley is a Toronto writer.

Writing Authentic Voices

THE WRITERS' UNION & ANTI-RACISM

by Libby Scheier with Lenore Keeshig-Tobias

TORONTO—Last May, during its Annual General Meeting, the Writers' Union of Canada (TWUC) gave unanimous approval to the following motion: "That TWUC act as a facilitator to seek funding for racial-minority writers to gather across the country to attend a three-day planning session to discuss concerns, set priorities and to produce recommendations to TWUC, the industry, cultural funding agencies, and the government."

The motion's successful passage followed two years of lively and sometimes heated and polarized discussion on racism in writing and publishing. At the Writers' Union 1989 AGM, a more vaguely worded anti-racism proposal had failed to pass. The motion's failure, by a fairly close vote, led to the formation of an independent ad-hoc committee on racism in writing and publishing.

Prior to the 1989 AGM, the now-famous Women's Press dispute and the Union's defense of three writers whose contracts were broken in connection with the Press's charge that their work was "structurally racist" had sparked a written discussion on what constituted "authentic voice" in the "Writers' Confidential" section of the Union's *Newsletter*. The discussion centred on issues such as: could white writers write Native or Black characters? could men write

women? In other words, could a writer from a racially or sexually dominant social group speak in the voice of an oppressed group without that constituting racism or sexism? Writers supporting the view that such writing is either racist or sexist referred to the practice as "cultural appropriation," making an analogy with political imperialism and economic exploitation. Those opposing this notion favoured giving free rein to the imagination, fearing that the former view was, or led to, censorship or self-censorship.

In the course of the debate, a third viewpoint emerged, one which did not want to advocate prescriptions or proscriptions, but connected the notion of "authentic voice" to the political and economic issues of access to publication, grants, reviewing and teaching. Advocates of this view expressed understanding of the frustration which Native writers, for example, felt when seeing white writers publish Native stories when Natives could not find a public venue for their own writing.

The confused and sometimes abrasive discussion at the 1989 AGM did at least produce a consensus among some Union members that the issues of voice and access should be separated: the issue of voice was for discussion but not Union action; while the

issue of access was appropriate for the Union to develop a policy and active program around.

Disheartened by the failure of the anti-racism proposal at the 1989 meeting, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, a panel member at that AGM's session on racism in writing and publishing, initiated a meeting to analyze what had happened and what should be done next.

The result was the formation of the "Ad-Hoc Committee on Racism in Writing and Publishing," a multi-racial body independent of the Union but composed mainly of Union members, as well as members of other arts organizations. The group included Marguerite Andersen, Dionne Brand, Barbara Carey, Susan Crean, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Judith Merrill, Daniel David Moses and myself. Keeshig-Tobias was asked to chair.

The Ad Hoc Committee decided to circulate a questionnaire to writers from racial minorities soliciting their experiences of discrimination in writing and publishing. As the committee was not funded, it did not have the resources to conduct a major statistical study. Instead, it believed it could marshal evidence establishing a *prima facie* case of discrimination on the basis of race to motivate the Union to conduct a full-fledged statistical survey which could lead to action.

As the 1990 AGM drew near, the Committee entered into discussions with the Writers' Union Executive, which had become sympathetic to their concerns. The committee felt that first on the agenda should be a meeting of writers of colour, who would discuss their concerns and present recommendations to the Union and other bodies. Given the overwhelmingly white membership of the Union, it was felt that almost any Union proposal would be tainted by paternalism. After the involvement of writers of colour, the Union could then follow their lead in developing policy. The Committee also presented its anti-racism proposal to the Executive, which the Union's National Council presented at the first plenary session of the AGM. As H. J. Kirchoff later reported in *The Globe and Mail*, its unanimous passage was met "enthusiastically," drawing "a standing ovation from the 150 or so writers present." An advisory committee was formed to assist the Union in organizing the racial minority writers' meeting. Keeshig-Tobias was elected chairperson and was also elected to the Union's National Council for 1990/91.

Union members Fred Wah and Ajmer Rode joined Keeshig-Tobias on the Advisory Committee, which will recruit more members both inside and outside the Union and meet during the summer and fall. ●

Writers of colour interested in obtaining information about upcoming meetings are advised to contact Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, c/o The Writers' Union, 24 Ryerson Ave., Toronto, ONT. M5T 2P3.

Libby Scheier's latest book is SKY—a poem in four pieces (Mercury/Aya Press). She is also co-editor of the anthology, Language In Her Eye: views on writing and gender, by Canadian women writing in English (Coach House Press). Both are due out this fall.

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias is a Native writer and poet living in Toronto.



"ONE DAY IN JUNE," A PAINTING BY SHIRLEY BROWN, 8' X 12' 1988.

Painting a Collective Herstory

MANITOBA ARTISTS FOR WOMEN'S ART

by Bev Pike with Kathy Driscoll

WINNIPEG—Artist-run centres were established to create solutions to the problematic relationships between artists and power structures, between artists and the content of their work, and among artists themselves. In Manitoba, a strong tradition of co-operative movements contributed not only to the viability of artist-run centres, but also to the Manitoba Arts Council's mandate. As a result, when the visual arts community began addressing the concerns of women artists, the organizational solution was co-operative, alternative and, to a degree, financially feasible. This is the story of that organization written using the combined voices of 17 cultural producers. Naturally enough, it's also the story of the need for ongoing change within the parallel gallery system.

Manitoba Artists for Women's Art (more commonly known as MAWA) is an

educational organization which encourages the professional development of women in the visual arts thus enabling their proper representation in cultural structures. Its objectives are to make visible female role models, to inform women artists and to promote awareness of their concerns. MAWA provides opportunities for women artists to develop a dialogue on contemporary issues through programming which responds to the expressed needs of the community; visiting and local artist lectures and studio critiques, educational workshops and exhibition projects.

Manitoba Artists for Women's Art was founded, as Sheila Butler, artist and co-founder, states, as "a pragmatic response to an insensitive system." Its mandate encompasses many feminisms because, as Diane Whitehouse, artist and co-founder, states, "The only thing

you wouldn't want to do as a woman is to silence voices, because that's what was done to you." Artist Eleanor Bond agrees: "That's why MAWA was such an incredible program—it was a whole new direction and it didn't base itself on any models."

Andrea Philp, founding director of MAWA, describes the breadth of need: "MAWA developed, in part, as a response to the way women have been treated in traditional educational institutions, specifically university art schools. The U of M's School [of Art] tried to redress the staff gender imbalance by hiring women to fill part-time contract positions. The school has a large female enrollment, so women instructors felt compelled to work extra hard to address their needs. They did this, however, without adequate salaries, benefit plans or job security."

"Female students felt that their education was incomplete because they had limited access to female role models. When they looked to the majority of the staff to learn how they could survive in the art world, they saw men in high-paying teaching positions, most of whom had only limited insights into public support structures and exhibition systems. So while the female students figured out that women must use other resources to support their production, they were given few clues as to what these resources might be."¹

Local women saw that others needed (and still need) to know how to evaluate and improve their art education. In order to do this, training is essential in the language and politics of cultural structures. As Lisa Mark, art history student and co-ordinator of *in/versions*, MAWA's quarterly publication on cultural production, points out: "Very often, women coming into university don't have access to the vocabulary of feminist theory and women's issues. So, they find it difficult to situate themselves in relation to what's going on around them. They need to gain power through language in order to avoid being silenced or worse, exploited."

Diane Whitehouse explains the beginnings of organizational action: "There were a large number of women coming out of the schools. Women who were on staff at the university were often on the boards of the parallel galleries. This made funding more easily accessible for them so that they could do things. It also educated the male who was involved within this structure. . . sometimes, not always."

The artist-run community had the kind of relationship-based receptivity within which the founders began innovative programming. As founding member Andrea Philip states: "Part of MAWA's success in the first year was due to its affiliation with PlugIn Gallery. The board members and managing director, Jon Tupper, were tirelessly supportive and generous. Further, this connection precluded the potential

problem of ghettoization, keeping MAWA solidly rooted in the established community."²

Aganetha Dick, sculptor, analyzes the larger environment: "One of the reasons that women were welcomed in the artist-run centres is that women don't have a memory in history, and I don't think that those two link. They were both searching and the women were trying to make a history, so both of them were interested in putting down roots of some kind." Donna Jones, painter, reiterates the dynamic: "Since artist-run centres can have a progressive mandate, they can direct their services towards particular groups. Artist-run centres are intended to be more political organizations".

Nell Tenhaaf, artist and former co-director of Powerhouse Gallery in Montreal, summarizes the situation: "Without artist-run centres, women artists would be at the 20 per cent level of representation which existed before artist-run centres came along. There is a direct correlation between women artists participating in artist-run centres and their eventual insertion into the mainstream art systems."

Over the six years since the formation of Manitoba Artists for Women's Art, flexibility in form and mandate has been its strength. The desire to be responsive to individuals and the community is paramount. This orientation to group process is of great importance in its priority program, the Advisory (or Mentor) Program.

The Advisory Program is a relationship-based educational system in which senior women artists share their experience with women who are beginning their art careers, developing professional skills and defining decision-making philosophies. Dena Decter, artist, describes the context: "I'll speak from my point of view as a woman who has, for various reasons, opted out of going through traditional art school. There was a place for me through MAWA and the artist-run centres, especially since I work from a feminist perspective. I have a feeling that more women find themselves,

because of other things that they're involved with, not taking the time to emerge as artists. It's really important to make the step from the studio to the gallery. Because women's lives are so fragmented, it takes longer to make that step, and artist-run centres provide that vehicle."

The Program's larger contribution is described by Sandra Tivy, artist and director of the New Gallery in Calgary, as this: "The Mentor Program is one of the strongest aspects of what MAWA does. While this relationship is obviously beneficial for the lesser known artist, it is good for the senior artist too. It provides a link to the newer developments in the arts community and this fosters a commitment to the on-going growth of the community. In comparison to the senior male artists who appear to be threatened by the younger artists, the senior women artists remain connected."

Thus the Advisory Program benefits many artists beyond those who are directly involved, as do MAWA's other programs. By now, MAWA has become a voice for the large constituency of women artists who look for new approaches to programming. As Nell Tenhaaf explains: "MAWA is seen as presenting local, grounded activity with a focus on participation within artist-run centres. It appears to be engaged with artist-run centres while remaining separate—although not separatist."

Women artists continue to work together in non-hierarchical groups to address their needs in their own communities. Yet, despite the energy supporting these groups and MAWA, women do not have the resources to accomplish all that needs to be done. Some cultural relationships require further development. As Kathy Driscoll, recent director of MAWA, outlines: "I feel that MAWA's done an incredible job in some ways; on the other hand, it hasn't really changed certain things that it initially set out to change. I know that there is a very tight core of old ideas that still exists. We've made chips and fissures into the structure

but ultimately we cannot afford to become complacent about our achievements. We must look at how women's participation in artist-run centres is parallel to that of ethno-cultural participation and through our endeavours continue to seek a voice from everyone. This is achieved through the integration and significant representation of ethno-cultural groups in positions of decision-making."

These sentiments are echoed by others. Diane Whitehouse feels that "It's not now just an issue of women and men, it's an issue of philosophy and whether women have alternative visions to offer structures. We have women now who would be just as happy to run things the way the guys do. So, women will be included. It's about structures of power and how they operate and how people function with each other."

Barb Hunt, installation artist, states: "I think that the men see us as making some gains. They don't want to share. They are doing the minimum that they have to in order to be perceived as progressive and in order not to create an adversarial position. Yet, it is not heart-felt. They can't see the advantages of shared power and of changing a whole system. They tend to be reactive to what they perceive to be threats to their social control."

To Reva Stone, installation artist: "The alternative galleries could be taking more of an advocacy role. They developed in the '70s as awareness of women's issues surfaced and they reflected those concerns. Now there's more closure once again for women in our culture and the alternative system is reflecting this change."

"That's what makes it so difficult at this time to openly criticize what's going on because, while many people are willing to acknowledge that there are big problems, the fear is that the government will just latch on to that. There are big problems but there are solutions and what we need to do is to use the existing money to

find better solutions," affirms Sigrid Dahle, freelance curator.

Manitoba Artists for Women's Art continues to work on solving lingering cultural problems from within the parallel gallery network. The accessibility and viability of that system is part of its attractiveness for women artists. As Eleanor Bond, painter, summarizes: "I know from being outside of the country and looking back here, it's very much an artist-run system. In many ways, this is the ideal nesting ground because we have all those spaces to show and so far, money to support people to produce work that will fit into the system."

Nevertheless, as artist-run galleries become more patriarchal in management and mandate, the relationships they were designed to improve become moribund. As Doug Melnyk pointedly says: "Artist-run centres have done so much that's positive for artists in general and for marginalized groups in particular. What we're seeing at this time point is that this is an era when it's starting to fail. The kind of thing that might give energy again the way artist-run centres did at first would be something that would have to be very, very artist-oriented."

Sigrid Dahle sums up the situation in this way: "It could be a time of exciting possibilities because everybody is so tired of administration and chasing the almighty grant buck, and people are looking for any alternative they can get their hands on. People are going back to their studios and back to their word processors, and are attempting to distance themselves from all the bullshit. That's really healthy too." Yet for women artists, it's a difficult balance. As Shirley Brown, artist, advises: "I keep coming back to the commitment of the artists in the artist-run centre. The centre seems only as good as its artists. Those which are continually helping the new artists are the centres

which have the generous, giving artists on their boards."

As Sheila Butler concludes: "I think that historically there's just no place else to go. Art simply has to be more integrated with society as a whole. And yet, there's a very strong movement in the art community to keep art isolated and elitist, and to deliberately mystify and couch issues in terms that keep people out of touch with anything but the inner priesthood. I'm not sympathetic to that. I think that art is good art more likely if it is a social phenomenon rather than the aberrant effort of the lonely genius."

In the end, it is imperative that women artists remain politically energetic as cultural producers because a healthy, non-elitist society is one in which the highest priority is placed on relationships which are strengthened by an understanding of individual context and an insistence on equality. The success of Manitoba Artists for Women's Art is a result of this kind of commitment among the more enlightened artists and cultural funders in Canada. MAWA continues to struggle for the necessary reform of unhealthy attitudes towards women in art. ●

ENDNOTES

1. Philip, Andrea, *Feminism and Art* Colloquium, Toronto, September 1987.
2. Philip, Andrea, "Women's Work," *Parallelogramme*, March 1986.

Bev Pike is an artist working in Winnipeg.

Kathy Driscoll is an arts administrator.

All quotes are from interviews recorded in Spring 1990 except Sheila Butler's which was recorded in 1989. MAWA and in/versions can be contacted at 175 McDermot Ave., 2nd floor, Winnipeg, MN, R3B 0S1, (204) 942-1043.

À L'ÉCRAN

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POUR LE 20^e ANNIVERSAIRE DE LA CRISE D'OCTOBRE

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VERNISSAGE : MERCREDI, LE 3 OCTOBRE À 20H
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JEAN TOURANGEAU (VIDÉO)
DENNIS TOURBIN (SUITE MURALE)
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MERCREDI, LE 10 OCTOBRE À 20H
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DENNIS TOURBIN, MICHEL VASTEL
MODÉRATRICE : FRANCINE PÉRINET

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James

Berry

INTERVIEW

by Ayanna Black

WELL, you may be one of those people who is under the assumption that poetry is dead. Yes, dead! You can just forget that. Poetry is very much alive. But alive with different drum beats. "Poetry has fallen into a lot of separate kinds of poetry. It is no longer possible to identify two or three august white males as representing Poetry," writes Charlie Sagnet (*Utne Reader*, Jan./Feb. 1990). For me, Canada is like a gumbo of cultures—thus varied forms of poetry are produced. Despite racism in the Canadian literary establishment, dub poets Lillian Allen, Clifton Joseph, Adhri Zhina Mandiela, and feminist writers Dionne Brand, Marlene Nourbese Philip and Claire Harris are garnering wide readership. Sound poets bill bisset, Alanis Obomsawin and Rafael Barreto Rivera are among some of the producers of the other varied forms of poetry that you can hear.

