

Centerfold

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No. 7 & 8 1977

“IT NEVER HAPPENS—



Staff Writer:
Marcella Bienvenue



- Q. What were you doing in there?
A. I wasn't doing anything really, we just set these things up.
Q. How long were you in there?
A. The earlier part of one evening.
Q. What were you studying?
A. Other people's fragmented philosophies.
Q. It looked more like the separating of phenomena.
A. You mean the light, the shadows and the reflections?
Q. I thought more of the melting wax burning your fingers.
Didn't you start from an initial proposition?
A. My initial thought was burning the candle at both ends followed by and connected to burning the midnight oil. It seems as an afterthought that when you accentuate the positive you illuminate the negative.
Q. It looks both like a laboratory and a studio, was it more of one and less of the other?
A. It may look like a laboratory in a studio but its more like a studio in a laboratory.
Q. Why was the TV image only a third of the screen?
A. As far as I am concerned its all there in one form or another.
Q. What's 'all there'?
A. Really just instruments of thought but always understanding that research leads to shots-in-the-dark. Consider this: What came first the candle or the eyechart?

INSIDE: p2 **When History forgets - they will be remembered.**
p5 **Standing in line at the Exchange**



Receiving the 1976 Window-on-the-Whirled Award at Calgary's International Airport. L: to R: A.A. Bronson, Felix Part and Jorge Zontal

Backstage at The Pavillion with General Idea

REHEARSING THE RECEPTIONIST

C. Robertson

Centerfold 7&8

ARCHITECTS ON THE RUN

Felix Partz: The first section which is the **General Idea** is basically this was to find what were our collection of images for that section which was the inspirational stage, supposedly: 'the artist being inspired'. All the imagery in that section is architectural imagery . . .

A.A. Bronson: the architect at the draughting board . . .

Felix: And we've done all of that architect's drag — the posing but we've never called ourselves architects, we've played up the image but never the word. It might be a personal reason for Jorge and A.A. who have architectural backgrounds.

Jorge Zontal: I am an artiste, I am not an architect, architects are so boring.

A.A.: I have had certain misgivings about being called an architect. Architects who are artists are never taken seriously.

Centerfold: Sometimes I get the feeling that the Pavillion (Miss General Idea 1984 Pavillion) is a development of earlier architectonics, but somewhat exploded (suprematist). Earlier the facet of the culture was purely visual that they reflected whereas your Pavillion is involved in cultural assets that were not accepted in earlier models. Do you see 1984 as a pair of handcuffs, as it gets closer?

A.A.: I don't think so in those terms, we are interested in all sorts of control mechanisms in contemporary architecture, etc. etc. but I don't think our view of 1984 is specifically Orwellian. We don't project the future as being a totalitarian state. I think we are more interested in 1984 as being a way the past had of looking at the future. We've used a lot of images of the past looking at the future, as constituting our present reference point — some of which are already the past, the date they originally projected has already gone.

Felix: And also a lot of the images show a sensibility of looking at the future that doesn't exist anymore: the utopian projection. The ecological scene totally re-evaluated that.

Centerfold: Has the definition of Miss General Idea changed as a symbol?

A.A.: I guess it has but not in any way that is easy to pin down.

Jorge: I think Miss General Idea is something one seldom thinks about but just happens. Like those cards we have, there are five title cards — and the title card for Miss General Idea is imageless, its left blank. Whilst General Idea has an image, and the Pavillion has an image and the Frame of Reference has an image.

A.A.: I think the only way our idea of Miss General Idea changes is that it develops as we do more work on it, but I wouldn't say it really changes.

Felix: I think it just fills in. Its very much defining Miss General Idea in negative, filling up all the negative space around it.

Jorge: Its easier to refer to the Spirit of Miss General Idea, one can be more schematic.

Centerfold: Are you becoming more involved in the Search for the Spirit?

Felix: Yes. The Search for the Spirit of Miss General Idea is the search for the motivation, the aspirations, the illumination, the allegorical research.

A.A.: Its part of any cultural activity, just thinking of ads with their illumination and inspiration . . . moments of inspiration . . .

Jorge: (inhales) 'It did clog my sink'.

Felix: Its also an examination of that whole mystique—the mystique of the possible illumination, its a similar state to the flawless work of art. Receiving the illuminating idea, very much a part of the myth of the artist.

Centerfold: Last time we talked you mentioned there was a lot of unpublished writing completed . . .

A.A.: There are all those silk-screened showcards which I don't think you've seen, about two hundred, each of which has an image and a text on them. That's a large body of writing almost all of it is unpublished.

Centerfold: Are there plans soon to put all of that between two covers, I heard that Volume 4 of FILE is to be General Idea's book?

Felix: You must be talking about the General Idea issue of FILE. Well . . .

A.A.: I don't think it will be complete, it will be a choice of material but, yes, we do plan to do quite a comprehensive thing.

Jorge: The last show 'Artists and Models' has quite a bit of text, probably different from anything else — the HE/SHE piece at Carmen LaManna.

Search for the Spirit of Miss General Idea

1. Exhibition: 22nd February - March 30th, 1977

GENERAL IDEA'S The 1971 Miss General Idea Pageant - A History

You are invited to attend the Private View at 8.30 pm, Friday 25th February at the Parachute Center for Cultural Affairs, 318 - 10th St. N.W., Calgary, Alta., 283-6536/264-8022

Refreshments will be served. The artists will be present.

2. Public Lecture: February 22nd, 8.30 pm

Alberta College of Art Lecture Theatre

GENERAL IDEA: Report on the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion

A Festival Calgary 1977/Parachute Center project with assistance of S.A.I.T., Culture Board and Comsound Electronic Ltd.

PRINTED MATTER

GENERAL IDEA
241 YONGE ST.
TORONTO
ONT.

