

## Curatorial Incubator 7

Frak Facebook: Celebrating the Anti-Social

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## Frak Facebook: Celebrating the Anti-Social

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Curatorial Incubator v.7



### Jennifer Chan

feeling video: are we done with judgment?  
pages 4 through 17



### Ted Kerr

white buffalo's return from emerald island  
pages 18 through 31



### Mireille Bourgeois

growing up stupid  
pages 32 through 47

**Lisa Steele**

Creative Director

Vtape

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Facebook has 350 million members worldwide who, collectively, spend 10 billion minutes there every day. 57% of all teens in America between 12 and 19 have Facebook accounts. But a recent article in The New York Times has reported on some teenaged girls who have either stopped or limited their access to social media, mainly because they suspected they were wasting too much time. And, interestingly, they found that life offline was actually richer and more productive. Weaning themselves off the constant stream of on-line ‘friends’ left them with more time for real world socializing. Duh!

This year, *The Curatorial Incubator, v7 - FRAK FACEBOOK: celebrating the anti-social* called for proposals to participate in this research and presentation project that aims to uncover works that buck the current trend of “social networking” and “living in public” that is so now. *FRAK FACEBOOK: celebrating the anti-social* explores the urge to burrow under the covers, to hide in the basement - in short, the drive to NOT connect, to NOT be nice. Our 3 emerging curators have answered the call with gritty aplomb. With her programme, [Mireille Bourgeois](#) posits stupidity as “an act so powerful that it can interrupt the very foundation of thought.” The gross and the abject figure prominently in [Jennifer Chan’s](#) selection. And [Ted Kerr](#) asks if the internet has changed gay cruising - his answer is a poem offered to the Earth herself.

This year’s participants spent a fruitful afternoon with renowned writer and curator [Philip Monk](#), who primed them with an earlier piece of his writing, *“Trash” as a Cultural System: Rauschenberg, Warhol, Smith and Shifting Museum Practices* originally published in [C Magazine](#). The morning after deactivating her Facebook account, notable anti-socialite and artist [Deirdre Logue](#) also met with the group to discuss our collective attraction to difficult disclosure and the implications of using

the self as subject. They then started viewing, searching for just the right combination of works to support their curatorial theme. And, once selected, these titles became the focus for the curatorial essays printed here. This year our celebrity editors included [Michelle Jacques](#), associate curator at the Art Gallery of Ontario who worked with Mireille Bourgeois; [Erik Martinson](#), from Vtape and one of last year’s Incubatees who worked with Jennifer Chan, and the multi-talented writer and curator [Jon Davies](#), former Incubatee and now Assistant Curator of Public Programmes at The Power Plant who edited Ted Kerr’s poetic study. Thanks to them all for their work and attention to this project.

At last year’s Curatorial Incubator Symposium, we spent an afternoon hearing from several participants in previous Incubators and heard some very interesting ideas. One suggestion that resonated was a desire to sit all together and see each others programmes all at once. Thus was born *VIDI THIS...VIDI THAT...* the marathon screening day (Saturday January 30, 2010) where all 3 programmes will be screened with introductions and q & a’s following and a final round table wrap up with audience and curators discussing effective strategies and actions for curating media arts.

So I will continue to resist the lure of Facebook. And like the other pan-theistic denizens in the galaxies of BSG, I say,

“No frackin’ way.”

Long live the dunce, the freak and the queer. So say we all.

# Jennifer Chan

## feeling video: are we done with judgment?



**Jonathan Sterne** “The entire edifice of new communication technology is a giant trash heap waiting to happen, a monument to the hubris of computing and the peculiar shape of digital capitalism.”  
(Sterne 2007, 17)

From the video:  
“Rest” by  
Paul Couillard

Echoing the bodily experimentation and performing self of early video art, Internet users are turning the camera on themselves. Attracting attention, sometimes kinship, sometimes antagonism, Internet video finds unlikely, yet abundant audiences. User-generated applications from the “Web 2.0” paradigm have allowed for communication, sharing and databasing of information ad nauseum. Encounters with nonproductive social media like Vimeo, and YouTube has precipitated excruciating volumes of amateur production including confessional videoblogs and revenge video. User feedback through ratings, comments, and video responses creates a personal, yet collective stream of consciousness – an endless parade of absurd amusement. Facebook, blogs, phone cameras, and livestream video chat contributes to our libidinal nature of viewership, thus generating more and more useless data on the Web.<sup>1</sup> Like the co-option of video into artistic practices during its advent, both artists and users have been employing the excessive potential of the digital to tactically negotiate their identity.