The 1990 World Poetry Festival held at Harbourfront, April 2-7, presented, according to their press release, "Twenty-eight of the most diverse, original and exciting English-language poets from around the globe." Greg Gatenby, World Poetry Festival artistic director, says, "The attention of last year's Festival brought ardent fans out in droves, and created a new audience for live poetry." And it was through this new audience with a passion for a variety of food for the soul that I had the opportunity to interview James Berry, who, along with Nigerian Tanure Ojadide and Malawian Frank M. Chipasula, has subsumed the best of his oral tradition in his writings. In this issue, I will introduce you to James Berry.

James Berry was born in Jamaica in 1924. He was among one of the first emigrants from the Caribbean to arrive in Britain soon after World II. His early days in Britain were bleak ones, trying to find decent accommodation and work. But Berry had a vision and determination that gave him the stamina to forge his way through the ugliness of racism. Since his arrival in Britain in 1948, he has become a cultural leader in the Black community.

His collections of poetry include *Fractured Circles* (1979); *Lucy's Letters* (1975); *Loving* (New Deacon Books, 1982), an extended version of *Lucy's Letters: Chain of Days* (Oxford University Press, 1985); and *When I Dance* (Hamish Hamilton, 1988) for which he received the Signal Poetry Award in 1989. He has published books of short stories among them, *A Thief in the Village* (Hamish Hamilton) and *Anancy-Spiderman*.

A teeming editor of poetry, his anthologies include *News For Babylon* (Chatto, 1984), a collection of West Indian-British poetry and *Bluefoot Traveller* (Nelson, 1976), an anthology of Caribbean poets in Britain. He has also written and contributed to books of essays on the aesthetics of Black writings. And, he is referred to as "the doyen, possibly... the best, of the Black poets who, in 1980s, have made a significant mark on British culture." (*Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*)

AYANNA BLACK: When did you start to write?

JAMES BERRY: Writing was something I always wanted to do from when I was a kid. But I didn't understand how to express what I was feeling. At that time, I had no literary background and at home we only had the Bible and hymn books. But when I was living in the United States, I discovered that something was eating inside me—a kind of an anger with the United States racial policies. Then I became fully aware that there was something in me which was a protester. The only place that I have been afraid is being with a group of white people in America. Believe me, I felt their hostility toward me; my Black skin was such a disadvantage that I felt that I was in danger. Now, this is surprising: I never felt so terrified in England. Although I couldn't get a job and it was extremely difficult to find a place to live and lots of us had to be crowded up in one room and so on, I still felt at home.

BLACK: Do you think that the image of Blacks has changed?

BERRY: It has changed, largely because of the struggles that Black people have fought and the systems that we are setting up for ourselves and the systems that we have participated in setting up like civil rights movements and Black countries becoming inde-

pendent. More and more, white institutions are being stormed to change their policies and of course laws have come in to prevent discrimination.

BLACK: But what about writing? Do you think that the images have changed that depict Black people as certain stereotypical characters?

BERRY: Well, I think that it has happened probably less or it has happened differently. Remember that it is traditional that white institutions will first do things they know about. And what they have to draw on is Black people as stereotypes but never people who are human beings in their own right and who have something to contribute as real human beings. I mean, this is the tradition in the relationship between Black and white people in the Western world. Gradually, because of protests from Black people and because white people's consciences are being attacked more and more, white people must change this.

But I blame us. I am saying that the responsibility is largely on us. It is for us to make our own films, it is for us to write stories and make sure that film companies, and soon, film these stories. It is about time that we begin to be celebrated in films, on cinema screens and television screens and in books so that people begin to understand that we are a genuine and relative part of the whole ex-



istence on this earth. But we have to do it and we have to do it now. It will not be changed through just white people. I mean, even if you have a Black actor playing a Shakespearean part, it is not the same as a Black writer writing about his roots, position and place and having a Black actor playing it. You see what I mean. We have to write because otherwise we conform to the image of what white people feel about us. We have to write our stories, our realities. We cannot allow whites to create our realities for us.

This is one of the reasons why I will not join people who just moan and moan that white people are bad. They are bad, of course, if we allow them to control our destiny. I will not allow them to control me. I only have energies for celebrating myself, my people and my culture.

BLACK: You have been involved in constructing cultural representation, especially for writers. How did you work at getting mainstream organizations to examine systemic racism?

BERRY: There is institutionalized racism because white people's institutions have developed by excluding Black people and this is

the root of the problem. In white society, Black people can become the people who clean out places; whites can get resources from our countries but nothing of this is revealed. So they white people are not used to sharing in a real equal way. Black people again have to organize to make changes.

BLACK: Do you think white people are prepared to share equally?

BERRY: I think so. You have to assume that: when pressed, if you are an equal citizen then you have to prove it. This is one of the challenges. We have to know within ourselves that we have equal rights. We have to learn the system; it is no good just staying outside and complaining. As a Black person you have to have your vision of how you want changes to happen and be able to apply it. But at the same time, outside, you need to set up cultural artistic forms which demonstrate your own culture.

BLACK: Some writers and activists would say, "I am not here to teach white people. They have to do some work themselves." How do you feel about that?

BERRY: Well, if you say that you are already limiting your progress. Because I don't think you will succeed if you set up a judgement in that way

because they are always teaching you, the Black person, whether you see it or not. I mean, you speak their language, you wear their clothes, you are really within their system. They are teaching all the time and they have set up structures, even their rejection of you.

BLACK: You are one of the most prestigious poets in Britain but you are still referred to as a West Indian poet, a Caribbean poet or a Black poet, though you are living in a system that is integrated. How do you feel about these labels?

BERRY: Well, I still resist it. I do not want those labels; I am a human being. Nobody talks about "white poetry;" I am just a poet. The moment you begin to be labelled like that you are ghettoized. My writing is as good as Shakespeare's and no one would call Shakespeare ethnic, so I don't want to be called ethnic. Everything that I have to say is for both Black and white audiences.

One of the things I am involved with is, for example, the use of English-based dialect poems, what we now call national language poems. In these I am asking you to look at them and to just get their rhythm and so on and to understand that it is a psychological kind of exercise in that you share my experience just as I have shared yours.

BLACK: Last night you read a poem that dealt with the battle of the sexes. How do you feel about feminism?

BERRY: I think it is one of the wonderful things that is happening to life. Feminism is a part, for me, of a new phase that has happened in the West, in the whole world, where the female mind is coming in positively to share. I feel that the white European male has done a great deal for our way of life, but he can't do any more. It is wonderful but it has merely provoked possibilities. It has not created abundance. We still have tremendous famines in the world; we still have divisions. Our political and religious leaders still preach divisions so we need these other

voices to create something of unity in the world. I hope that women will not imitate men. If they do they will not be true to their purpose to do what they are able for life. In the same way with Black people, we have got a tremendous history of suffering but I think that more and more we will come into a creative flow to continue giving something to the world. I think that the worst of feminism wants to cut men off. The most positive aspect is really to stimulate a greater empathy between the sexes and that is what I go for. Everybody has given a great deal to the world. White people have given and lost in exactly the same way. I am interested in how we go forward, how I use myself to the fullest.

BLACK: What do you see for Black people in the future. Where are we going as a world?

BERRY: In thinking about this I have to see that Black people are a relevant segment of wholeness and no one group of people makes wholeness. The opposites that nature has given us—the black and the white, the male and the female, the light and the dark—each one is relevant. I think that Black people have a tremendous future but we must know that and we must be proud of ourselves. Just be it in the way you are and the way you acknowledge it to be part of your way of life. Share it with education, with skills and with cash. I see Black people with their tremendous sense of compassion and love and the tremendous energy that they have within themselves. We must not deny ourselves or deny the world. ●

Ayanna Black is a Toronto poet. She is a contributor to and co-editor (with Dore Michelut) of Linked Alive, a new collection of five renga (a form of Japanese linked poetry) published simultaneously in French

Chick Flicks

FESTIVAL de FILM et VIDÉOS
de FEMMES de MONTRÉAL

by Marusia Bocurkiw

MONTRÉAL—The *Festival International de Films et Vidéos de Femmes de Montréal* headed off an extraordinarily packed summer festival schedule in this city. Jazz, fireworks, comedy and "world beat" music were just some of the items on a cultural menu financed by such corporations as Du Maurier, Bell and Alcan. In the general hegemonic blur of bright corporate signifiers, the women's film festival (now in its sixth year) would seem to be the one place where a diversity of feminisms could be seen. With an ambitious 10-day program of documentaries, features, and film and video shorts from around the world, it remained one of the few festivals in Montréal where the audiences are mostly women and predominantly lesbian, and the corporate logos aren't 20 feet tall.

The festival is one of only two annual women's film festivals in Canada. (The other is the *In-Sight Women's Film/Video Festival* in Edmonton.) Its importance as a venue for women film/video makers, a focus for distributors and an opportunity to view independent women's productions from, for example, Eastern Europe and Latin America cannot be denied. This year, the festival featured a large number of films from the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries,

as well as an important survey of Québécoise and Franco-European video. The documentary section showcased some exciting and politically uncompromising work like Jenny Morgan's video *State of Danger* (Britain, 1989), a look at Israeli solidarity with the Palestinian uprising and Nina Rosenblum's remarkable film *Through the Wire*, (U.S., 1990), a scathing investigation into the physical and psychological torture endured by women political prisoners in the U.S. Given the low number of films and videos by women in mainstream festivals



STILL FROM THROUGH THE WIRE.

and the general absence of feminist discourses within the film/TV industry, it's hard to fault any women's cultural event that has survived the cutbacks and repression of this current era of conservatism.

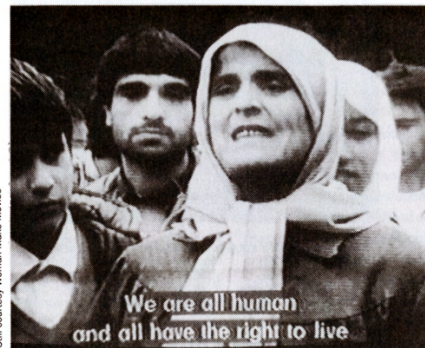
This year's festival did, however, receive criticism from the Montréal women's community. During a mid-festival press conference, members of Réseau Vidé-Elles, a Québécoise video collective, denounced the almost complete lack of lesbian content. Others critiqued the under-representation of films and videos from the developing world. Indeed, in a festival of such scope (over 100 films and videos, and a budget of \$334,000), it is difficult to justify a situation in which one can count the number of works made by lesbian and Third World filmmakers on the fingers of one hand. Equally inexcusable is the fact that not one of Canada's First Nations women filmmakers was represented in the festival line-up.

In an interview with a Montréal weekly ("Film Festival Goes Straight," *Montréal Mirror*, June 28, 1990), festival director Monica Haim contested such criticism. "There's always somebody who

feels left aside," she said. "This is probably the least prejudiced festival in the world. I don't even have unconscious prejudices." Unwilling to leave bad enough alone, she further declared, "I think art is perfectly amoral. I don't think we should make judgements. Certainly, explicit sexual acts of the lesbian persuasion aren't going to make anyone blush here."

The women planning next year's festival will have to do some serious re-organizing if the festival is to maintain its following. With attendance considerably down from previous years, it's obvious that watered-down feminism isn't cutting any ice. Police harassment of lesbians, gays and people of colour is on the rise in Québec (see page 10), as in the rest of Canada. A women's event that excludes the voices of these groups is only speeding its own demise. It's a hopeful sign that Haim's views do not represent the entire festival staff. Anne Golden, a festival programmer, expressed concern about the festival's direction. "Lesbian representation has to be addressed," she said. "It shouldn't be up to the lesbian and gay film

Still courtesy Woman Make Movies



STILL FROM A STATE OF DANGER.

festivals to do all the work." Golden mentioned that Telefilm Canada's funding criteria is somewhat of a problem. Telefilm specifies that most of the films and videos shown must be Montréal premières. This policy effectively excludes work shown at other film festivals earlier in the year including *Vues d'Afrique* and *Image and Nation* lesbian and gay film festival. Moreover, it perpetuates the idea that a production is "old" once it is shown a few times—a notion which deprives marginalized communities of their own histories.

Golden doesn't think that funding from Alcan and Petro-Canada has any bearing on festival programming decisions. Still, it's interesting to speculate on what would happen to this funding if the festival decided to do a major survey of lesbian films and videos as part of next year's programming. More realistically, what effect does corporate sponsorship have on the imaginations and political wills of organizers and programmers? The corporate presence is definitely an issue for Montréal's cultural community, where municipal funding for culture is low and huge outdoor festivals get prioritized over permanent artist-run spaces. The festivals provide a plentiful source of

free recreation during the hot summer months, while the artist-run centres support artists and alternative art forms year-round. It doesn't have to be an either/or situation, but it is significant whose stories do or don't get told. During this summer's *Festival International de Jazz de Montréal* (sponsored in part by Alcan), 150 striking Alcan workers handed out leaflets entitled "Alcan is less jazzy than you think," describing the corporation's low wages and poor environmental practices. The 2,400 residents of La Baie, Québec are seeking \$21 million in compensation from Alcan for 26 years of dust pollution. The ugly face of the multinationals gets prettied up by music in the streets while workers lose jobs and lives.

The task of balancing funding with the politics of representation has never been an easy one, particularly when community expectations are high. But with funding for women's culture being cut back across Canada, feminist periodicals, film/video centres and festivals have no choice but to take some political risks and rock the boat right out of the mainstream. ● **Marusia Bocurkiw is a video/filmmaker and writer living in Montréal and Toronto.**

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Tang Ren Jie

A LIVING ARCHIVE

THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL OF CHINESE FILM IN MONTREAL INCLUDED AN ACCOMPANYING PHOTO EXHIBITION, *TANG REN JIE*, WHICH DOCUMENTED OVER 100 YEARS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN MONTREAL.

by Molly Kaur Shinhat

MONTREAL—Three years ago in Montreal Tammy Cheung borrowed 14 Chinese films and presented a mini film festival. At the time she was a foreign student from Hong Kong studying cinema in Montreal and working as a community worker for the Chinese Neighbourhood Society of Montreal. Part of that included organizing a "variety show" to celebrate the Chinese New Year. From that first year the variety show-cum-festival eventually grew to become the *Festival International du Cinéma Chinois de Montréal* (FICCM), Cheung co-directing with Lori McLean and Heidi Miller.

The annual festival continues to be the main activity of InterCineArt, a group dedicated to promoting cross-cultural understanding. The festival's scope expands each year in terms of its programming. This year's edition featured over 80 films and videos from Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Canada, U.S., England and Japan.

The eclectic selection, which included documentaries, full-length features, commercial films and TV items from current affairs programs, was further augmented by a group of films made in the '30s,

'40s and '50s in mainland China, providing audiences with a rare chance to see some early masterpieces of Chinese cinema such as Yuan Muzhi's *Street Angel* (1937), Zheng Junli's *Crows and Sparrows* (1949) and *Fate of a Graduate* by Ying Yunei (1934).