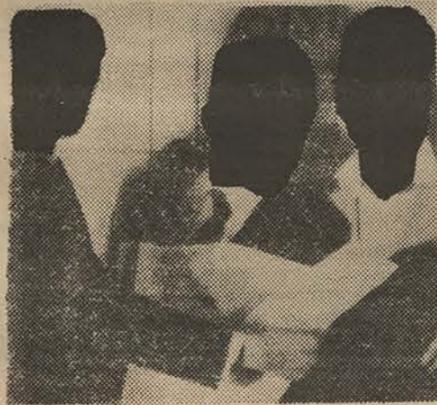


That's the General Idea

And it came to pass the General Idea came to Calgary, came to Alberta and came to the ski slopes of Lake Louise and the escalator slopes of Oxford Square.

They came with their enigmatic venetian blind gowns, paradox without ambiguity, neo-classical, graceful and structured. They walked among us, presented us with the gentle spirit of Miss General Idea, led us to the vision of the Miss General Idea Pavilion 1984 and breathed upon us the freshness of originality, poise and equilibrium.

Assisted by Festival Calgary the Parahute Centre For Cultural Affairs hosted the General Idea lavishly last week.



GENERAL IDEA
Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal, A.A. Bronson

parents in Fredericton and 1925 he was a student at the Ecole des

A.A. Bronson, Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal who have constituted the General Idea for over a decade, flew into Calgary last week (blinders on). They were a refreshing change to the ordinary swing of things here, acting as sounding boards for the media, elaborating on the language and movement of the successful artist and demonstrating through historical dialectic and reasonable exaggeration the phenomenon of Miss General Idea, the leit motif of their production and ambition.

Memorable scenes of their visit are many. Lake Louise ski instructors downhill, under the watchful lens of General Idea cameras, in full attire which included the now infamous venetian blind gown. Models similarly attired attempting to go down the up escalator at Oxford Square made for some momentary drama and breathholding.

Somehow, Calgary will never be the same after their visit. We have experienced the past, present and future almost simultaneously with the advent of General Idea. For those of us with open minds and curiosity it was constant process of catching up, fitting together the final pieces of the Hoarding jigsaw. As they would say in reference to their construction project for the Miss General Idea Pavilion 1984, "the missing pieces in the Hoarding have been included so the general public can add their personal vision of the project while they see through what we're trying to do."

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Centerfold: Earlier you incorporated Levi-Strauss in your writings, the de-mystification interest now seems to have regained a high profile amongst artists, do you think the de-mystification banner is a red herring?

A.A.: Our interest was always in myths and how they work, we were never really interested in de-mystifying them — we never thought of them as falsehoods. It seems that most people when they use the word myth they mean it as almost synonymous with a lie on a large scale, a fabrication.

Centerfold: You were, I assume, not too bothered by the mystery that you were creating and its effect on other people. Does it really matter whether or not new mysteries are created?

A.A.: I think its in fact the opposite — we need to create new myths. The only reason that people are getting into the de-mystification trip is that so many of the myths are just not that useful anymore. I think that de-mystification as a purpose in itself (as something that should be done to everything) I think is a red herring. The way you define yourself as a radical is by deciding to de-mystify — I think we approach it from the other end. We're interested in how myths are made to a certain extent that means de-mystifying them in the sense that we have to pull apart existing myths to see how they work but it also means that we create myths. The process of myth-making is a natural occurrence, its just a particular relationship that gets set-up between different objects and meanings and words. And because its just a relationship its always coming into existence, I don't think its something you can get away from or even should.

Centerfold: So you believe that all those doctors of de-mystification are in fact creating a tautology?

A.A.: Sure . . .

Jorge: The opposite word to de-mystification supposedly was 'camp' in the sixties. So what you dealt with was done by acting it out madly, and supposedly you created a neutralising effect, you were above it and so could handle it. But it immediately set-up a whole new chain reaction.

Felix: There was an interesting occurrence in the Contextual Art symposium where a lot of the audience were attacking Joseph Kosuth for being an art superstar, but the only status that Kosuth had as a superstar was the status that those people gave him.

Centerfold: So the artist-socialist who want to be socialist in a specific sense can't do so because they're not conversant or have faith in the mass culture . . .

Felix: And also their whole frame or reference, though they would deny it is the art-scene: they're aiming to operate outside of the art scene where they lack oxygen. One example of their theory-in-practice which was given at that Contextual Art conference was this protest against the American Art of 200 Years, whatever which was a show at the Whitney. This was their move-into-the-outside world as far as righting some wrong in society. Its merely a matter of stepping back and saying what is this great concern that art history is written correctly? It had relevance for again, a very elite core of people. For an immediate activist involvement it seemed pretty thin or abstracted, it was very much a new art movement, instead of pushing paint around they were pushing around ideology.

A.A.: Strictly for the art scene.

Centerfold: Is there still a problem with being over-articulate, of cutting out the middle man — the historian?

Felix: Its difficult, we had a recent experience that was unsatisfactory but on the other hand there's the desire to have people provide that overview. I'm flexible; articles about us are often articles about the person whose writing about us, the way in which they react and interpret meanings: Ambiguity without Contradiction allows that.

A.A.: Also we come across with our own analysis and our own synthesis of the material so strongly that its hard for somebody to develop their own analysis of it, in the process of being interviewed we usually provide that; in the work itself there is so much of that material.

Centerfold: The wiring is the foundation for the Pavillion and built within the language are all the safety devices for fire and theft prevention.

A.A.: I don't think its a safety device but more a characteristic of our way of thinking in terms of ambiguity levels and multiple meanings.

Felix: 'LIGHT-ON' is contradiction of the context.

A.A.: Is LIGHT-ON a way of searching for the site or a way of drawing on the landscape? Two aspects of the same thing.

A.A.: In terms of feedback we leave it to them to decide whether we are being egotistical or something else.

Jorge: Or showing-off our sources, or showing off showing.

Centerfold: When two trophies clash — the sound of one trophy clashing?



V.B. gowns on location at Lake Louise Ski Resort

A.A.: I'd like to back-track a bit in that whole thing about the architect and his work and the public being much more of a viable triangle than the artist and his work and the public. Steve Willats has tried to overcome that and I think basically that he's failed — and the same with Daniel Burin in the sense that its remained on the level of theory. They both seemed to have ignored the obvious solution which is popular format like the rock n' roll group or any other number of public formats.

Centerfold: Are you suggesting a definition of public space rather than that which people see as a traditional architectural space when you mention the rock band?

A.A.: What do you mean by space? Physical space?

Centerfold: I thought you were referring to the Pavillion with no physical permanent location, no bricks?

LOTS OF TV

A.A.: Right. I feel the same with people like Art Language in that all the problems they seem to bring up they, at the same time, are acting out. The more they talk the more it seems impossible for them to communicate with a larger audience.

Centerfold: So are you suggesting that if you wish to act out problems you should at the same time be constructing the solutions, the analysis is the practice-theory module.

Felix: Yes, we are going towards something which may not be less introspective or less of an inversion but more visibility. Like that whole inversion trip is very foundational in a way — I think we're ready to build.

Centerfold: I noticed that there was an invitation to participate in the 1984 Pavillion, what was the response?

Felix: We did get some, and some were interesting — in fact some of them have been developed. The slide show incorporates worked on submissions. There have been collaborations in the form of drawings and blueprints. A number from the Western Front. There's also our involvement in Art Metropole — the whole archive thing, that's quite a part of the Pavillion to us; the archive and the network it establishes.

Centerfold: Could the finished Pavillion be contained within say a film, a videotape and a book.

Felix: No, its going to take lots of big galleries and lots of private collections (laughter) as well.

Jorge: Lots of network tv shows.

A.A.: In its finality, I think its really a diverse thing it won't be defined in a single event or form. It definitely will be decentralised. Parts of it will be physical and parts of it won't. The archive as the library in the Pavillion will be quite real.

Felix: We have had many discussions about building pieces that have multi-uses, like the Hoarding piece to operate on many different levels rather than being just constructions for video sets or gallery installations. The new loft we have in Toronto gives us the opportunity to surround ourselves with many of our found props and constructions, the space affords mobility and rearrangement and will suggest fresh inspirations. The Pavillion doesn't restrict us, for instance FILE is totally accommodated into the Pavillion structure. I see FILE very much as the Search for the Audience segment of it and it doesn't necessarily have to be our work to establish an audience.

Centerfold: How many rehearsals do you think you can take?

A.A. Bronson: We're planning on one a year . . .

Jorge: . . . It only seems to happen when all ideal circumstances are possible.

Centerfold: How can the rehearsals extend? Will it include so far untouched aspects?

Jorge: The audience is always a big factor that's why they're public rehearsals — we haven't got into any non-public rehearsals which is interesting — we haven't for instance rehearsed how to walk around the corner of the building, or how to get inside.

Felix: I think that ties in with what I said about having our new space and all those props around like the interview we did with Carmen LaManna was very much exploring a different type of space of the Pavillion than the Performance/Audience space and I think we will be getting more into the studio type of responses, little scenerios — corridor situations — the lobby. People sipping cocktails in the Lux-On, listening to Musak and waiting for the second half to begin.

Jorge: Rehearsing the receptionist crossing her legs to the right.

A.A.: At a right-angle.

Centerfold: What is the immediate plan?

Jorge: Its very much the Search for the Audience . . .

A.A.: The details of which are a half-hour TV show for Channel 19 in Toronto, which has a potential-theoretical audience of six million, probably about one hundred thousand. Its a chance for us to try putting together our material in such a way that it can be read on more than one level. So that it can hold the interest of an audience that doesn't know anything about us.

Centerfold: So the Pavillion's development to date is at this very moment being back-tracked for clarification?

A.A.: Yes, for the last while most of what we have been doing has been setting it all in order and trying to make the information more accessible. Though we do have many new projects waiting.

Jorge: I think the climax of this activity will be the TV pilot and then we will return to the draughting boards.

Felix: The backtracking thing is very much like clearing the site. Establishing ourselves in the media, using the media as another network its very much the Site of the Pavillion as well as other networks. There have been several pieces talking about the media, like again, the Hoarding, erecting it in the media more often than we do in Real Estate.

Centerfold: So after your upcoming expose's you expect the audience to anticipate and look for further developments of the Pavillion?

A.A. Bronson: Yes there are signs of that already — the show which is at Optica is in fact a complete survey of all the different projects through the cards we've already mentioned which are in fact index cards which run through all the basic images and ideas. The show is educational in the sense that it demonstrates as much our approach as our projects.

Centerfold: Do you think as the work towards the Pavillion expands you will have to engage a number of contractors.

LET'S NOT CALL THEM...

Felix: Mmm, hmm. We have our whole new line of consumer products, our foray into the wonderful world of consumerism. Lots of popular priced, let's not call them multiples, let's not call them knick-knacks.

A.A.: Accessories, I think is the term . . .

Felix: Accessories for Modern Living! We have flip-flop products that are found and work their way back to the drawing board rather than beginning there — the palettes are like that, so the found and manufactured are in the end indistinguishable.

Centerfold: If someone came up with the money say in 1981 to build the Pavillion, would you?

Jorge: Mmm, hmm.

A.A.: I don't know . . .

Felix: Ah, what do you mean to carry out our every last fantasy?

Centerfold: Its not so much a dream, I mean projects of this nature have been financed before, just look at the Olympics.

A.A.: I think we'd do it but I think we'd see it as being a piece of the Pavillion. (again laughter)

Felix: I could see attempting the construction of say the Performance area — the actual auditorium and the library.

Jorge: I think we would be more interested if someone gave us money not to build the Pavillion, to build something else so we could do the Spirit of the Pavillion — I'd love to build something for the wife of a sheik so we could do it as the Spirit, or the hangar of a Texan millionaire.

Centerfold: Is there anything that you could not see yourselves doing in the future?

Jorge: "Falling in Love Again."

Centerfold: To get back to your concerns of understanding, isn't the mirror of media as reflected by General Idea a common language?