The events of June 4, 1989 in Tiananmen Square had a definite impact on this year's programming. Michael Gilson, who programmed with Cheung, says it was difficult not knowing what would be available. An attempt to get *Black Snow* by Xie Fei (1990), one of the few films known to be made after June 4, failed. *Samsara* (dir. Huang Jianxin, 1989), screened this year to packed houses, has been banned by the Chinese government although it had received praise from the public. The film focuses on the disillusionment and later demise of Shi Ba, the son of a high-ranking official. The exact number of prints in circulation of *Samsara* is not known, but it is thought that the festival's copy is one of two or three presently not in China.

This year for the first time, part of the festival moved on to another city—six films were screened at

the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec. While the Secretary of State has encouraged the festival to expand, organizers say that expansion cannot proceed without increased funding.

During the year there are two grant-subsidized positions. These positions expanded to five during the festival. This year's festival would not have been possible with the volunteer labour of some 25 Montrealers of various backgrounds.

In a recent interview, Cheung voiced some of her outstanding concerns, most of which centre on community involvement. Unlike many other film festivals, the FICCM has not experienced any major difficulties in attracting Chinese viewers and securing the on-going support and interest of Montreal's Asian communities. This year they averaged about 60 per cent of the audiences. Cheung would like to see greater involvement, however, at the organizational level and moves are being made in this regard. Closer bonds between FICCM and grassroots communities are becoming evident. As usual, the festival's schedule was published

in full in the *Chinese Press* (the highest circulation Chinese language newspaper in Quebec). Posters and schedules were also distributed by hand in Chinatown.

This year's accompanying photo exhibition, *Tang Ren Jie*, looked at the history of Chinese presence in Montreal. Produced by InterCineArt, it was displayed outdoors in Chinatown for three days in Sun Yat-Sen Park and later moved indoors to Complexe Guy Favreau for 12 more days. All told, an estimated 8,000 people saw the exhibition.

Made up of 107 photographs, it covered more than a century of the history of the community from 1867 to the mid-1980s. Archive photographs from several private collectors, the Notman Photographic Archives, the City of Montreal, Canadian Pacific and la Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec made up the bulk of the exhibit. Portraiture dominated the subject matter though there were some photographs of streets, buildings, festivals and processions through Chinatown. A few newspaper clippings completed that section, a couple of which were about the



IMMIGRATION CERTIFICATE OF WOMAN DESTINED FOR MONTREAL, 1915.

famous Chinese athlete, Willie Woo. May Woo, his sister, created a stir when she joined the Chinese Lawn Tennis Club in Montreal. She was the first woman to do so and it made the society page of the local newspaper. Another clipping announced the inauguration of the Chinese Masonic Temple on La Gauchetière Street (June 6, 1912). No less than three different photographs of this event made it into the paper. Adding contemporary newspaper clippings on the community would have served as an interesting counterpoint in terms of past and present coverage in the mainstream media.

The early portraits are almost a "who's who" of the Chinese community at that time. Most were taken in studios at the request of the sitter—something only the rich in any community could afford to do. Alongside these early pictures, a number of group photographs of partially or completely unidentified people form a marked contrast. In a photograph depicting two women, one stands while the other sits holding a young white girl on her lap. They wear clothing made of plain material, not the luxurious fabrics sported by the women in the other portraits. Identified only as "Chinese domestic workers in

the McDonald Family, 1867," the anonymous photograph was presumably commissioned by Mr. McDonald and reveals much about the paternalistic relationship between these women and their employer.

A series of colour photographs, interiors and exteriors, taken by Suzanne Girard and Marik Boudreau complete the exhibition. Taken in the standard social documentary style, these pictures contextualize the archive section, particularly in trying to understand the impact that the containment of Montreal's Chinatown has had.

In the 1970s despite strong opposition from the community, large sections of Chinatown were expropriated by the government to build the Guy Favreau apartment, office and retail complex. Several other buildings were also demolished to widen some of the main streets in the area. Girard has documented this process, illustrating it especially well in "Guy Favreau, 1982." In the background of the photo, construction fences shield the gaping holes made to build the complex. Just in from the corner of La Gauchetière and St. Urbain streets stands a deep red four-storey pagoda that was a powerful symbol inside and outside the

community. When work to widen St. Urbain began it was put in storage, where it remains to this day.

Boudreau's work features some intense portraiture. "La Gauchetière, 1980," taken on the street of the same name, shows an elderly woman sitting on some steps. She looks completely exhausted, a shopping bag at her feet. Nearby three young people, seemingly oblivious to her presence, are busy talking to one another. The photograph could be read as a comment on generational difference, but it also depicts the strong on-going tradition in the Chinese community of gathering in Chinatown on Sundays throughout the summer. The picture illustrates the changing nature of the community as a whole, in this case a particularly ironic one. About 70 per cent of Montreal's Chinatown is now made up of single older women. In the earlier part of this century, because of the head tax, the situation was reversed with young single men making up the majority of the community.

By exhibiting the photographs in Chinatown, more people from the community, particularly senior citizens, were able to see it. Prior to setting it up, organizers Suzanne

Girard and Anita Malhotra had no idea of the impact of holding it there. In one case a Chinese-Canadian man in his 40s from out of town broke down in tears. Girard says he told her (through a translator) that he recognized his father in one of the images. Taken in a restaurant in March, 1940, the photograph shows a man cutting chicken on the left. His co-worker, with arms folded across his chest, looks into the camera with a faint smile on his lips. Because the photograph was taken with a flash, the light falls off a little on the edges. The man recognized his father from a long scar on his forehead. His father had been dead for some years and the man had no photographs of him. Girard was able to give him the address of the archive, promising to help him obtain a copy of the picture.

This kind of interaction between the organizers and the community occurred many times during the three days. The names and histories of many people in the photographs who had been unknown were identified. ●

Molly K. Shinhat is a journalist living in Montreal. She will review Forbidden City and Meng Gen, both screened at the FICCM, in the next issue of FUSE.



LA GAUCHETIÈRE STREET AT THE HEART OF MONTREAL'S CHINATOWN (DATE UNKNOWN).

Video News

BY KIM TOMCZAK

The Helms Amendment

affects artists, filmmakers and video makers in the U.S. Among other things, it calls for a ban on materials considered "obscene, including but not limited to depictions of sado-masochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children or individuals engaged in sex acts. . . ." The arts are under siege in the U.S. and many artists have responded to this oppressive legislation. A 29-minute videotape has been produced by the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression which documents demonstrations, actions, protests and rallies organized by artists and art supporters to expose this affront and proclaim their anger. If you have followed the attack on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and on individual artists and need to find out what is happening, I highly recommend this excellent tape. Titled *National Arts Emergency*, it is available for free circulation from: Video Data Bank, 22 Warren Street, New York, NY, 10007 or Electronic Arts Intermix, 536 Broadway, 9th floor, New York, NY, 10012.

The Production Process.

If you are a member of a community group or a collective planning to make a videotape, an excellent guide, *Portable Video Production*, published by Video Tiers Monde, is now available in French, English and Spanish. This unique guide consists of three booklets and a video cassette. The booklets are made up of four chapters: "The Language of Audiovisual Communication" deals with concepts and definitions of shots, camera movements, editing etc.; "The Production Process" explains the stages of production, from scripting to shooting to post production; "Technical Aspects of Production" offers an overview of the availability, use and upkeep of video equipment; the final chapter, "Distribution," discusses various strategies of distributing and presenting videos. The accompanying video cassette illustrates various shooting errors and offers corrective suggestions that encourage both a clear message and clear image. *Portable Video Production* may be ordered from Video Tiers Monde, 3575 boul. St-Laurent, ste. 608, Montréal, Quebec, H2X 2T7, tel. (514) 982-0770.

Yellow Peril: Reconsidered

is a film, video and photography exhibit curated by Paul Wong of On Edge in Vancouver. The exhibition concentrates on Asian-Canadian work displaying a new world consciousness. Twenty-four artists are included in the six-city tour. The work in *Yellow Peril: RECONSIDERED*, brought together for the first time in Canada, represents a broad range of artistic, social and community concerns held by Asian-Canadian artists. A publication available from On Edge includes writings by Anthony Chan, Monika Gagnon, Richard Fung, Larissa Lai/Jean Lum, Midi Onodera and Paul Wong. These essays range from theoretical analysis to anecdotal humour, including a chronicle of community media organizations, a dissection of multiculturalism and an examination of historical exclusion. Order your copy (include \$18 plus \$2 shipping) from: ON EDGE, 201-431 Pacific Blvd., Vancouver, B.C., V6B 5M6.

The Media Arts Section

of the Canada Council has hired Susan Ditta as its head. Ditta has a distinguished career in the film and video community. Now leaving her position as assistant curator of film and video at the National Gallery of Canada, Ditta was executive director of the *Canadian Images Festival* from 1979 to 1984. *Canadian Images* was one of the largest and most important showcases for Canadian film and video in Canada. She went on to work at Artspace, an artist-run centre in Peterborough, then curated the 1985 Grierson Seminar. Shortly after, Ditta worked as the managing director of *Mayworks* (the festival of working people and the arts) in Toronto. Congratulations go to Susan Ditta and to the Canada Council for hiring a true friend to the film and video community.



Still courtesy Vtape.

ART PROJECT JUNE CLARK-GREENBERG

Video News

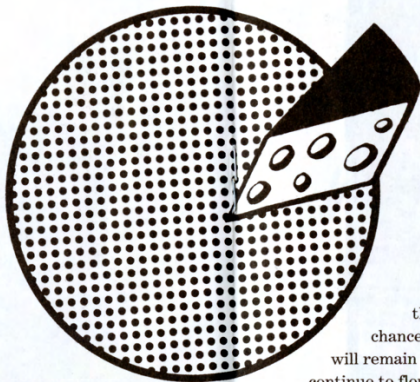
MISS RUBY USED TO WORK FOR A WHITE LADY ON FIFTH AVENUE. SHE TOLD MAMA THAT ONE DAY SHE HEARD THE DINNER GUESTS TALKING ABOUT HER AND SHE HEARD THE WORD NIGGER. SHE COUGHED UP A BIG WAD OF PHLEGM AND MIXED IT INTO THE FOOD SHE WAS ABOUT TO SERVE.



the 6% solution

A FIGURE USED IN THE GAME OF MULTICULTURALISM ARRIVED AT THROUGH THE MATHEMATICS OF RACISM IN CANADA VISION 21 OFFERS A DIFFERENT EQUATION FOR ANTI-RACISM IN THE ARTS

by Marlene Nourbese Philip



en-Vision if you can an international conference of writers, hosted by Canada and held in Toronto. Fifty per cent of the Canadian delegates are Canadians of African, Asian or Native backgrounds presenting ideas and work that are contestatory of the dominant Eurocentric culture. Would this be a Canadian conference? Certainly not, if one believes that "Canadian" means a dominant white group surrounded by micro-cultures some of which are coloured brown, black or yellow. It is, if you see Canada intent on righting, as much as any country can, the gross inequities and injustices which result from racism.

In a press release published in the *Toronto Star* (December 27, 1989), PEN Canada stated that African, Asian and Native peoples comprise six per cent of the Canadian population. By cleverly manipulating the base figure, but not the actual numbers, PEN Canada showed that the representation of Canadians from these backgrounds at the 54th International PEN Congress, held last fall, varied from 12 to 23 per cent. Percentages changed, but the actual

number of African, Asian and Native delegates to the Congress remained constant at seven.

In the Canadian context, however, six per cent represents poor schooling, high infant mortality rates, under or unemployment, premature deaths, coerced sterilization, police harassment and poor housing. Six per cent of Canada's population faces these problems and more for the simple reason that their skins are black or brown. The high incidence of these pathological social conditions within this six per cent of the Canadian population is disproportionate to the numerical presence of Africans, Asians and Natives in Canadian society.

Six per cent is also replete with the historical resonances of racism: the genocidal effect of European settlement on Native peoples; the building of this country by Asian labourers who were then relegated to second class status; the internment of Canadians of Japanese heritage during World War II; Africans, including Black empire loyalists who fled to Canada from slavery only to confront

racism once they got here; the immigration to Canada of many Afro-Caribbean people who followed the capital taken out of the Caribbean by Canadian banks; a racist immigration policy which, because of a need for cheap and unskilled labour, has only very recently begun to let in darker-skinned people, and which still discriminates against them by the positioning of numbers of immigration offices around the world. In Canada six per cent constitutes what is left after imperialism, capitalism and colonialism have done their dirty business, and then suggests that business ought to be as usual. Six per cent, in fact, represents the survivors.

All of this is not to dismiss the need, at times, for formulae designed to achieve equity and parity between those of dominant culture and those of groups which have traditionally faced discrimination. We ought not, however, to forget that that is essentially what they are—arbitrary formulae for trying to redress ancient and not-so-ancient injustices to arrive at some sort of equity. If the formulae obscure what the source of

the need for redress is, chances are that the system will remain intact and racism will continue to flourish.

How one uses percentages is integrally tied up with how one understands and interprets them. If one sees six per cent as merely another figure in the game of multiculturalism and forgets that, in the mathematics of racism in Canada, genocide plus racism leaves a remainder of six per cent, then as a figure six per cent can be infinitely manipulated to prove anything. If the goal is merely to reflect the various percentages in the population, then the manipulation that PEN Canada engaged in, while being extreme, is to be expected and, more than that, PEN Canada is therefore correct in its conclusions that it over-represented in percentage terms (though not to the degree that they suggest) the presence of Africans, Asians and Natives in Canada. If, however, the goal is to redress through every means possible a long and destructive legacy of oppression, racism and exploitation in this country, then those who cleverly manipulate figures, while leaving the essential structure intact, do nothing but perpetuate this particular system.

Vision 21 starts from a position that sees culture as an integral and vital aspect of how a system reproduces and reaffirms itself. If, therefore, the system in question, in this case Canadian society, is racist in its

well-springs, then it follows that the official and dominant culture of that society and its articulation will reflect that racism, even in such a supposedly esoteric practice as writing. What the South African writer, J. M. Coetzee, accurately describes as the "ideological superstructure of publishing reviewing and criticism" plays a vital role here in Canada in the shoring up of racist traditions. Starting from such a position, Vision 21 desires to make changes in the arts in Canada, not to assert power over anyone as has been suggested, not to prove that Chinese or African culture, for instance, is necessarily better than English culture, but to create an equal respect for each. Vision 21, therefore, ends up in a very different place from those who limit themselves to looking at percentages and conclude that because they have over-represented those percentages, God must be in his heaven and all's well with the world.

To eradicate racism in Canada and to establish it as an anti-racist society, Canada needs what Martin Luther King, pacifist though he was, called a "revolution of values and a radical relocating of power." Nothing less will suffice. Vision 21 believes that those individuals and groups interested in working toward this goal must begin with an understanding that racism is often not the result of an individual act, but a consequence of rules, procedures and criteria that all together have a discriminatory effect regardless of motive or intent.

In addition to looking at percentages, what follows are some of the issues which must galvanize us all into intelligent debate, if we are to begin to make changes:

- how the white dominant culture and groups which hold power must change so that power devolves to other groups which have traditionally been excluded;

- how to prevent continued ghettoization and containment of African, Asian and Native cultures by the dominant culture;
- whether the new and emergent voices from African, Asian and Native cultures are powerful enough to challenge the dominant culture;
- whether Canadian culture is to be formed by taking the best from Native, African, Asian and other immigrant cultures along with English and French culture to create a new entity;
- what constitutes appropriation of other cultures, such as Native culture, by the dominant culture;
- how to make the "ideological superstructure of publishing, reviewing and criticism" more responsive to and respectful of writers from other cultures, and more responsible for the public monies they receive;
- how to open a space for emerging voices which are profoundly contestatory of the dominant culture.