A.A. Bronson: People definitely respond — you can see that with V.B. costumes, some sort of an immediate response to those costumes. People do want to know what they are and they want explanations but when it comes right down to it they don't demand them.

JAK February 11 - 19th

"Jets @ Centre of Gravity" consisted of a series of polaroids (airport shots) the Da Vinci man-in-circle superimposed with an aeroplane plan, an effective montage of a model aeroplane which had 'crashed' into nude buttocks, one of those newspaper/turpentine rubbings; In the middle of the floor was a large piece consisting of airport maps and model planes suspended on cotton describing a landing pattern. Making art is not difficult, finding a theme takes only seconds - but observing where to land is a task that necessitates both thought and care.

DAVID BUCHAN: GREEK/CHIC February 9th

David Buchan's illustrated lecture was a refreshing insight and sometimes paranoia into whether 'we' dress well when not meaning to, double-negating fashion until the code is certainly layered enough for art. The sports wear, bag wear even the marxist wear are all parodied and at the same time hallowed. The race to keep ahead in clothes takes an ironic twist with the final emergence into Geekdom, where most of us (unknowingly) live. All of those people who are 'not into fashion' are in ratio at the top of selectability in terms of dress. Lets hope it doesn't catch on. (see upcoming issue of FILE).

ELIZABETH CHITTY and TERRY McGLADE February 18th

Being the first dance performance at Parachute it was significant that Elizabeth Chitty's 'Lap' was congruous with our upstairs neighbour's Judo club. Performed, perhaps in a smaller space than usual, the accompanying video worked well in terms of comparative viewing. The biographic narrative was important if only for some to place the dance in a recognisable perspective.

Terry McGlade's video pieces 'Slow Dazzle' and 'Alone' were both well-executed! Slow Dazzle still had too much go-go dancing in it for my aesthetic but was compensated by shots of the dancer moving backwards towards the camera. 'Alone' with video of Margaret Dragu and narration by several women including Peggy Gale, Margaret Dragu and Elizabeth Chitty was an interesting document in color, almost enough to change one's mind about the state-of-the-art of color video.

EUGENE CHADBOURNE, RICHARD BAKER AND RANDY HUTTON February 27th

Following Eugene Chadbourne's Solo Concert on February 11th and 12th came the acoustic guitar trio. Whilst not contradicting the review of Chadbourne's solo album (in Centerfold 5&6) there are some direct criticism of this concert. Of the trio pieces penned by Chadbourne, the execution was revealing: Chadbourne was more interested in visually showing the audience, by facial gestures, how difficult each of the manoeuvres was whilst 'Duck' Baker would coast on all of the improvisational sections that were written 'to be like' Chadbourne. Hutton was the only one who exhibited any real concentration that was actually required. The trio played some beautiful almost Baroque pieces, a very syrupy - almost banal Steve Lacy work/interpretation of, and three solo pieces. 'Duck' Baker playing himself was quite different and very engaging (known for his ragtime playing); Hutton's piece was well within his capability and Chadbourne again stretched the audience into a 'false' avant-garde. Whether the audiences here were being too familiar and Chadbourne had begun playing to them I don't know, but his showman antics seem to contradict and definitely distract from, what so far has been, a very interesting development. Having returned to the States I hope his 'dues' don't end up as a battle between popularity and perception.



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LA MAMELLE ART CONTEMPORARY Vol 2 Number 2/3

Edited by Carl Loeffler, La Mamelle has established itself as an important west-coast magazine. Following the Performance and the Video Issues this issue follows-up some of the earlier features: A Report on Terry Fox's: 552 steps through 11 pairs of strings, Sam Samore and Barry Bloom's: The Athlete as Artist to name two. There's an article/analysis of Contextual Art by Ken Friedman, a piece by Chris Burden and a good section of magazine and book reviews. Art Contemporary (the La Mamelle has been dropped from the cover) still has the open contributing-editor policy that it started with which keeps it both healthy and alive.
\$2 La Mamelle P.O. Box 3123, San Francisco, Calif. 94119.

B.C. MONTHLY Vol III, No. 3

Edited by Gerry Gilbert No. 3 like No. 2 is a very full magazine of prose, poetry, fiction, scores, documents and more. This issue has work by Ray Johnson, Opal Nations, Gerry Gilbert, Zonko, the Hummers 'Songs from The Patty Rehears Story' to mention five of the twenty-nine contributors. Each issue is a handy bed-side book (and more).

(Co-edited by Bob Rose) \$3 B.C. Monthly, Box 48884 Vancouver V7X 1A8.

IMAGES AND INFORMATION Volume Two, No. 2

Edited by Don Mabie. A correspondence art anthology mainly by Chuck Stake. Very open to contributions. Transcription of 'Viewpoints on Aesthetics' - a panel discussion organised by Art Catalyst.

\$2 Images and Information, 4236 Worcester Drive SW, Calgary, Alta T2P 2B3.

QUEEN STREE T MAGAZINE Issue 10-13

Edited by Angelo Sgabellone. After a delay of twelve months Queen Stree T is back. There are some blatant Torontonion omissions: no mention of Art Metropole and CEAC, and A Space - just to mention three.

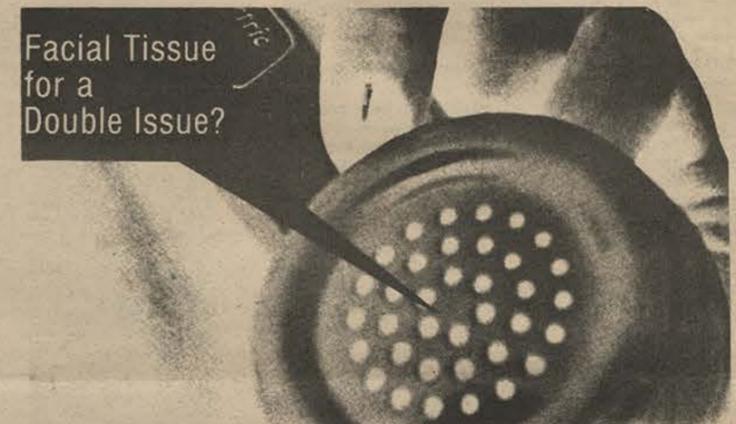
Articles on Murray Favro, Carmen Lamanna, Agnes Denes, Joseph Beuys, Some Canadian Women Artists and Beth Learn. Good information and book section - a very full one hundred pages. If there can be some editorial/publisher discretion or distinctions (Beth Learn does not have to be on the cover of an international multimedia journal of the arts) Queen Stree T could easily pick-up Arts-Canada's bored readership.