In whatever discipline, the work of the artist and writer consists in giving tangible form to their imagined ideal. Vision 21 is committed to creating conditions free of racism, sexism and economic inequality for the practice of art in Canada. By working to eradicate the presence of racism in the arts and to build respect for the different cultural sources for all artists, Vision 21 is contributing to making real the ideal of a world free of racism. ●

Marlene Nourbese Philip is a Toronto writer and poet. She is a founding member of Vision 21.

Brenda Lem (artist and filmmaker) and Gillian Morton, both members of Vision 21, contributed their ideas and thoughts and time to the issues discussed above.

Marlene Nourbese Philip originally submitted this piece to the *Toronto Star* in an attempt to counter the spurious arguments that PEN Canada made concerning statistics (*Toronto Star*, December 27, 1989) and the representation of African, Asian and Native voices. The *Star* held on to the piece for several weeks and when Philip contacted them about its publication, she was told that the PEN issue had become stale news. The *Toronto Star* never published the article.



Jalonnement du terrain culturel au
QUÉBEC
Mapping out a cultural space

BY/PAR NORMAND THÉRIAULT

L'image publique de l'art n'est en aucune façon égale à la somme des oeuvres produites en atelier. En corollaire: la somme des efforts individuels n'est pas l'indice de sa vitalité. Pour l'histoire, quelques gouttes de peinture tombant d'un seau troué tenu par Jackson Pollock vaudraient toujours plus que les annuaires complets du *Art in America* pour les années quarante—la proposition est à inverser si l'objectif visé est la rédaction d'un mémoire de maîtrise ou de doctorat. Toutefois, un milieu est et sera toujours vivant s'il est évalué capable de maintenir en son sein les éléments d'une éventuelle génération alors en apparence spontanée. Évaluer l'art québécois, c'est à coup sûr montrer ce qui se fait, ce qui est publiquement visible mais aussi s'interroger sur les cadres donnés à l'activité créatrice.

Photo par les artistes./photo by the artists.

THE public image of art never measures up to the number of works produced in the studio. The corollary: the sum total of individual initiatives does not provide a reliable indication of its vitality. A few drops of paint falling from a holed bucket held by Jackson Pollock will always be worth more for the purposes of history than the back issues of *Art in America* from the '40s—if one's goal is the writing of a master's or doctoral thesis, however, the proposition is reversed. Nevertheless, a milieu is alive and will remain so if it is deemed capable of maintaining the elements of an upcoming generation close to its heart while they are still in their initial stages. So, while an evaluation of Quebec art requires that one show what is being done, what is publicly visible, it also entails a questioning of the scope given to creative activity.

< LA DONNA DELINQUENTA, BY LYNE LAPOINTE AND MARTHA FLEMING, INHABITED A VACANT THEATRE IN MONTREAL. DURING THE 17 DAYS OF ITS EXHIBITION (MAY/JUNE 1987), IT WAS VIEWED BY 4300 PEOPLE./LA DONNA DELINQUENTA, PAR LYNE LAPOINTE ET MARTHA FLEMING, A ÉTÉ INSTALLÉ DANS UN THÉÂTRE ABANDONNÉ À MONTRÉAL. L'EXPOSITION, OUVERTE PENDANT 17 JOURS (MAY/JUIN 1987), A ATTIRÉ 4300 PERSONNES.

Début juin 1990. Tout le Québec est en attente. Société distincte ou ce que l'on voudra bien. Projet de société ou néo-libéralisme. Un autre Québec est aussi en attente. Dans notre discours égoïste, il s'agit de savoir si l'art et les valeurs qu'il représente ou devrait représenter s'inscrivent dans un discours élargi à toute la société québécoise. Il faut admettre l'isolement de l'artiste quand pour la première fois depuis longtemps les valeurs culturelles sont déterminantes dans l'établissement d'une définition d'un projet de société. Il y a là une contradiction qui demande quelques explications.

D'une part, tout va. Quatre musées transformés ouvriront bientôt leurs portes: McCord, Beaux-arts, le Musée du Québec et celui d'art contemporain s'ajoutant au Centre canadien d'architecture et au Musée de la Civilisation. D'autre part, les outils confiés aux artistes, outils définis par le vocable de parallèle, demeurent marginaux: les centres d'artistes créés au début des années soixante-dix datent maintenant quand c'est le même petit nombre qui les fréquentent et les animent et que la population "culturelle" globale a augmenté.

Pourtant. Depuis sept ans au Québec, la fréquentation de certaines expositions dépasse le demi-million: l'Art de la Chine, Picasso, Léonard da Vinci—preuve que le dumping culturel fonctionne. Aussi, il devient habituel que les représentations canadiennes officielles à l'étranger aient une forte coloration québécoise.

Un malaise existe. A Montréal, il y a un vide. L'art contemporain québécois est maintenant exclu du programme des grandes manifestations des musées des beaux-arts ou d'art contemporain de Montréal, et les Cent Jours d'art contemporain du Centre international d'art contemporain (CEAC) rétrécissent d'eux-mêmes, quand à l'occasion ils ne sont pas une année escamotés. En fait, il est maintenant normal que l'activité artistique se confine à la présentation de solos dans les lieux des galeries privées. La situation est anormale dans un pays où historiquement l'art se récupérait dans un discours d'identification ou d'affirmation sociale.

En fait, l'oeuvre d'art a, depuis quatre décennies, quitté les ornières du folklorisme culturel. Même, elle ne se développe plus depuis vingt ans dans une succession historique. Au Québec, comme en Occident, l'artiste est un membre d'un grand tout où le discours nationaliste peut à l'occasion, et seulement peut, être mis en parallèle à la production courante (un autre exemple serait l'École de London des années soixante

It is the beginning of June 1990. All of Quebec lies in waiting. Distinct society or whatever you will. A *projet de société* or neo-liberalism. Another Quebec is also waiting. Within our self-centered discourse remains to be seen whether art and the values it represents, or should represent, inscribe themselves within the larger discourse of Quebecois society. One must acknowledge the artists' isolation when, for the first time in a while, cultural values are the determining factor in defining a *projet de société*. Therein lies a contradiction that requires some explanation.

On the one hand, everything is fine. In addition to the new Canadian Centre for Architecture and the Museum of Civilization, four newly renovated museums will reopen: the McCord Museum of Natural History, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Musée du Québec and the Musée d'art contemporain. On the other hand, the means available to artists, means which were defined in parallel terms, have remained marginal: the artist-run centres established in the early '70s seem dated when the same small number of people visit and sustain them while the global "cultural" population has increased.

Yet, over the last seven years in Quebec, attendance at certain exhibitions has passed the half-million mark: l'Art de la Chine, Picasso, Leonardo da Vinci—proof that cultural dumping works. It has also become standard that official Canadian exhibitions abroad are weighted in favour of Quebecois work.

But an uneasiness prevails. In Montreal, there is a void. At present contemporary Quebecois art is not included in the large events at the Museum of Fine Arts or the Musée d'art contemporain, while the *Cent Jours* exhibitions presented by the Montreal International Centre of Contemporary Art (CEAC) are shrinking of their own accord, when, on occasion, they are not skipping a year altogether. It's become normal, in fact, that artistic activity is confined to solo exhibitions in commercial galleries. In a country where, historically, art has salvaged itself in a discourse of social identification or affirmation, this situation is abnormal.

Over the last four decades, the work of art has abandoned the conventions of cultural folklore. In the last 20 years, it has not even developed in historic succession. In Quebec, like elsewhere in the West, the artist is part of a larger whole where a nationalist discourse occasionally might, and only might, parallel current cultural production (an ex-



SCULPTURE PAR MICHEL GOULET DANS CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK./SCULPTURE BY MICHEL GOULET IN CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK.

et soixante-dix). Même le morcellement est tel qu'aujourd'hui il faut approcher l'art non par les villes. Maintenant, Montréal pourrait aussi se réclamer d'un statut de société distincte face au reste du Québec.

Il reste toutefois à savoir ce à quoi Montréal et le Québec réfèrent quand le discours a pour objet l'oeuvre d'art. Dès le début, il faut savoir que le Québec se réjouit du fait d'être la touche francophone dans la mer nord-américaine tout en s'exportant à l'étranger comme un élément nord-américain accessible. Ainsi, Montréal ne se veut pas à la merci de l'impérialisme new-yorkais et le pluralisme dont son art témoigne n'est pas seulement idéologique, il est aussi stylistique.

ample would be the London School during the '60s and '70s). Indeed the divisions are such that art must now be approached by cities and not by country. Montreal could now also claim to be a distinct society vis à vis the rest of Quebec.

When discourse centres around the work of art, however, it remains to be determined to what Montreal and Quebec refer. At the outset, it should be acknowledged that Quebec prides itself on being the francophone touchstone in the North American sea, while marketing itself abroad as an accessible North American place. As such, Montreal does not want to be at the mercy of New York's imperialism, and the pluralism which Montreal work demonstrates is not only ideological, it

Photo avec la permission de la Galerie Christiane Chassany./Photo courtesy Galerie Christiane Chassany.

Montréal est en train de se définir, et de la façon la plus simple, en se délimitant un espace géographique.

L'événement muséal retenu par tous au cours des années quatre-vingt n'a ainsi pas été l'accumulation des grosses expositions mais l'ouverture en 1989 du Centre canadien de l'architecture. L'édifice est là, sa collection surtout et quelques expositions. L'architecture de l'ensemble se veut exemplaire et la critique lui rend hommage. Tant mieux. A l'extérieur, sur le site, chevauchant un boulevard, s'appuyant sur une autoroute, un jardin. Il est de Melvin Charney. C'est la frontière ouest du Montréal culturel.

De l'autre côté de la ville, une oeuvre est en devenir. Elle débute dans une place publique, travers elle aussi une rue pour s'ouvrir en demi-lune dans les pelouses du Parc Lafontaine. Ce projet sculptural de Michel Goulet constitue pour l'est montréalais l'extension de la zone culturellement habitée.

Les deux oeuvres sont de même nature: elles réfèrent à des éléments d'architecture pour parvenir par des références symboliques à des proportions cosmologiques. Les deux oeuvres sont efficaces. Même, par un retour des choses, l'événement du printemps 90 a été en art le fait que Goulet exposait dans un parc new-yorkais quelques chaises. Ces dernières, comme le jardin de Charney, ont été exécutées dans le cadre du programme provinciale d'intégration des arts à l'architecture. Le projet du Parc Lafontaine est financé par un programme similaire mis de l'avant par la ville de Montréal.

Plus tard, dans l'actuelle année, Thomas Corriveau installera même six maisons à l'intérieur d'une salle de lecture de la bibliothèque de la ville de Laval, au coeur de l'autre île de l'archipel montréalais.

On comprend ainsi que ce n'est pas par hasard si les oeuvres d'un Kim Adams ont trouvé place à la Galerie Christiane Chassay, dont les oeuvres d'un autre artiste, Jacek Jarnuszkiewicz, avaient été retenues par les organisateurs de la biennale de Sao Paulo. En fait, quand le Musée d'art contemporain ouvrira finalement ses portes, c'est une pièce d'un autre de ses artistes, peut-être son plus éminent, Pierre Granche, qui en animera la place publique centrale, comme en pendant d'une oeuvre moins réussie réalisée elle il y a quinze ans avec un budget modeste à l'intérieur du complexe Desjardins.

Montréal et le Québec se donnent un art public. Ce sont des oeuvres de cette nature qui ont attiré

is also stylistic.

Montreal is in the midst of defining itself in the simplest way, by mapping itself out a geographic space.

Thus, the museum event that stands out in people's minds for the '80s is not the stockpile of large exhibitions but the opening of the Canadian Centre for Architecture in 1989. The building is there with its collection and to date, a few exhibitions. Its overall architecture is said to be exemplary and the critics have paid tribute to it. So much the better. Outside, on the site, straddling a boulevard and overlooking a highway, lies a garden built by Melvin Charney. It is the cultural border of the west of Montreal.

On the other side of town, a work is evolving. It begins in a square and also crosses a road to open up semi-circular on the grounds of Lafontaine Park. For the east of Montreal, this sculptural installation by Michel Goulet extends the culturally occupied zone.

The two works are of a similar nature. By referring to architectural elements they arrive at symbolic references to cosmological propositions. These works are effective going back to the spring of '90, the art event of the season was Goulet exhibiting some chairs in a New York park. Like Charney's garden, this project was carried out under a provincial program of integrating the arts and architecture. The Lafontaine Park project was financed by a similar program initiated by the city of Montreal.

And later this year, in the heart of the other island of the Montreal archipelago, Thomas Corriveau will install six houses inside a reading room of the Laval library.

One understands then that it is not by chance that the works of Kim Adams found a place at the Galerie Christiane Chassay, from where the works of another artist, Jacek Jarnuszkiewicz, were selected by the organizers of the Sao Paulo Biennale. In fact, when the new Musée d'art contemporain finally opens, it will be a work by another of Chassay's artists, perhaps her most eminent, Pierre Granche, that will bring the public square to life, like its counterpart inside the Complexe Desjardins, a less successful work executed 15 years ago with a small budget.

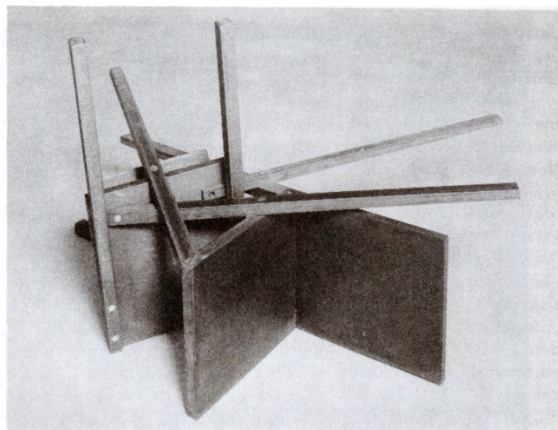


Photo par Louis Lusier, avec la permission de la galerie René Blouin.

STEEL CHAIRS (1990), SCULPTURE PAR/BY BETTY GOODWIN.

l'attention des Montréalais à l'extérieur de leur île. Ainsi Charney, avec Daniel Buren, se fit remarquer par son projet d'intervention urbaine à l'intérieur de l'exposition d'été organisée par le Musée du Québec en 89. Même quand la ville de Sherbrooke a réussi à s'inscrire dans le calendrier artistique, ce fut grâce à la maison onirique de Bourgault-Legros placée en façade d'une édifice gouvernementale: l'argent du gouvernement du Québec secoue encore la torpeur de l'Estrie, comme en rappel de la sculpture installée il y a trente ans par Armand Vaillancourt à Asbestos.

Une autre intervention du même domaine reste à être signalée. Durant dix-huit jours, au printemps 89, sept étudiants ont refait l'intérieur du 896 est, rue de la Gauchetière: ciels baroques et logements ouvriers, salons des discours architecturaux et expositions de résidus architectoniques. Roch Cayotte, Robert Derome, Remy Laporte, Pierre Larue, Annie Lebel, Jean-Gilles Lemieux et Mario Lemieux avaient donc du 27 avril au 14 mai renouvelé le geste de l'intervention, rappel des temps d'avant l'installation. Le fait que leur appui venait de Charney, Granche et de l'architecte Jacques Rousseau y était sûrement pour quelque chose.

Art public, mais aussi références directes à une potentielle encyclopédie des connaissances. Dominique Blain opère dans la même voie lorsqu'elle relie dans son installation des *Cent Jours* de 1989 casemates de bombardement et documentation Renaissance, discours d'art et d'histoire. Aussi l'action d'ouvrir le *Musée des Traces* de Irene Whittome,

Montreal and Quebec are devoting themselves to public art. It was these kinds of works that caught Montrealers' attention outside their island. Thus Charney, like Daniel Buren, was noticed when he carried out a public art project, in this case a part of a summer exhibition organized by the Musée du Québec in 1989. Even the city of Sherbrooke secured a spot in the artistic calendar thanks to the Bourgault-Legros house that was placed as a facade on a government building. Quebec government funds continue to shake up l'Estrie's apathy, recalling Armand Vaillancourt's sculpture installed 30 years ago in Asbestos.

Along the same lines, another intervention should be noted. For 18 days in the spring of '89, seven students remodelled the interior of 896 de la Gauchetière Street East: baroque skys and workers lodgings, salons of architectural discourse and displays of architectonic residues. From April 27 to May 14, Roch Cayotte, Robert Derome, Remy Laporte, Pierre Larue, Annie Lebel, Jean-Gilles Lemieux and Mario Lemieux thus revitalized the interventionist gesture, a recall to times before installation. The fact that their support came from Charney, Granche and architect Jacques Rousseau was surely of significance.

It was public art, but one which also directly referenced a potential encyclopedia of knowledge. Dominique Blain was working in the same vein when she linked blockhouses and Renaissance documentation in her installation for the *Cent Jours*

d'abord installé directement à côté de la Galerie Christiane Chassay avant d'être reconstruit au Musée des Beaux-Arts de l'Ontario cet automne ne demande qu'un léger déplacement mental pour se plonger dans un lieu où sont reliées les iconographies personnelles et une documentation temporelle d'une ville: objets-fétiches de l'artiste et photographies de Montréal et de sa région au début du siècle.

Constant recours à l'histoire, inscription de l'oeuvre dans une action qui dépasse le discours d'art: des paramètres de l'art québécois. Il est ainsi significatif que l'été de 1990 a vu six maisons de la culture présenter l'oeuvre de 124 artistes sur le thème de "Dans dix ans l'an 2000": le défaut de la manifestation était toutefois le processus de sélection, la démocratie étant normalement mauvaise conseillère, chaque visiteur avait ainsi à accomplir un travail de conservateur!

L'entreprise récupère donc à son compte cette tradition québécoise de l'oeuvre inscrite dans le discours social, les oeuvres d'art se caractérisent par leur capacité à dépasser le niveau culturel, dans une recherche débordant le langage visuel. Pourtant...

Dans un autre de ses survols sur l'art québécois, où il était alors explicitement demandé d'établir un palmarès, l'auteur de ce texte déclarait à la fin de 1988 ce qui suit:

«Une artiste s'impose qui, en dix ans seulement de production intense, est devenue la créatrice convoitée par tous les commissaires d'exposition. Betty Goodwin déploie partout son univers obsessionnel fait de forces et de formes primitives qui s'appuient sur une calligraphie et un gestualisme dense, où la figuration rend explicite le contenu de l'oeuvre. Ce retour à l'image n'est plus maintenant une nouveauté dans un art qui, au Québec, emprunte beaucoup à la Transavangarde...»

Plus loin:

«Dans cet univers où les objets et les formes s'associent librement, où la logique est interne aux oeuvres, Gilles Mihalcean installe des microcosmes tridimensionnels sont les lois sont formelles ou littérales.» (cf. *Forces*, 84, hiver 89, pp. 59-60).

Goodwin, Mihalcean, deux noms donnés comme par un retour des choses, en conclusion à une action volontaire visant à rétablir la primauté de l'objet en opposition à un discours général sur l'oeuvre d'art.

Historiquement, l'art québécois s'est toujours articulé en termes d'urgence, de nécessité: la seule justification acceptable de l'art résidait dans le droit absolu à la création, le produit découlant de l'activité

exhibition of 1989—a discourse of both art and history. Similarly, the initial placement of Irene Whithome's *Musée des Traces* beside the Galerie Christiane Chassay before being installed at the Art Gallery of Ontario this fall demands only a slight mental shift for us to be able to plunge into a place where personal iconography and transitory documentation of a city are linked: fetish objects belonging to the artist and photographs of Montreal and its surrounding region from the beginning of the century.

The parameters of Quebecois art are defined by a constant return to history and a framing of the work within a movement that transcends art discourse. It is significant, then, that this past summer six Maisons de la Culture presented the work of 124 artists on the theme "Dans dix ans l'an 2000" (In ten years, the year 2000). The flaw with this event, however, was the selection process (democracy is usually a bad adviser) which obliged each viewer to undertake the work of a curator!

To its credit, the undertaking recuperates that Quebecois tradition of art inscribed within social discourse: the works distinguish themselves by their ability to surpass a cultural level in an investigation that goes beyond visual language.

In another survey on Quebecois art written at the end of 1988, where it was explicitly requested that a record of achievements be established, the author of this text declared the following:

"In only ten years of intense production, an artist has emerged and become the artist coveted by all the exhibition organizers. Betty Goodwin is unfolding her obsessive universe made up of primitive forces and forms that rely on a dense calligraphy and gestural quality, where the content of the work is made explicit through representation. This return to the image is no longer a novelty for art which, in Quebec, borrows liberally from the transavangarde."

And later:

"Within this universe where objects and shapes freely associate, where logic is inherent to the works, Gilles Mihalcean places his three-dimensional microcosms whose laws are either formal or literal." (in *Forces*, 84, Winter '89, pp. 59-60).

Goodwin, Mihalcean: two names cited in taking stock, concluding a voluntary initiative directed at re-establishing the primacy of the object at odds with a broad discourse on the work of art.

Historically, Quebecois art has always articu-



Photo par/by Claudio Franzini.

**LA FÉLURE, AU CHOEUR DES CORPS (1990)
PAR GENEVIÈVE CADIEUX, INSTALLÉ AU
PAVILLON DU CANADA, BIENNALE DE VENISE./
LA FÉLURE, AU CHOEUR DES CORPS (1990)
BY GENEVIÈVE CADIEUX, INSTALLATION AT
THE CANADIAN PAVILLION, VENICE BIENNAL**

devenu ainsi secondaire. A la fin des années soixante-dix, le courant esthétique mis de l'avant par les enseignements universitaires, mais surtout soutenu par la prolifération rédactionnelle d'un René Payant, impose que l'oeuvre d'art soit d'abord lue et regardée en fonction des codifications: la victoire du plaisir sur la légitimité. Dix ans plus tard, les ateliers, à la suite des salles de cours, regorgent d'oeuvres peintes, d'objets nés par le fait d'une intervention artistique. A l'ouverture pour l'oeuvre d'art avait succédé la luxuriance encadrée.

L'impact de ce post-néoréalisme, pour résumer le propos à la manière d'Alison Lurie, est aujourd'hui passé à la petite histoire. Il sera permis de remettre de l'avant le travail d'un Guy Pellerin, d'un Christian Kiopini et de ces autres pour qui la peinture est d'abord une recherche sur l'objet peint opéré comme au temps de cet autrefois récent où on parlait du tableau en terme d'icône. Il y aura sans doute même

lated itself in terms of urgency and necessity. The only acceptable justification for art lay in the absolute right to create, thus the product emerging from the activity became secondary. At the end of the '70s, the aesthetic put forward in universities, but mostly upheld by the copious writings of René Payant, prescribed that the work of art should first be read and viewed according to its code: the victory of pleasure over legitimacy. Ten years later, following the lead of the classroom, studios overflowed with paintings, objects created by artistic intervention. The work of art had replaced framed luxuriance.

The impact of this post-neorealism (as Alison Lurie might surmise) has now passed into the record. It is now permissible to put forth the work of Guy Pellerin, Christian Kiopini and others for whom painting is first and foremost an investigation into the painted object as in the recent past,

un retour vers la génération qui leur était antérieur. Yves Gaucher fera-t-il plus qu'être de passage à Montréal? Quant à Molinari, il a proposé une transformation radicale de sa peinture quand son *Danse Soupier* de 1987 a débordé la recherche sérieuse pour rejoindre des préoccupations du début de siècle, de Matisse à Monet, comme pour refaire l'histoire, à tout le moins l'actualiser. Il restera aussi à faire une exposition à tout le moins de présentation d'oeuvres: Claude Tousignant accumule dans son atelier un travail de peinture. Dernier des Plasticiens, ce peintre poursuit inlassablement la formulation concrète d'une définition théorique de l'oeuvre peinte, à partir de prémisses formulées dès 1955, comme si la succession des systèmes ne permettait pas d'oublier l'enjeu fondamental d'une démarche créatrice, soit dans ce cas l'établissement de la vérité de la peinture.

Présence donc d'une peinture pensée en continuité avec l'histoire et dont le classement sous le vocable de modernité aurait été le mode retenu pour en exécuter la mise au rancart. L'élégance du geste ne peut pas faire oublier que dans le débat sur la post-modernité, il demeure que finalement compte l'oeuvre ou les oeuvres elles-mêmes: pour les mêmes raisons, le discours autour de l'avant-garde s'est éteint il y a vingt ans.

Il était encore possible de croire que le Québec avait généré une formule particulière d'oeuvres d'art: *Aurora Borealis*, en 1985, les oeuvres montréalaises se distinguaient par la complexité des systèmes et des langages, sorte de discours touffu tenu parfois dans un chevauchement des symboliques. Il y a depuis lors une épuration.

D'abord, on n'organise plus de telles expositions. Au mieux, comme a été obligé de faire au printemps de 1990 le Musée d'art contemporain, il y a présentation d'objets de la collection: une exposition calme aux fils ténus.

D'autres part, les artistes, comme pour répondre au besoin du marché, ont opéré une épuration dans le travail au point où un Pierre Dorion en arrive à la peinture de chevalet. Dans ce sens, il y a une limitation face à la complexité et les oeuvres québécoises empruntent nettement dans certains cas aux sources nord-américaines. Il aura ainsi fallu New York pour souligner combien Lyne Lapointe et Martha Fleming se cloisonnaient d'elles-mêmes à l'intérieur de la problématique victorienne, utilisant ici le recours historique pour éliminer les références locales.

Dans un autre cas, n'eût été de la personnalisation des références ou les choix bibliographiques, le tra-

where paintings were discussed in terms of iconography. It is likely there will even be a return to the previous generation. Will Yves Gaucher do more than just pass through Montreal? As for Guido Molinari, in 1987 he suggested a radical transformation of his work with *Danse Soupier*, a painting which went beyond serial investigation to meet up with the concerns of the beginning of this century. From Matisse to Monet, rewriting history or at least bringing it up to date. Claude Tousignant is accumulating a series of paintings in his studio that remain to be exhibited. Beginning with premises formulated as early as 1955, Tousignant, the last of the Plasticiens, relentlessly pursues a concrete formulation of a theoretical definition of the painted work, as if the succession of systems does not allow one to forget the fundamental stakes of the creative process, in this case establishing the truth of painting.

The presence, then, of a painting thought out in terms of historical continuity and whose classification in terms of modernity would have been the method retained to discard it. In the debate on post-modernity, the elegance of the gesture cannot make one forget that, ultimately, it is the works themselves that count: the discourse around the avant-garde died out 20 years ago for the same reasons.

It used to be possible to believe that Quebec had generated a particular type of artworks: At *Aurora Borealis*, in 1985, the Montreal works differentiated themselves by their complexity of systems and languages, a kind of dense discourse sometimes held in an overlapping of symbolic systems. Since then, there has been a refining.

First of all, such exhibitions are no longer organized. At best, as the Musée d'art contemporain was obliged to do in this past spring, there is an exhibition of works from the collection: a calm exhibition very much in check.

On the other hand, responding to the demands of the market, artists have refined their work to the point where Pierre Dorion, for instance, is doing easel painting. In this sense, complexity becomes limited and in some cases Quebecois work clearly borrows from other North American sources. As such, it took New York to emphasize how Lyne Lapointe and Martha Fleming compartmentalize themselves inside a Victorian problematic, resorting to history in this case to eliminate local references.

vail d'une Geneviève Cadieux, au regard des images données, serait de n'importe quel lieu de notre Occident contemporain. L'efficacité des systèmes, les outils de présentation en arrivent à uniformiser le travail.

Le *Cénotaphe* de Barbara Steinman ou la pièce montée à Venise en 1988 n'ont d'origine local que le lieu de production de l'artiste. On comprend pourquoi il a été dit que le nationalisme n'a qu'un temps et, quand arrive une Jana Sterbak, il faut se dire que Montréal peut aussi être un port d'ancrage pour l'élaboration d'un discours nord-américain et européen d'intention.

On trouvera tantôt d'autres oeuvres qui pourront équilibrer le discours. Le réseau Fluxus soutenu par la revue *Inter* à Québec en serait un cas. Il faudrait revenir à la sculpture de Mongrain ou Poulin, il y aurait place à être faite aux oeuvres d'une Nicole Jolicœur ou d'un Alain Paiement, car ces travaux sont en attente d'expansion.

Bref, depuis trop longtemps déjà, l'art québécois attend l'occasion d'être mis en scène. Il y a un manque flagrant d'exposition et des moyens sont à être trouvés. Si l'art et la société québécoise s'éloignent, la faute n'en est pas aux artistes quand, depuis quarante ans, les oeuvres sont devenues complexes et que le seul fait de vouloir créer ne suffit plus pour justifier la démarche créatrice. Dans ce sens, le temps des biennales est révolu et il faut réclamer les grandes expositions thématiques qui auraient sans doute l'heureux défaut d'empêcher l'accoutumance à l'unanimité.

C'est ce dont l'art québécois et montréalais ont besoin.

Normand Thériault est un critique d'art qui réside à Montréal. Il fut un des conservateurs d'*Aurora Borealis* en 1985.

In another case, having neither the personalization of references nor the bibliographic choices, the images in the work of Geneviève Cadieux could be from any place in our contemporary Western world. The efficiency of systems, the tools of presentation come to standardize the work.

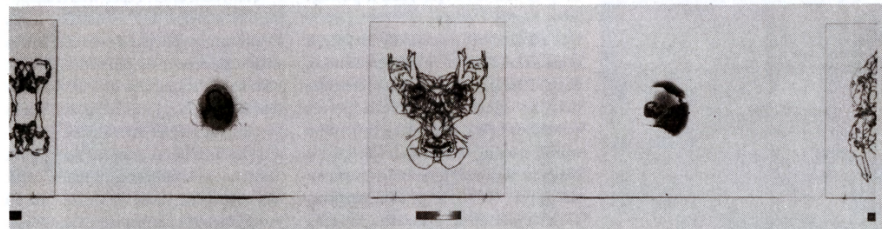
Barbara Steinman's *Cénotaphe*, or the work she exhibited at Venice in 1988, betray no local origins other than the artist's place of production. It has been said that nationalism has only one time so when a Jana Sterbak arrives on the scene, one must conclude that Montreal can also be an anchoring point for the development of a directed North American and European art discourse.

One can also find works capable of balancing this discourse. An example would be the Fluxus network upheld by *Inter* magazine in Quebec. Going back to the sculpture of Mongrain or Poulin, making room for the work of Nicole Jolicœur or Alain Paiement, because these last two are waiting in the wings.