\$6 Queen Stree T Magazine, Box 251, Station B, Toronto M5T 2W1

PARACHUTE No. 5

Edited by Chantal Pontbriand and France Morin. (English and French) Features include "Art as Contextual Art" by Jan Swidzinski; Notes and Commentaries" by Herve Fischer; "Alison Knowles and Dick Higgins" by Rene Payant and "Miljenko Horvat" by Raymond Gervais. The information section is very Flash Art like, very much the Montreal/Italia dream - more impressive for its place names than its content. The books and music section is superior to any other Canadian art publication. Editorial choice in Parachute always surprises me, it wants to be (and is) an international magazine but does not always have an in-depth understanding. There are many Canadian writers it could and should employ. Allowing for these not abnormal quirks Parachute is, at present, the best Canadian art magazine available.

\$2.50 Parachute C.P. 730-Succursale N. Montreal, Quebec H2X 3N4



VOICESPONDENCE
audio cassette magazine

Issue 2 - Fall 1976, 90 min. Stereo
THE TELEPHONE ISSUE:
A.A. Bronson/Ray Johnson (From Club Canasta)
Robert Filliou/Members of the Eternal Network (1973)
COUM/ 'Stained by Dead Horses' (1975)
Michael Morris/IMAGE BANK (1976)
Vic d'Or (& ensemble)/FONESCALL (1976)

Issue 3 - Winter 1976, 60 min.
PLUG - An Acid Novel (1968)
Emmett Williams and Dick Higgins

Available from:
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OTHER BOOKS: Amsterdam
ZONA: Florence
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Roscoe Mitchell Solo Concert



SUNDAY VIDEO SUNDAY

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« THIS WILL ONLY TAKE A MOMENT, JUST A FEW ROUTINE QUESTIONS »

Are you being framed ?

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL WOODROW

Clive Robertson



Paul Woodrow's BUREAU OF IMAGINARY EXCHANGE was held at the Alberta College of Art. Co-founder of W.O.R.K.S., his last performance was W.O.R.K.S. Plays Cricket at the Agnes Etherington Centre, Kingston, 1976.

C.: What factors led up to your formation of the Bureau of Imaginary Exchange?

P.: The reason it came about is perhaps due to a number of personal crises. One thing that has concerned me for sometime is my idea of art in relation to myself, that is, the whole notion of me as an individual. I have done a lot of things which are so-called individual, the artist as an "individual," the stance that the artist sees himself against society. This notion has always intrigued me and previously I would consider that the artist opposing society was the artist's role. I believed that what society was trying to do to me was to make me a conformist, wanting me to believe in convention and tradition. So what I had been doing, in one sense, might be seen as counter-society but in another sense — the way I saw it — it was very subjective.

C.: Do you mean that you saw the role of the artist as being corrective, without having too clear an idea of what the correction was, but corrective of something you disagreed with?

P.: You might say there was a striving towards something that was not too clearly defined. In general I was interested in a more socialist type of society, one in which the individual becomes more responsible for the total creation of the society.

There has always been a certain tension in my life about being an artist and as I work as an art educator it's almost like a schizophrenic type of existence where, in one sense you're trying to be an individual and then as an art educator you're training people to participate in the society. So the 'role' of individual is or has been one problem. I have also had a lot of experience in working in groups, and that has produced the normal occurrence of certain domination by members of groups which has included domination by others and myself. My idea of a group I suppose was like my idea of a society in which it was like a meeting of certain types of activity where there would be acceptance of an organic nature.

C.: So the group you would see as a model of the type of society you are working towards?

P.: Yes. Another factor leading to my present work is that for a long time I have been interested in mysticism, the idea of the mysterious and mysterious powers and especially a kind of art that transcends its particular creation-time, for example I believed that art was capable of transcending a particular period of time, that good art would last forever, that art was dealing with absolute time. This summer was perhaps my highpoint in that specific interest in Mysticism — I suppose I always believed that if things weren't going well you could always escape to this imaginary reality which was more engaging than the one we have to face every day, we can begin to feel part of that notion, without being responsible for what we do within a social reality.

C.: Don't you think that our everyday reality has all the potential mystery and confusion as the ideal transcendent mystery that some forms of so-called "absolute" art have. Don't you think that archetypal or absolute forms are easier to deal with?

P.: I don't, things are such a mystery. I think the reasons for certain kinds of occurrences are based on the social structure that we live in, the reason for certain forms of art or certain forms of behaviour, or certain designs of cities, attitudes etc. are not all mysterious, they have a definite association to the dominant ideology of society. If we always assume that art is always an idealistic activity we cover up the real reasons for its existence, which is based on definite ideological reasons.

C.: But isn't everyday mystery the result of ideological compromise which is necessary to live within at least a democratic society. Our behavioural reasons for making the compromise is the nucleus of the mystery?

P.: The reason we use the term 'compromise' is based on the view that we are powerless to do anything, individually we are powerless. If we believe in Idealism then we believe in individuality, we are conditioned to think as individuals we are powerless and have to choose our personal forms of escape — art being one of them, and we can live in this subjective reality. It ties in with other idealist attitudes for instance that society is prescribed, that human nature is prescribed, that the structures around us are also prescribed and unchangeable.

C.: So is it outlining an ideology that is workable rather than compromising and ideology which is unworkable?