In short, the mise en scène of Quebec art is long overdue. There is a woeful lack of exhibitions and the means to rectify the situation have to be found. If art and Quebec society are growing apart, artists are not to blame because over the last 40 years the works have become increasingly complex—the desire to create being not sufficient to justify artistic endeavour. As such, the time for biennials has past and large thematic exhibitions must be reclaimed. Such undertakings would likely have the fortunate drawback of preventing an addiction to unanimity.

This is what Quebecois and Montreal art need.

Normand Thériault is an art critic living in Montreal. He was one of the curators of *Aurora Borealis* in 1985.



DÉTAIL DE LA VÉRITÉ FOLLE, UNE INSTALLATION (1989) PAR NICOLE JOLICOEUR./DETAIL FROM LA VÉRITÉ FOLLE, AN INSTALLATION (1989) BY NICOLE JOLICOEUR.



Photo by Douglas Clark.

"A TALE OF AVARICE AND POVERTY" (1985)

**Adrian Piper:
Reflections 1967-87
The Power Plant, Toronto
May 4 - June 10, 1990**

by Laura U. Marks

In 1971 Adrian Piper read a passage from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that affected her profoundly. Briefly, it argues that I can have objective knowledge of the world, but I must recognize that the categories of knowledge are conditions of my subjectivity. In other words, the way I understand an other is really an aspect of myself. In "Food for the Spirit" (1971), a "private performance," Piper spent a month grappling with this passage "that was shaking the foundations of [her] identity."

Ten years later, Piper was translating the passage into accusatory form. "You confuse your personal experiences with objective reality, and forget that you have a subjective and limited self that is selecting, processing, and interpreting your experiences in accordance with its own limited capacities."¹ With remarkable consistency, Piper's work has concerned these processes for 20 years of private performances and public confrontations: many of these are documented in *Adrian Piper: Reflections*

1967-1987. Her experience as a Black-identified, pale skinned woman of mixed ancestry puts her at the threshold of both Black and white "otherness," and this position of privilege/liminality has given her a clear view of how people struggle to maintain those separations, as though struggling for their own identity. This concern makes the leap from "A Tale of Avarice and Poverty" (1985), a wrenching story of how Piper's family was disowned by relatives who could pass for white, to the geopolitical "Portrait" (1983). "Portrait" breathes new meaning into the overused image of the bombing of Nagasaki by pairing it with a text that diagnoses xenophobia as an attempt to control what we fear in ourselves by cutting it off.

In contrast with this need for control is Piper's respectful and inclusive attitude toward her past self. A chronology listed in the catalogue of the show refuses to segregate her professional accomplishments from such landmarks as her childhood art projects, encounters with artists and theorists she admires, or 15 years of good times with her cat Diotima. The fabric of her life forms a continuous background throughout her work, beginning with the "time-space continuums" of the late '60s that ground a highly abstract analysis in the details of her home and routines. Sometimes the person disappears into the detail, as in the minutely observed diary entries of the "Concrete Infinity Documentation Piece" (1970): Peed and shat. Weighed 98 lbs. Body Temperature 92.7°F. Assembled Osterizer. Ate three teaspoons of soya lecithin." Such early performances prove what Piper seems to have suspected, that she disappears into a vacuum when she tries to isolate herself from her social and cultural context. At the same time she was doing the "Catalysis" performances in which, for example, she rode the New York subway wearing clothes soaked in codliver oil and vinegar. Both sorts of experiments affirmed her realization,

or re-realization, of the inseparability of self and other—although with less of the social goodwill that characterizes her mature work.

Like other conceptual artists, Piper uses her body and her experience as "reflective surfaces" (the title of a performance/video). These works fight the racist notion of authenticity, which supports rigid categories of experience.² "I would never simply say Black," she writes in "Political Self-Portrait #2," "because I felt silly as though I was co-opting something, i.e. the Black Experience, which I haven't had. I've had the Gray Experience." Piper not only documents the swirl of grays that have made up her life but also, through devices like the "Mythic Being," creates herself as her own other. This surrogate—usually male, usually working class, sometimes white, sometimes Black—allowed Piper both to experience another identity and to divest herself of some of hers.

This body of work is not "about" Adrian Piper; rather, it challenges the viewer to examine his or her own life for the roots of our own prejudices and false boundaries that others have created around us. Many of the pieces feature direct address to the audience in Piper's characteristic tone: polite, patient, slightly weary. She assumes that we can learn; we, too, are products of political and cultural circumstances that can be understood and addressed. This faith informs *Funk Lessons* (a 1983-84 performance documented in a 1984 video), in which Piper invites an audience to participate in an evening of destruction and dancing (her embossed gold invitation card says, "Have rhythm, will travel"). She stands earnestly at a blackboard coaching the audience in different moves; poker-faced video titles outline some of the key elements and misapprehensions of funk: "two step," "shoulder shrug," "funk is modular"; "vulgar," "sexually expressive," "no structure." Between moves Piper gives

a pocket history of funk, naming the Black musicians whom white musicians lucratively ripped off. To the affable self-conscious white man in the audience who says, "White people can't dance," she calmly replies, "It's just a matter of practice."

Some of her more recent works show an exasperation with audiences who use categories like "art" and "culture" (as in "I came here to get some—") as excuses to avoid examining their own prejudices. "Four Intruders Plus Defense Systems" (1980) places the viewer in a black-walled booth with four photographs of angry-looking young Black men, while Piper's voice anticipates "bad" white responses to the work: the Hilton Kramer response ("Frankly, I just don't think it works as art," because politics doesn't belong in art); the whiny liberal response ("These images just seem to be so resentful, and that just doesn't mesh with my reality. . . Not all Blacks are like that. . . only the ones who don't see us reaching out to them").

The last works included in the exhibit, selections from the charcoal-on-newspaper "Vanilla Nightmares" series, confront *New York Times*-reading, middle-class intellectuals with their connections to histories of enslavement and oppression. For example, on a page of *The Times* from June 29, 1986 about



Photo by Douglas Clark.

the burning tire “necklaces” that Black South Africans use against each other—often cited as proof that apartheid is less a cause of violence in that country than intra-racial conflict—Piper has drawn a row of slaves chained together by iron neck rings. A smaller story, “U.S. Reportedly Reassessing South African Policy” and a box explaining the South African press restrictions underline the white control that continues into the present. The power of the U.S. to “reassess” policies that affect millions of Black South Africans, even supposedly liberal policies, is harshly illuminated by recent reports that 27 years ago the CIA gave South Africa information to aid in the arrest of Nelson Mandela.

As I left the Power Plant I overheard a woman saying, “Well, I think it’s valid as personal expression, but it’s not what I would call art.” Piper’s occasional frustration is truly founded when some viewers parrot the very defenses she identifies. There are so many ways to learn from this work: through identifying with the artist’s processes of scrupulous self analysis; through the vertigo of examining our racism and self/other boundaries; through recognizing our own defenses, or defenses that have been used against us; through quieting ourselves and listening to the stories. This work dignifies its audience. In it Piper confronts us with anger, assuming we can take it; rigorous analysis, expecting us to comprehend; and the challenge to change ourselves. ●

Laura U. Marks is an artist, activist and assistant editor of *Afterimage* magazine.

ENDNOTES

1. Adrian Piper, “Ideology, Confrontation, and Self-Awareness: An Essay, 1981,” in Brian Wallis, ed., *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), p. 132.

2. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Questions of Multi-Culturalism,” an interview with Sneja Gunew in Sarah Harasym, ed., *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 61.



Drawing the Line Kiss 'n Tell: Persimmon Blackbridge Lizard Jones and Susan Stewart Beaver Hall, Toronto April 5 - 22, 1990

by Mary Louise Adams

Over the last decade, lesbian communities have been engaged in a sometimes bitter and divisive struggle to define the boundaries of an appropriately lesbian-feminist sexuality. At issue has been our ability to construct a workable sexual politic. How to represent it? How to practice it in our sexual lives?

Popularly referred to as the “sex debates,” this process of definition has for the most part taken place in the feminist and lesbian and gay press, among feminist artists and at feminist conferences like the 1984 *Lesbian Sexuality* conference and the 1985 *Challenging Our Images* conference on pornography and prostitution, both held in Toronto.

Opposing sides in this “debate” have been rather clumsily labelled pro-sex/anti-censorship and anti-pornography/pro-censorship, though clearly, none of these classifications can account for the complex feelings and thoughts any particular woman might have about the is-

sues at hand. Nevertheless, each side has been staked out and, after almost a decade, there have been few successful attempts either to shift the boundaries or to change the terms of the debate. *Drawing the Line* is a conspicuous exception in this segment of lesbian and feminist history.

An exhibit of almost 100 lesbian sex photographs, *Drawing the Line* is the collective work of three Vancouver artists—Persimmon Blackbridge, Lizard Jones and Susan Stewart—who call themselves Kiss 'n Tell. The show, curated by A Space's Queer Girls/Lesbian Arts Committee, was in Toronto as part of *QueerCulture*, a lesbian and gay arts festival.

While the photos in *Drawing the Line* are important interventions into feminist debates about sex, the photos alone aren't what makes this show significant. *Drawing the Line* is an outstanding example of user-friendly art. As women enter the gallery, they're given black markers

so they can write their comments and reactions to the show on the walls around the photographs. The result is a candid, complex and contradictory pronouncement on the state of lesbian sexual politics.

By the end of the show's run, a small slice of an ongoing discussion is frozen on the gallery walls. And it certainly isn't limited to the deliberate theoretical discussions we are used to reading about in the feminist press. *Drawing the Line* elicited a series of gut reactions, ponderous questions and assertions of sexual taste. According to Lizard Jones, the writing on the walls is an indication that the familiar sex debates have responded to only a fraction of women's concerns.

While the members of Kiss 'n Tell work collectively to direct the show, Susan Stewart is the group's photographer and Persimmon Blackbridge and Lizard Jones are the models. The collective hopes that by keeping the models consistent throughout the show, viewers will be less likely to focus on the “who” as opposed to the “what” of each photo. This seems part of an effort to highlight the content over the form of the images. Viewers are asked to pass judgment, not on Susan Stewart's photographic technique—which in a number of instances is superb—but on sexual practices and the representation of sexual practices.



Photo courtesy A Space.

Not surprisingly, the distinction between practice and representation was not always taken up by the women who wrote on the walls. Comments suggested that many women assumed the photos were frozen images of “real” sex. In spite of 10 years of analysis and theorizing about the production and effects of pornography, it is still easy to conflate photographs with real life. It wasn't always clear if comments were directed at the practices depicted or at the fact that those practices were being represented and displayed publicly.

The photos were arranged in progressive order from the least to the most controversial. We moved from cosy shots of two fully-clad women in the woods, to a couple playing with food, to a clothed woman masturbating, to two naked women making love, through various degrees of butch/femme, a threesome, a variety of s/m-ish shots, and a final series of two women having sex in front of a man. By the last group of photos the walls were so covered in comments, it was almost dizzying to try to read them all.

What was most at issue in these comments? Love.

Was there any love in the images? What does it mean to have sex without love? What would a photo of love look like? One woman wrote in four-inch high letters under the very first and most “loving” group of photos (Persimmon

and Lizard making out by a waterfall), “SEX WITHOUT LOVE EQUALS ABUSE.” Another woman wrote alongside the same group, near a photo of the two women kissing, “This is about love and I love it.”

Related to this concern about love was a preoccupation with what's “natural.” Women seemed to be searching for an elusive, essential, unencumbered lesbian sexuality. Love, it seems, is high on the natural, while props, jewellery and even clothes are not.

Some thought the photos mimicked heterosexuality, others felt they resembled “50s hetero-porn bullshit.” This exchange was penned beside a close-up of a woman kissing another woman's breast:

“Why are you imitating het love making?”

“What is heterosexual lovemaking?”

“Why is this photo het? I love breasts.”

Further down the wall, the shadow of a lacy tree branch playing across a woman's torso was lauded as “probably the best photo in the exhibit because it combines nature with love.”

I found myself wondering how it is that someone could pick up on “love” in a headless image of a woman alone. In this sense, the show is an incredible exercise in de-coding—both the photos and the responses to them can be taken up in a variety of ways. Viewers have the opportunity to play off each other's comments, to try out different ways of seeing, different ways of making sense.

While some popular (read: mainstream) symbols seemed to be easily appropriated by lesbian viewers, others proved more controversial. For instance, there was no condemnation of the use of the waterfall to code an image as romantic. But leather, black lingerie and s/m props were said to obscure and hinder the models' own passion. It would be interesting to see the response to images in which seemingly contradictory codes and symbols were juxtaposed. When nudity and the outdoors are assumed to represent a “natural”

lesbian style of lovemaking, how might women respond to an image of naked lesbians fist-fucking or having anal sex (neither of which have been easily accepted into the lesbian canon) in the woods?

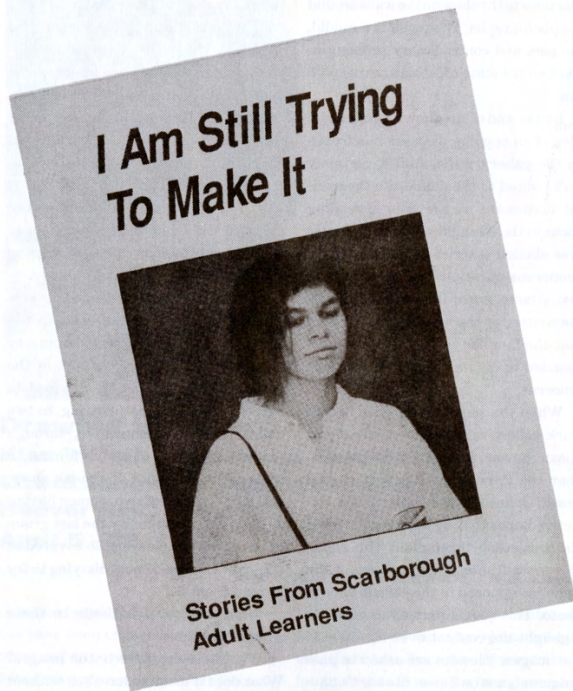
Of course, most women probably didn't go to the gallery to deconstruct diverse systems of meaning. Lesbians look at sexual art to get turned on, to get ideas, to see what other women think lesbian sex is. Unlike gay men or heterosexuals, we haven't an easily accessible body of erotic work and lesbians are starved for sexual imagery.

While the photos in *Drawing the Line* represent a huge range of sexual possibility and all of them had at least one person to vouch for their "hotness," I didn't find the series a turn-on. In part, the intensity of the commentary—much of which was decidedly unsexy—upstaged the images themselves. As well, the models in the photos rarely made direct eye contact with the camera, limiting the possibility of my own entry into the scene. And while this leaves me the pleasure of the voyeur, I found that position a difficult one to sustain as I made my way around the room.

Given this, it makes sense that I found the images that play to the voyeur are the most erotically successful—a longshot of the two models inside a deserted barn, scenes in the woods and, perhaps surprisingly, a close-up of a woman with her eyes closed. This latter one seemed such an intensely private image that looking at it felt intrusive. Its inclusion in a "sex" show marks an understanding of erotic power that we rarely get to see in sexual imagery, lesbian or otherwise.

Turn-on or not, *Drawing the Line* is a significant document. As a diverse group of images, the show points to the potential in lesbian sexual practice. As a piece of political art, *Drawing the Line* is a model of accessibility and usefulness that others would do well to learn from. ●

Mary Louise Adams works with *Rites*, a magazine for lesbian and gay liberation, in Toronto.