P.: You could put it like that, one of the problems is that people talk about change and when we look at art, the reason for the existence of art is the corrective function you mentioned — which is normally/historically seen as beautifying that which is ugly. We think that we are capable of creating new form which is in opposition to the society we live in; if we are working to a prescribed form — just in the same way that we accept the prescribed form that society has created, then I don't think that we are really dealing with the problem. If we ask ourselves what is constant in the world that we live, there are very few things that are constant — if there is one thing that is constant that must be "change," therefore if we do create a form it cannot be prescribed or static — it has to be a form that is continually changing. In essence this means that we are creating this changing form and in fact there is no form that we can actually create

that is a complete form in opposition to the society that we live in. So we can only carry on creating this opposition which might not have a specific form but it will work in such a way that it is very immediate in terms of time. If we think of it in terms of art it can't be style, or it cannot be a movement as such, because society is always changing therefore we always have to change; so these are like strategies of immediacy so that we may deal with certain kinds of things. There are certain keys to what my present work is about and one of them would be unravelling the so-called mystery of society. We have to begin to realise that some of these things that are supposedly eternal or absolute or universal are, in fact, not . . .

C.: Is it possible for an individual or a small group of individuals to keep on top of structuring that attitude whilst its target is constantly changing. It seems to be that change is accelerating so that to keep informationally abreast of it let alone in front of it is a questionable reality?

P.: The speed of change is based on speed-as-appearance, so when you slow down the appearance you will still have similar things going on. With speed of change it makes it more difficult to deal with de-mystification of the society that we live in, but I maintain that it doesn't make any difference how fast the change is taking place, that underneath the speed is basically the same kind of structure.

C.: Don't you think that society would place artists as a sub-group at the bottom of a consultative list on anything that did not deal with aesthetics?

P.: I agree, I don't think anyone in their right mind would ever go to an artist, or would think that an artist can ever solve any kind of problems because of the traditional notions they have about art as an idealistic activity: full of mystery, full of inspiration, full of mad genius and those kinds of things. Perhaps people see the artist as some kind of lunatic fringe of the Chamber of Commerce.

C.: If that's the case don't you first have to deal with that attitude rather than collecting the type of information you have been engaged with recently?

P.: Of course we have to de-mystify what the artist's role is within society and replace the lunatic image with one of insight into the problems that society is attempting to deal with. You see what I was drawing attention to earlier is the problem of the individual. Because most people see themselves as individuals they see society as made of these separate entities, what they don't see is that society is a collective. So mentally it goes: I am an individual and I have problems and my problems are different from your problems — I'm not going to tell you about my syndrome, and perhaps the artist is seen in the same way as a person who has specialized problems which are not the same problems as every day people. For instance artists are called creative people whereas the majority of people aren't called creative.

C.: But in the last five years don't you think that artists as a group have more than committed to tape, printed form, their personal one-to-one problems with themselves and their interface with society?

P.: If this is the case one would assume that the general public would have a different view of the artist but for example in the city in which we live I would say that this is not the case, I think that most people's notion of the artist in Calgary is again that art is an idealist activity, and that the artist is a 'visionary' or a person who can interpret reality through some form of special powers.

C.: What is your re-definition of the role?

P.: Firstly of all we have to do what you just suggested was ongoing that is we have to subject ourselves to some kind of scrutiny in terms of questions like, What is the artist in fact? What is he? What type of person is she? What kind of activity do they do? Does their activity relate to the society in general? He has ways of preceding certain processes that he uses. She uses certain contexts. She uses certain kinds of language. How do those things really function in terms of society, does it make things clear or does it make things into a mystery. All these things are very general but perhaps the artist is still very much the mystery-priest, perhaps it is an esoteric or an elitist group of people.

C.: If I understand your change of function are you saying that the artist is changing his/her role but remains a mystery because unlike other sub-groups which would include persons of supposed authority (of many different disciplines) that the artist as such is never called upon to explain him/herself in that way?

P.: I think perhaps, the other sub-groups aren't asked to explain themselves either. I mean whoever asked us? One thing that connects people across disciplines is the idea of perception, but even perception itself is ideological. We often think that we have a choice of how we want to perceive something but I think that we don't have that choice and our perception is formulated by the dominant ideology of the society in which we live. The artist is furthermore more outside of society than perhaps any other sub-group apart from perhaps the mad scientist. Some people talk about art being a necessity but who is it a necessity for?

C.: On what you have said so far, what are the chances of you being able to illuminate that change of function in something like the BUREAU OF IMAGINARY EXCHANGE? If what you have said is true, the person coming into that gallery installation, will they change their attitude, and hinged upon that, will they remain open to what it is that you present or engage them in?

P.: The kinds of activity I am carrying out within the Bureau of Imaginary Exchange does not function in the same way that art functions. First of all it involves a dialog with the person who is doing it. Secondly it involves certain types of questions which do not normally happen in terms of art activity. What I have attempted to do which is open to questions of success is that I have tried to explain what my activity is about whereas within the normal process of art we cannot explain in words what we are supposed to be doing because we would have to be poets.

C.: But surely it's almost twenty years of participatory art which is not the same traditional form that you are comparing your present activity to. Don't you think that distinction that you are making with your participatory art and past participatory art forms is superficial and really it's a continuation . . .

P.: Well if you look at groups like Fluxus for example, or others that made happenings — it occurs to me that what those things really involved was that instead of the artist making the mystery, it involved a group of people making the mystery. I mean there was no explanation in a sense. Certainly people did get things out of it but I think one thing they didn't get out of it was to understand its function in relation to society and its function in relation to ideology. They took part in these very interesting experiences, I would venture to guess that it was never pointed out to the participants, that their activity was as creative as the people who were authoring the idea for the activity.

C.: But don't you think that the joint creativity was published and stated ad nauseum, even if the artist's attitude denied it when it finally came to the crunch?

P.: Perhaps I would say that the participants might have realised that they could also create mystery very easily. I don't think it was placed in the terms that those people could create themselves and society.

C.: So are you saying that from our present vantage point you could say that what those artists were primarily involved in was showing others the variety and infinite means of structuring play?