**I Am Still Trying To Make It:
Stories From Scarborough Adult Learners
Scarborough Board of Education, 1990**

by Shannon Bell

I Am Still Trying To Make It is a collection of stories written by learners at the Adult Basic Learning Centre of the Scarborough Board of Education. The learners include people from foreign countries who are studying English as well as individuals who have gone through the Canadian educational process without learning to read and write.

The book consists of 50 stories which are divided into eight sections: "Friends and Family," "Working," "Our Children," "Animal Friends," "We Remember," "A New Land," "Other Places" and "Just Me." Each story is a composition relating to an accompanying snapshot. These are actual snapshots of moments in time (many of a

personal event in the author's country of origin), yet they also represent the author's location in the processes of learning English.

Rhonda Sussman, who compiled the stories and edited the book, explains that the stories vary in complexity. Some of them have errors in grammar and spelling. Sussman explains that the authors are beginners not yet able to self-correct, so the errors have been left in the published version to reflect the individual's writing or speaking style.

The language experience method underlying the structure of this book relies on the composer to talk or write something that is important to her/his own experience. This approach is based on the pedagogical theory that adults learn most when the object of knowledge is meaningful to them; adults are more inclined to talk and write about their own lives, creating their own texts rather than using texts given to them. Storytelling is the least mediated form, closer to what people feel and think. Storytelling is a basic, existential way of teaching and conveying thoughts; it reaches out to others. A number of the pieces are about writing, reaching out to people in similar learning positions.

The book was a learning experience for the 50 writers. Sussman worked with each individual from her/his position of literacy. For those orally dictating, she wrote down what they said (mistakes and all), editing with them where possible. The first concern, Sussman adamantly states, is with meaning: Does their meaning come through? She and the composers corrected errors according to meaning first; work on form and structure was the final part of the process.

The stories in *I Am Still Trying To Make It* give an experiential insight into cultures from as diverse places as Eastern Africa, the Middle East, South Africa, the Caribbean, the Far East, and Western and Eastern Europe. Topics vary but the three themes of race, class and gender predominate

implicitly and explicitly. Two-thirds of the authors are women. Although it is no surprise, one reads that immigrant women work the hardest yet are the most underprivileged in terms of education and employment.

The book title, *I Am Still Trying To Make It*, is the title of the last story in the collection by Lenora, a Black woman, who tells how when she was young she hated school and how when she was old enough to understand the importance of education she became pregnant and had to put it on hold. She ends by saying, "So now I am 48 years old and I am still trying." A story by another Black woman, Lyn, "I Work Hard," narrates how the author has worked as a cook's helper for 15 years and is taking English so that she can earn a certificate as a cook's helper from a community college and earn appropriate wages. "Only Seven" by Casandra tells of how she and her twin sister at age seven were left by their mother with a friend. The friend took them in to do chores. A picture of her and her sister in a Jamaican village accompanies the story. Casandra writes: "The chores were very hard... We had to work all day. We had little time to play. My sister and I would sit on the porch and when the children came home from school I would say that someday I would go to school and learn to read." Asgari, a Muslim woman, in her story, "Coming to Canada," supports the fact that in patriarchy it is women and children who are the last to learn the language of the country that is to be their new home. She says: "Four years after I arrived we had moved four times and I had another baby. We now had six children. The problem was that I didn't speak English, and my children didn't speak English." Sexism is the explicit topic of Steve's story, "Four Years Not Enough." Steve tells of his marriage and how he had to learn that he and his wife were partners rather than him being the boss. He explains that when they got married in 1985 his attitude was, "Well, you're my wife and this is

what we're doing." He continues: "Boy, did I have a lot to learn. One of the things I learned is that... we both need to do things in agreement."

Although all the stories are interesting, educational and passionate accounts of life, four stand out. Patrick's "My Mother" is a beautiful and powerful story about his Irish mother who had 21 brothers and sisters. Patrick chronicles her life in Ireland, England and Canada. Of her, he says: "She was a very obliging person. She'd do anything for you. She was always cheerful, singing and dancing. She was also the boss." Monica, a young woman, writes about giving birth. "Having a Baby" captures the pain and fear of first childbirth as well as the wonder and joy at the "small pinkish baby" that would soon call the author MOM. In "The Funeral," Christina narrates her family's experience around her brother-in-law's funeral. It was the first time her entire family had been together in 15 years. Finally, "Restoration of My 1970 Chevelle" by Bob is a fun story about restoring what is now a beautiful and prize-winning car with 400 horsepower of happiness. "Some days if I'm feeling down and out, I'll take the car out for a run around the block. I feel great after that."

I Am Still Trying To Make It was compiled for use by English as a Second Language (ESL) and Adult Basic Education instructors as a reading tool and to encourage learners to write. I think it should also be read by those interested in immigrant culture and in storytelling as a pedagogical technique and artifact of culture. The book is available from the Scarborough Board of Education. ●

Shannon Bell is completing her doctoral dissertation, "Writing and (Re)Writing the Prostitute Body," in Political Science at York University. Her writing, focussing on the representation of female sexuality, has appeared in the cultural publications *Rites* and *Our Times*.



Broken Arrow Mojah Verse to Vinyl Records

by Klive Walker

Former Truths and Rights vocalist and guitarist, Mojah, has re-entered the musical arena with a debut album entitled *Broken Arrow*. Truths and Rights, of course, was the seminal Canadian reggae band that left an indelible mark on the Toronto music scene 10 years ago. Mojah was the musical force in this band and helped to open the doors for other reggae acts such as The Sattalites and Messenjah.

This new album reflects Mojah's unique vision through the power of his song-writing skills, lyrical themes and distinct vocal style. The collection of 10 songs on the album reveals an artist seriously attempting to carve out his own sound and approach to reggae.

While the music is unmistakably reggae, one can hear elements of rhythm and blues ("Don't Walk By"), calypso ("Rastafari Live") and African. The significance of the material is in the poetry and message of the lyrics, situated within a strong melodic framework. Each song has a distinct melody which the rhythm supports, not vice versa as is common in a lot of today's dance hall reggae. Mojah's pro-environment anthem of the title track is an example of his ability to deliver activist concerns without being trite or offensive:

Broken arrow is a code
The code for destruction
I found out this morning
It's nuclear reaction
... You kept us in the dark
Now I know the truth about you

In "Today" after an ominous refrain, "Bad news, bad news..." Mojah tells us the news:

Over inna Namibia
Violence reign apartheid's bloody
Over inna Mozambique
Apartheid killing our brothers and sisters
"Africa" gives a more optimistic twist on the same apartheid scenario:

It won't be long
Before freedom comes our way
It won't be long
Before Nelson Mandela's free
We'll walk in Soweto

The album packs a thematic punch which makes it distinct from a lot of the reggae heard from Canadian artists these days. The record has so far garnered favourable reviews and has received a fair amount of airplay on college as well as mainstream radio.

How does Mojah feel about the auspicious re-introduction? "It's a thrill, especially working with Lillian Allen and her company, Verse to Vinyl." Mojah adds, "I have worked with bands before [but] nothing [in terms of] serious recording happened." He went on to explain that his first collaboration with Allen was in the days of Truth and Rights. Allen was closely affiliated with the band, co-writing "Acid Rain" with Ato Seitu and Mojah. "Actually," says Mojah, "it was Allen who came up with the Broken Arrow concept as song and title for the album."

The other key figure involved in the creation of Mojah's solo recording effort is Eddy Bullen. He was responsible for production (he co-produced with Mojah) and musical arrangement. Bullen is no newcomer. He has worked with the likes of Liberty Silver, Leroy Sibbles, Errol Starr and others and has given many of

the songs a '90s sensibility without sounding too slick.

It is obvious that Mojah's creativity has been alive and well since the demise of Truths and Rights. It is also true that his musical career did not start with that band either. "My first band was when I was 14, before that [I] performed at school concerts." This was in his birthplace, Trinidad. That first band was called The Strays. "We did ten concerts. . . played soul, rhythm and blues, and calypso. [Our musical heroes] were James Brown, Sam Cooke and Otis Redding—the soul generation." During this period of the late '60s Mojah discovered reggae in the form of Prince Buster and Desmond Dekker.

In the late '70s with Truth and Rights, Mojah played a leading role in establishing a kind of reggae that related specifically to Canada. When one picked up a Truth and Rights recording, whether it was "Acid Rain" or "Metro's No.1 Problem," it was clear that it was a Canadian brand of reggae. This work pre-dated Devon's "Mr. Metro" and even the recorded version of "Rub-A-Dub Style Inna Regent Park" by Allen. Therein lies Truth and Rights's major significance. When Truth and Rights disbanded, he went on to help pull together a band with a one letter name—V.

This band had what could be described as a fusion of different musical styles including Latin, calypso and reggae—a sort of pre-"world beat" sound. Along with Mojah and Terry Wilkins, this aggregation included Lorraine Segato and Billy Bryans who used the same musical ideas to achieve mainstream popularity with their band The Parachute Club.

As an artist, Mojah has often been on the cutting edge of the music scene in Toronto. The release of *Broken Arrow* could be the beginning of the ascent of an important talent. ●

Klive Walker is a music researcher and writer.

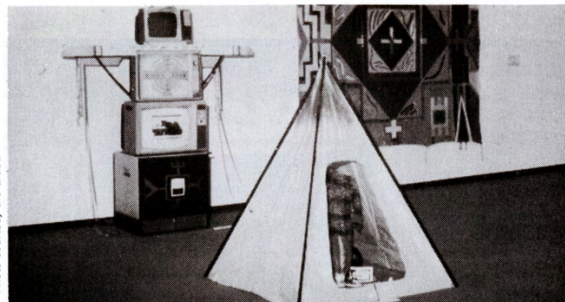


Photo courtesy: the artist.

"HUEY, DEWEY AND LOUIE WANNABE," BY BOB BOYER.

Seeing Red Jane Ash-Poitras, Bob Boyer, Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Edward Poitras Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston

by Carolyn F. Acoose

Seeing Red is a challenge to the viewer to reassess the history of Canada's First Nations contained in textbooks and to confront contemporary issues facing Indian people today. The exhibition title's double entendre is bitingly obvious. We are all reminded, Indian and non-Indian alike, of the anomalies of life faced by Indian people of yesteryear which persist to the present. While these artists are of Indian ancestry, their art cannot be ghettoized or trivialized by viewers and arts-related professionals who expect it to conform to the standard formula that will readily identify and validate it as "Indian art."²

Bob Boyer is a Métis from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and presently head of the Department of Indian Fine Arts at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College in Regina. Although he is recognized more for his monumental paintings on blanket, Boyer addresses issues of cultural appropriation in an installation work entitled "Huey, Dewey and Louie Wannabee: A Re-Appropriation of a Misappropriated Appropriation." Groups ranging from the manufacturing industry to Indian hobbyist

organizations are taken to task for their roles in the annexation, for their own gain, of the image and culture of North America's First Nations. Ever hear of Red Man tobacco? Jeep Cherokee? Or how about Dodge Dakota? Even professional sports teams tout Indian names. In this work Boyer has placed gaudy, tourist souvenir items, clothing with bright geometric designs, and other articles which use the "Indian" theme as their selling point inside a plastic pseudo-tipi. Behind this sits a modern "totem pole" constructed from four television sets. Two of the screens each display a shiny vehicle identified by an Indian tribal name. Another section had an old test pattern painted on it—the one with the profile of a war-bonnetted Plains Indian in its centre. The final section of the pole displays a videotape of ceremonially dressed pow-wow dancers dancing to the beat and cadence of Northern Plains Indian songs. The irony is in the fact that the tape is black and white. We are acutely reminded of what little value the appropriators placed on the true expression of Indian culture. On either side of the installa-

tion is a diptych of Boyer's blanket paintings whose imagery is based on the geometric style of the Northern Plains Indian.

"Preservation of a Species: Deep Freeze" is a 10-piece installation by Calgary-based artist Joane Cardinal-Schubert, whose grandmother was a Peigan medicine woman. The viewer, who visits each unit at a time, is compelled to ponder the host of indignities faced by the Indian nations in the past and that still persist in our time. Cardinal-Schubert confronts the policies of over-zealous governments and museums, for example, citing them for such insensitive practices as confiscating human remains and placing them in cold storage areas, where they exist to this date. She critiques traditional museum practice in which Indian culture is denied and, in some instances, totally negated.

Jane Ash-Poitras, a Fort Chipweyan Cree who now lives in Edmonton, presents a three-part installation bearing the title "Hudson's Bay Lure: Assimilated Transformation." The first two portions address the dubious economic policies of early fur-trading companies and the equally questionable government-legislated activities geared to assimilate, integrate and eliminate Canada's Indian people. The work ends on a note of optimism, however, as the third section imparts the sense that, in spite of the conditions, Indians and their culture will always endure.

"White Buffalo Cloud" is an installation by Edward Poitras, originally from the Gordon Reserve in Saskatchewan, who now lives in Regina. The first segment of this installation is a table on which is placed a brass plate, onto which a poem has been etched. Beyond that, a round rock has been chipped in the form of a cup to which buffalo blood has been added. The next section is a piece of pipestone with the words "The Pipe" inlaid in lead on one side and pictographs scratched in on the other. Poitras then placed a hundred pound block of

soapstone on a pedestal of brass rods. The stone surface, which has been given minimal treatment, takes on the shape of a cloud. Viewed from other angles, one also sees the shape of a buffalo frozen in the process of turning as well as a totally visible buffalo head. The final section is a flat slab of pipestone cut into the shape of North and Central America resting on a low base of metal screws.

The premise of Poitras's work is formed around the legend of White Buffalo Calf Woman, who brought the sacred pipe to the Sioux people. The legend, in part, recounts how White Buffalo Calf appeared to two men. One of the men had less than noble thoughts about her and immediately there was a loud clap of thunder and they were enveloped by a cloud. After the cloud disappeared only the man with the good heart and White Buffalo Calf Woman remained.

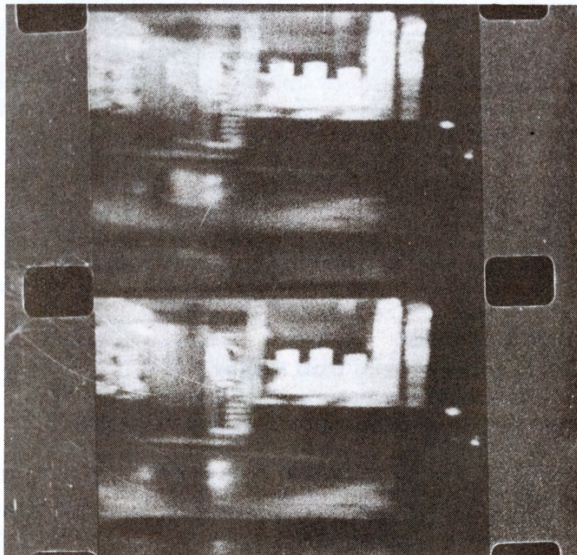
Although the issues addressed in this exhibition relate directly to Canada's First Nations, they are equally appropriate concerns of other Fourth World societies. The artists' approaches to art-making are as diverse as the backgrounds from which they come. They have, however, successfully stripped Indian art from the clichés created by anthropologists and ethnologists, but in the process the vision of each Indian artist remains. ●

Carolyn Acoose lectures in Indian Art History at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Regina.