P.: I think that would be a good explanation. Again one of the reasons why an idealist kind of art makes mystery is that it is associated with things like play and escape and illusion. For example in my exhibition I have asked people (and here I should mention that I have limited myself to an area I am specifically interested in that being the area of values) what do we value? When you are asking that question supposedly you are asking something that is very, very subjective. But what I have done is displayed all these questionnaires, and the reason I have displayed them is not to really show perhaps the individual differences between the responses but I am displaying what I would call collective information that we all have. When I was working in art before you might say that I was working for myself, the work that I am doing now is not particularly for myself, it's perhaps more the notion of making public first of all this collective information and secondly to begin to point out that people can become creatively involved in forming a new kind of society.

C.: Perhaps now would be a good time for you to describe the similarities and differences between the Bureau of Imaginary Research and Herve Fischer's Utopic Identity Office.

P.: Firstly I should point out that my work is based upon the work of Herve Fischer, in old terms that would raise eyebrows of unoriginality — there are others like Steve Willats who also are working with similar motivations. My work does bear a strong resemblance to Herve Fischer because I am very interested in his approach. I should immediately say that I don't think that I have the kind of understanding that Herve Fischer has of the total horizon of this form of work, but hopefully I am gaining practical experience. If we want to compare the Bureau of Imaginary Exchange with the Utopic Identity Office I think first of all Herve Fischer's Office deals with the notion of individuality. Fischer works with the idea that there is not perhaps something that we would call ourselves, the only thing that I think is ourselves is my name and my body, I don't know whether Herve Fischer would agree . . . when I consider that it explains the reason for Body art which is about that realisation, that the only thing we do have that is ourselves is our body, the physical space that we occupy. Fischer asks people who they would like to be, on the top of his questionnaire one of the stamps he uses is Identity-Fiction. If people pick-up on what this means it is that their idea of identity is really fictitious — that identity itself as Individualism is a fiction. One of the most common answers would be: I would like to be myself.

C.: Do you think it's a coincidence that many N. American artists have for quite some time lived with multiple identities?

P.: I don't think it's a coincidence but further evidence that all of us, not only artists, but everybody is thinking of that kind of identity question. We cannot use the term 'I' meaning one clear person. 'I' am a teacher, father, husband etc. in my everyday life and I think that people now understand that there is not one constant 'I' for any one person. If we look inside ourselves we find one of two things. In the Eastern version there is a void, nothing, in the Western version — which is introspection there is everything else. It's Fischer's idea that identity is on the surface and that we operate between surfaces.

C.: Shouldn't there be basic differences between your specific methodologies and Herve Fischer's methodologies because you are dealing with two quite different cultures, if not societies, one is European-French and the other N. American.

P.: I would say that there is something common to those cultures and that is that we both live under similar dominant ideologies. Perhaps N. America is the epitome of Capitalism whereas France is Capitalist with Socialist/Marxist tendencies. But the same kinds of notions exist in both cultures. Perhaps we would never have anyone like Beuys for example . . .

C.: That's what I mean, within Fischer's and your very basic questioning, don't you think that the answers would be colored by cultural background. Furthermore if you wish to deal with specifics don't you have to take into consideration those perhaps small but measurable differences? One of the strongest criticisms of any sociological research is that it is very difficult to get specific results and a generalised framework denies the possibility for functional data.

P.: Why is that?

C.: My positive attitude towards sociological research is based upon sociologists dealing with say specific problems of re-habitation for instance (restructuring of social contexts for a re-housed sector of a population) whereas my negative attitude would be towards Fullermisms or McLuhanisms which I don't think the artist in a sociological role should imitate.

P.: My answer would be that in the situation you described is that you have a theory and a practice. Now the practice is more or less an analysis of a situation rather than an intervention into that field. In this kind of work it's a different kind of practice, it's not the practice of theory and analysis but it's a practice of intervention, which you might say is an artist strategy in terms of looking at some of the Fluxus things or Dadaist things — it's an act of intervention between a person and another person.

C.: In what sense is it an intervention?

P.: If I was the first kind of sociologist I talked about I would obviously have some kind of theory, and I would involve myself in observation, record what was going on, then analyse. Therefore I didn't have to get involved at the level of talking to any of those people.

C.: The reason I brought up the example of my positive attitude was that those sociologists did not go into the re-habilitation context with a theory but went to analyse a practical problem with which they would have to live with the consequences, and even with prolonged study most of the research was 180° away from what in the end was really needed. I understand that the work you are now doing is an analysis that in fact may never require reaching a theory stage?

P.: Right, by intervention I mean dialogue. I used a quote by Steve Willats which I think is interesting, it concerned the reason for using the questioning method. He was quoting someone else (De Bono?), he said questions are not primarily to disseminate information but because of their effect that the question registers on the person you are questioning, the question can be said to produce creative ideas, that is you have to create an answer. I am not saying that they are creating their own answers, often they may be re-creating society's answers. The most interesting occurrence has for me been prompted by the exhibition has been my conversations with people. It's not in terms of me antagonising someone else — but to find out what people now really value is very interesting.

C.: Before we analyse the answers perhaps you could answer my previous question about relative differences between two cultures?

P.: There probably are some answers . . . In Europe, generally speaking, people are more apt to understand the kind of activity that's involved in the Bureau of Imaginary Exchange, because their crisis of survival and economy is very real; if you look at the governments of those countries they are not archetypal capitalist kinds of governments, they are more socially concerned than say N. America, N. America is still very concerned with free enterprise.

C.: Don't you think that corporate concerns are global and its more a question of a countries economic strength, for instance where a country is economically strong there is a liberal-token kind of Socialism, whereas in a country where the economy is weak there is more likely to be greater pressure for a real Socialism, because the non-socialist government can not make the gravy for enough token measures.

P.: You could say that European people's obviously have more history and therefore more tradition which program them either way to be more flexible or less flexible to the approach I am dealing with.

C.: Doesn't this lack of tradition or programming also bring up the possibility that the environment you are dealing with is more likely to deal with what it is your dealing with as a game, as play because they have less to loose.