ENDNOTES

1. In Western Canada, most First Nations individuals and organizations use "Indian" when referring to themselves.

2. The very early forms of contemporary Indian painting, particularly in the Southwestern United States, had to conform to a very strict formula—dictated by anthropologists, ethnologists and art patrons—in order for it to be regarded as authentic Indian art. Briefly, the proscriptions were that the work a) had to be very flat and stylized, with no illusion to the third dimension; b) could not show landscape detail, either in the foreground or the background; c) had to be historically relevant and not outside of the artist's tribal affiliation; and d) above all, had to "look" Indian.



STILL FROM DE GAGNE, BEAUSOLEIL AND GELINAS'S SALES IMAGES.

Photo courtesy: Les Productions l'Ombre Magique.

Images 90: Festival of Independent Film & Video The Euclid Theatre June 7 - 12, 1990

Decolonization curated by Loretta Todd

by Lenore Keeshig-Tobias

Unlike *Images 90* curator, Loretta Todd, I have little problem with the term Native, preferring it to the term Indian. (Indian is Canada's legal term for its indigenous inhabitants.) For me, Native, while still a white man's word, includes Indian, Métis and Inuit. Better still are the words indigenous or aboriginal which I prefer over Native. The best, by far, is First Nations. If you want to be specific, in my case, the word is Ojibway—ironically the white man's bastardization of a Native word.

Anishnawbe is what we call ourselves. It means "good of the earth."

Decolonization, as defined by the Collins English Dictionary, means to grant independence to (a colony). In the minds of First Nations, the same word means self-determination—the right and ability to make decisions for oneself without outside influence or interference. In terms of the arts, which I am more familiar with because of my art, it is the right of Native peoples to tell their own stories their own ways in

whatever genre or medium they choose. There is also flipside to decolonization which must not be ignored: It entails acknowledgement, acceptance, and a relinquishing of power. In terms of hearts, this means access to production dollars, which at present are difficult for Native artists to obtain, and acceptance of Native copyright. Stories and symbols/emblems belong to individuals, clans, tribes and nations. No one has the right, without permission, to tell or reproduce these because no one has the right to speak for another unless requested to do so.

"Decolonization," the program put together by Métis video and filmmaker, Loretta Todd for *Images 90* was more than just a series of examples set out for Native peoples to "reclaim and rename" ourselves. The films and videos, in fact, demonstrated the process of self-determination itself: First Nations peoples speaking for themselves on their own terms and in their own voices (albeit most times in the oppressor's tongue).

The five videos and one film ranged between two and 40 minutes in length, covering Native peoples from across the North American continent and including a link from the other side of the world: *Moodeitj Yorgas* (Solid Women) by Australian Tracy Moffatt. In this 22-minute video, aboriginal women's voices are out of sync, illustrating how the English language is an imposed language and one that does not always reflect aboriginal (non-English) cultures.

While I personally loathe the term Indian because it is an imposed term used to identify all the First Nations of the western hemisphere (except for the Inuit) regardless of individual sovereignty and history, I appreciate the effort of *Indian Is...* by George Burdeau and students at the Institute of American Indian Art to reclaim and redefine the meaning of "American Indian." In this 10-minute videotape, speakers proclaim their American Indian existence and what it means to them.

A community produced tape, *First Contact* is a re-creation by Native people

in the Okanagan Valley of part of their history, recollecting the time of contact when, over 100 years ago, the white man passed through Okanagan territory without asking. *Like an Eagle in the Sky* by Den Todd and *Indian Drum* by Verna Leon and Allan Mitchell can, I suppose, be classified as musical videos. The former has a wonderful sprinkling of aboriginal language. How nice to see faces, movements, gestures and symbols I can identify with and have lived with. These are, as Todd writes, "close-up images encoded with our own meaning."

Have you ever had religious solemnity broken or interrupted with a joke and laughter? It's an experience common to many indigenous cultures which reminds people of their humanity. It is a wonderful way of keeping heads out of the clouds and feet on the ground. Victor Masayesva illustrates this important aspect of First Nations cultures through Hopi clowns in his 1988 video *Ritual Clowns*. Masayesva goes on to illustrate a subtle twist in the Native understanding and appreciation of ritual clowns through white missionaries' admonition of the Hopi clowns. The purpose of ritual clowns like that of the Trickster in Native literature is to admonish, instruct and discipline. Having long ago rejected the purpose of the clowns in their own society, the white

man becomes funnier and more foolish that the very clowns they have no use for.

There is a lesson to be learnt from this video and that is *not to be like the white man* in condemning and discrediting something not fully understood. We can apply this analogy to the history of Native relations with Canada. Try it out and you'll understand why Native people have never wanted to assimilate. But for the analogy to truly measure up there's a catch—First Nations people have to learn to love the white man as much as we love our Trickster!

The final presentation in the program, *Navajo Talking Pictures*, is a film which exemplified the theme of the whole program. Filmmaker Arlene Bowman, with good intentions, tried to make a film about her grandmother but found resistance. In struggling to complete the film, she came to realize that she herself is a part of her grandmother's story and must therefore be in the film too. Thus we have a film/story that is not about a Navajo talking picture but is a Navajo talking picture.

To me, Todd's "Decolonization" programme at *Images 90* was not so much "about" decolonization but a presentation of strong words, songs and images that have illustrated the process of decolonization itself. ●



STILL FROM NAVAJO TALKING PICTURES BY ARLENE BOWMAN.

Color Schemes
Le Gout de Mon Espoir
Shaving
Sales Images

by Andrew Munger

Having survived and even thrived since its debut three years ago, the latest installment of Toronto's festival of independent film and video, *Images '90*, presented Toronto audiences with its most dynamic and challenging, not to mention international, program. The mandate was independent work and the voices heard most often (for a change) were from communities most marginalized within mainstream culture. Here are some films that I found particularly engaging and enraging.

Shaving by Vancouver filmmaker Michael Smart examines the adult male's relationship to the limitations of his own body. Only five minutes long, this grainy, ochre-tinted ode to hygiene features a handsome young man shaving. Through optically created ellipses, he appears to be prevented from completing his task. The man is trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of lather and blade. A voice-over ponders the inevitability of this uniquely male ritual, el-

evating the banal to the profound. Through improved methods of shaving a person can achieve heightened levels of awareness and insight, or so the voice on the soundtrack claims.

Shaving as male rite of passage is explored, as is the general difficulty men have relating to their bodies and its imperfections. This theme is unique in non-gay specific films. Macho male mythology is deconstructed through self-deprecating humour; filmmaker Smart doesn't take his gender too seriously. It's actually a funny, experimental film and extremely pleasurable to watch, evoking the languid satisfaction of a successful shave.

Sales Images is a collective work, a colour film by Montréal artists Michel de Gagne, Remy Beausoleil and Michel Gelin. During its brief but exhilarating 14 minutes, *Sales Images* manages to utilize virtually every technique in the abstract film lexicon. Appropriated television images, text (from Magritte) and frames are torn, shredded, pixilated, scratched, written on, layered, burnt out, and optically printed. A collage film, *Sales Images* asks the \$64,000 question about the nature of spectatorship, representation and media fascism. The filmmakers response to these questions is a visceral, pleasurable, scattergun attack. The images themselves are

harmless and even banal—quite contrary to what's implied by the title: *Dirty Pictures*. It's the stunning visual quality, arresting recombinations and frenetic pace that gives *Sales Images* its power: a power that is aural as well as visual. A dissonant, jarring soundtrack layers excerpts from William Burroughs, Charles Bukowski and Jim Carrol, musical cut-up, television soundtracks and other appropriated material. With *Sales Images*, you're never sure where the filmmakers are going, but you're always interested in finding out.

The most impressive video was *Color Schemes* by Shu Lea Cheang. "[O]riginally conceived as a video installation for washing machines," it's organized along the lines of a "washload," complete with "soak" and "rinse" cycles. Political without being dogmatic, rigorous yet accessible, *Color Schemes* presents 12 people relating their unique yet similar personal experiences of racism. The 12 "disciples" (there's a terrific "last supper" scene featuring Swanson's TV dinners) respond to unspoken racial stereotypes. A First Nations woman informs an acquaintance, "No, I don't know where to get peyote or Navajo rugs cheap." An Afro-American man assumes the role of the media stereotyped ghetto Black, shooting pool and stating, "I'm gonna come into your neighbourhood and sell your children drugs." The soliloquies originate from the (uniformly excellent) performers' personal experiences. The voices are unmediated; the her (and his) stories, compelling and authentic.

A minimum of video effects is deployed, one of which is a metaphorical mix of primary colour chromakeyed over the window of a front-load washing machine. However vigorously the machine agitates, the colours remain separate and unique. *Colour Schemes* provides an excellent paradigm of possible oppositional media strategies. Politically sophisticated, formally inventive and

totally accessible, it sets a new standard in progressive videomaking.

The only truly low point at *Images*, for me, was *Le Gout de Mon Espoir* or my re-titling, *White People Have Feelings Too*, a video by Montrealer Alex Roshuk. It chronicles a "summer romance" between a mature man and woman, as told from the woman's point of view. An argument can be made as to whether a male filmmaker can credibly assume the voice of a woman character as Roshuk has done. However, this issue is rendered irrelevant by Roshuk's regressive depiction of the female character, who's depicted as desperate, lonely, in need of a man. The exposition consists of home video-style vignettes of the main character and her male friend rolling in the leaves, chatting in cafés and doing the sorts of things bourgeois white heterosexual couples do (on American sit-coms), while she tries to rationalize and explain how she likes him but doesn't know if he likes her and isn't sure if she should tell him she loves him, but maybe he likes her, but it's all so confusing—and unbelievably irritating. Well, she finds her man but doesn't know how to respond to him, whether to open up, close down, shut up or leave town. Her neuroses are individualized, personalized and disassociated from the marginalized position of women. ●

Andrew Munger is a filmmaker and freelance writer.

Barcelone
Céline Baril

by Alex Roshuk

"Every film is a documentary of its actors."
 —Jean-Marie Straub

On June 10, 1990, Céline Baril's *Barcelone* made its Toronto premiere at *Images 90*. Her 40-minute film is another work by one of the younger Québécoise video and filmmakers, among them Jeanne Crépeau (*Le Film de Justine*, 1989, 16mm), Danielle Roy (*L'Ombre de Nous*, 1988, 16mm), Marie Décary (*Canal Zap Canal*, 1989, video), Lucie Lambert and Bénédicte Deschamps (*L'attrait infini de quelques seconds fragiles*, 1989, video), and Josette Bélanger (*Les hasards heureux de l'escarpolette*, 1989, video).

Barcelone is an experimental film in the tradition of Jean Vigo. The images and pacing of the film are often reminiscent of Vigo's *Apropos de Nice*. There is also another, more contemporary layer of discourse here. The influences at work are no longer distinct and pure as they were in early modernist works. Quotations, dedications and references abound and they all begin to flow together: dada and surrealism, cinema and politics, Brecht and television. Other, more obscure references begin to appear more important as time passes: expatriate Russian structuralists, like Vic-

tor Schlovsky, who lived in Berlin during the '20s and transmitted their influences to Western Europe by way of such men as Piscator and Nabokov; the anarchists of Aragon and the fighter of the Spanish Civil War who have made Barcelona a historically and fascinating environment.

The film is a textual deconstruction as well as a study of the archeology of a contemporary urban landscape. It is sort of documentary film in quotation marks. We watch Baril watching a videotape clip from Vigo's *Zero for Conduct* as the film is constructed in nine segments, each titled after a letter of the city's name—"B" for Building cathedrals, "A" as in up in the Air, "R" for Regard, "C" for Cinema, "E" for España, "L" for Language, "O" for Origin, "N" for Navigators and "E" for España—BARCELONE. However, the use of video is constraining here, being used primarily in the titling sequences and the quotations from Vigo. Do we gain easy access to the past through the television/video monitor? Can we finally begin to say that popular perceptions of history are beginning to change thanks to photography, film video and holography as means of representation?

Baril then takes to a stage set with a postwar American photographer's seamless paper backdrop. Her vignettes are short statements about history, cinema and even Barcelona. In one sequence she wears a pair of glasses (literally—shot glasses) and pours water into them. In another, a map of the world is covered with ice cubes, which she mops up from North America to end the ice age.

Barcelone becomes a search for the old world, the modernist Europeans, dada and surrealism—all here in the '90s in North America. She, like the Spanish navigators who circumnavigated the globe, is circling around the images of history, another time, another place, another sensibility and culture in which she wants participate. Placing



STILL FROM COLOR SCHEMES BY SHU LEA CHEANG.

Photo by Paul Wong.



STILL FROM BARCELONE BY CÉLINE BARIL

Photo by filmmaker.

herself as a performer in the film, Baril brings a first person perspective to all these references which have been constructed into a layering of history, images, places and words, all focused around Barcelona as nexus or centring device. It would seem that this strategy is undertaken to "peel the layers of the onion" or uncover the hidden significance of what might just be an exquisitely photographed travelogue. By her juxtaposition of images, Baril attempts to link architecture with art (and gardening) and politics, and urban space with historical fact (and pillow fights). *Barcelona* recalls not only the cinema of Jean Vigo but also the absurdities of Marcel Duchamp woven into a complex "personal" investigation.

We see men making movies and Baril sitting in the director's chair searching for outtakes strewn over the floor. Baril has placed herself in a world that seems completely dominated by men and master narratives. By her conscious intervention, she brings back the presence of woman, a connecting force. To quote another Québécoise filmmaker, Hélène Klodawski, "to integrate the personal point of view with that of the political... is particularly feminist. The merging of these two frames of reference remains an ongoing challenge."¹

Dedicated to Spanish architect Aldo Gaudí (who died in a streetcar accident in the early part of the 20th century), *Barcelona* is a film about pleasure: the pleasure of the image, of discovering the unknown street, the unknown town, knowing that around every corner one might stumble upon Christopher Columbus, Jean Vigo or even Céline Baril. In this masterful first film, Baril is at once an actor, filmmaker, visual commentator and historian, reminding us of the significance of images, their references to the past and the personal meaning and pleasure she finds in manipulating images. ●

Alex Roshuk is a Montreal writer and videomaker.

ENDNOTE

1. *Cinéma au féminin*. (Montréal: Cinéma Libre, 1990), p. 60.

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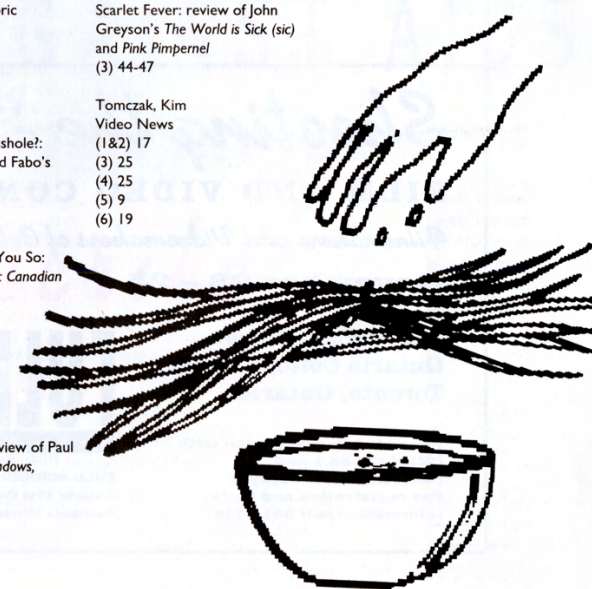
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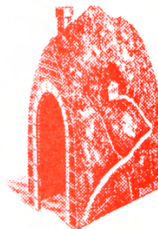
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