P.: That's a good question but when I question people they have choices to make: they can be serious or they can be playful, what's quite evident to me is that when you ask questions concerning for instance, values, they are for the most part very serious in their response.

C.: But, without being antagonistic, the type of people you have been questioning has been the "Art audience" which would probably be the most sympathetic to you setting up the Bureau of Imaginary Exchange.

P.: I realise that and intend to carry out the research in many different kinds of situations apart from the art gallery. I had to start somewhere and as for the time being I am obviously dealing with art, I had to start where its at — if I was dealing with economics I would have started in a business office.

C.: How much work are you going to be involved in?

P.: Please check back in two or three years but I intend to devote a great amount of time to this and project offshoots from this. I see this as a long-term activity, the questionnaires will change dependent on the types of responses. I did mention briefly that I am involved in art education and now I see that what I am doing as art really relates to my job and there is no longer a schism between the two.

C.: You obviously have reasons to think that the type of activity you are now doing is more positive or more holistic than the performances-activities you were engaged in previously?

P.: The performances were probably more to do with myself and my notions of what I am rather than being involved with the audience and their role. As I really saw the audience as observers rather than participators and creators. Perhaps the most important part of what I am now doing is not what I do but what you could call a contract between myself and whoever I am dealing with. I am bringing the information together. When I am displaying the information it's not mine but everybody's who has taken part.

C.: Perhaps what I am trying to get at is that you will, after a number of investigations, be the only one who is common to them all very much like the participatory-performance artist where you again are the common denominator of all of those performances.

P.: I understand the confusion, but the project is not called 'Paul Woodrow' but goes under a bureaucratic name, the Bureau of Imaginary Exchange. The participatory performance still projects 'Paul Woodrow — the artist.' One thing to note is that I have made people sign declarations — at the bottom of the form there is a line which reads that "the information that I have presented to you is true and correct." So that they have to be responsible in a very real way about what they say because that work is to be displayed. Someone else was doing the interviews and as soon as the interviewee realised that his answers were to be displayed he changed his answers accordingly. With the performance I was involved in the audience didn't have that responsible a role, the most damaging thing they could do was to make fools of themselves — we were all silly, or we all played together. The answers displayed become public information complete with identifying names, addresses and occupations.

C.: Don't you think there is a difference between signing something which is "true and correct," and signing something which is true and correct, legally binding and can be used against you? It's worth looking I think at the support mechanisms: A lot of the support/assistance you would get in the "true and correct" form is from the sub-group of Artists, that support is mandatory in a sense; its not that its not useful support because most artists have a desire to see other artists complete what it is that they are doing. I think what I have just outlined is the definition of the 'responsibility' you have been getting. Perhaps you could analyse some of the answers?

P.: One of the questions I asked was upon what five things do you place the most value. Strangely enough not too many people put "art," quite a few people put things like vision, or seeing, or being alive, or honesty or co-existence. Another question I asked was what work of art would you like to own. It appears now that at least 50% of the people answered that they would not like to own any art.

C.: Is that because most of the artists get their art for free?

P.: I don't know . . . one woman wrote: the only thing I would like to own is myself. I asked her why and she said that she felt that most people were owned by other people because most people tried to live up to the expectations of others.

C.: What about the art equals religion answers?

P.: The relationship between art and god is that they both are Absolute, both transcendent, both mysterious — they don't exist in the social reality they exist outside of it; perhaps our notion of artistic imagination, is not social imagination but the facility to create images that come from nowhere — the same region of space that is believed to be inhabited by god. That's why so many people see art as a spiritual activity because it has religious connotations. One might say that an aesthetic and a religious experience are the same except in that the context is different. So it's not unusual for artists to believe in god, both deal in the same class of mysteries. One girl wrote that she would not like to own a work of art because if it was around she would be able to unravel its mystery, and she would prefer to keep art mysterious.

C.: I wondered when taking part in the Exchange why you grounded your questions in traditional art, you established the art in terms of it being purchasable. Also the aesthetic toenail of color, weren't you impeding your own activity at the same time?

P.: My assumption, which can be proved both correct and incorrect, is that most people do assume that art is aesthetic and they also assume that artworks are to be bought and sold — furthermore that there is a direct relationship between the work of art and its economic value. The question I posed was not to do with monetary value but functional value within society. Ownership was not so much to do with economics but individual ownership.

C.: Looking ahead — do you think that people's reaction to your research is going to be directly affected by their estimation of the quality of your research. For instance the color preference question has the tone coin-machine-mood-analysis. The quasi-psychological N. American desperation?

P.: First of all you have to consider the context that I am working in. I am working in a very general way that has no pretence of being scientific. The exhibition is divided into two areas. One I call a theoretical section which demonstrates why I choose to do this particular activity. The other area being practical. I try to make the area where I do the practice as unthreatening and as simplified as possible. I believe that I can structure the activity in a simple way using everyday language, that's not clouded by mystery. Its noteworthy that the theoretical area suffers from mystification, in terms of the kind of terminology that I have used. In answer to your question all I can say that even pure science has certain ideological aspects to its disciplines. To assume that science is completely neutral is like assuming that art is neutral is to make a big mistake. Perhaps I can be judged in the serious nature of the responses that I have had, perhaps if people would not answer seriously the questions that I pose it might defeat what I am trying to do. So far that has not been the case.

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22

Report on the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion
(Alberta College of Art Lecture Theatre)

MARCH

22 - The 1971 Miss General Idea Pageant - A History

30

FEBRUARY

27

Concert: Chadbourne, Baker, Hutton

MARCH

5

Concert: Windsor Viney and Clive Robertson

6

Bill Jamison Trio

28

Dollar Brand

11

Missing Associates 9pm

15

Peggy Gale on Video 8:30pm

(Alberta College of Art Conference Room)

22

Cioni Carpi "CDFB

Return to Abandoned Fields of Action, 1975"

(Alberta College of Art Lecture Theatre) 8:30pm

INFORMATION/DIFFUSION

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