What happens when devious performance is framed within the context of art and displayed publicly, online, or in a gallery? What does the deliberate performance of struggle suggest about the conditions of videomaking? I assembled this program to provoke ontological questions – to invoke the “wtf” – concerning the growing amount of bizarre exhibitionism in contemporary visual culture. I will focus on these ways of seeing in relation to reality television, amateur video, cybersculture, and the art world. To frame this matter in the broader discourse of artistic practice, I begin with Rosalind Krauss’ (1985, 52) assertion of video as a narcissistic medium for channeling immanent bodily desires that are otherwise regulated by social or institutional etiquette. Deliberate performance for the camera serves as entropic and excremental demonstration of individualism. As Georges Bataille states, to destroy, or depart from physical composure and become formless (*informe*) waste is to liberate the self from embodiment, to access an intellectual transcendence.<sup>2</sup> This program provides a glimpse into strange manifestations of personhood after the writings of Bataille, who proclaimed an erotic connection between the display of destruction and death, excess and expenditure in the processes of daily living.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I extend Arthur Kroker and Michael Weinstein’s idea of data trash, or the hyper-production of information, to argue that such “Internet trash” consists of digital debris from memes, quiz results, fan art, viral ads to humiliation photos and even pedophilia.

<sup>2</sup> Art historians Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois interpret Bataille’s *informe* as an “operation” subverting the formal analysis of twentieth century art.

<sup>3</sup> Information theorist Eugene Thacker (1998) applies Bataille’s notion of technological excess and expenditure invested in web pornography production to explain how digital interactions are excremental.

Waste production in the form of expletive action represents the refusal to contain the most basic physical desires. The roaring half-naked woman in Anna Peak's *Lokhalle* thrashes at wood on the floor in an abandoned warehouse. The artist describes these acts as "performing being human". Excremental action presents itself in the protagonist's hollering and cursing, with only the curses being legible. Enacting aggression with no explanation, her subject ineffectually destroys her environment. Throwing her wig off in the middle of the video, gender is abandoned and attention is diverted to her robust, dirt-covered body, indexical of the strength and baseness of her actions. Her performance is hyperbolic and carnal in defiance of the jarring demands of adulthood in a gendered society. Similarly accentuating internal agitation, Charlemagne Palestine's *Running Outburst* approaches kinesthetic performance emphatically. Shot from waist height, the viewer assumes the position of the camera and becomes interpolated as an organ of Palestine's enduring body. Freudian aversion underpins his camera movements as he moves around the room while droning sonorously. Eventually running, he never approaches closely enough to the pillars for our inspection of teddy bears situated at the bases. The jerkiness of the camera adds an implicit sense of childhood trauma. Like the unexplained fury possessed by the female subject in *Lokhalle*, Palestine withholds visual knowledge of understanding personal history. Trauma cannot be deconstructed or symbolized, but is conveyed through the channeling of extraneous emotion.

Conversely, Mirha-Soleil Ross and Mark Karbusicky's *G-SPrOut!* draws not upon the excremental, but rather, the romantic prospects offered by digital technology. The video begins with textual flirtation in a vegan chatroom between "TofuTits" and "Soyboy", personas played by the artists themselves. The documentary portrays a radically sex-positive approach to the subaltern romantic needs of vegans.<sup>4</sup> (Spivak 1985, 484) Interviews of vegans confessing their thoughts on omnivores are interspersed with footage of a role-playing and then lovemaking transsexual couple. The discussion openly uncovers multiple layers of queerness, illustrating the political act of choosing a partner who shares the same attitudes of animal-free consumption. "Let's just say, if you're not a vegetarian, then I won't swallow," one interviewee snickers. "There's a scent, almost a spice to vegetarians...and it's not pleasant. I'm not saying meat eaters are stinky awful people by any means, but on an intimate level...there's something there

<sup>4</sup> In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak questions whether subaltern populations have an authentic representational visibility in society. In *G-SPrOut!*, members of the community are able to speak for themselves in an empowered fashion.

photo 2 + 3 of 7 | Jennifer Chan's Programme | Feeling Video: Are we done with Judgment?



From the video:  
"G-SPrOut!" by  
Mark Karbusicky & Mirha-Soleil Ross



From the video:  
"Running Outburst" by  
Charlemagne Palestine

photo 4 + 5 of 7 | Jennifer Chan's Programme | Feeling Video: Are we done with Judgment?



**From the video:**  
“*Lokhalle*” by  
Anna Peak



**From the video:**  
“*Subject to Subject*” by  
Jesika Joy

that I'm not comfortable about,” confesses another interviewee. Discussion of sex meshes with the politics to protest not only a morally questionable meat industry but also hetero-normative social values. The politicizing of pleasure and ethics is solidified by TofuTits’ textual proclamation, “It's my own special spot, I call it my G-SPrOuT!”

Unlike the positive coupling of desire with consumption in *G-SPrOuT!*, *Subject to Subject* toys with the sexually dishonorable. Jesika Joy explores erotic danger in the suspension of disbelief in her role as a docile White female subject. A Black man’s foot forcefully rolls over her face and chest as she wriggles and moans on the floor in simulation of an ambiguously violent, yet permissive struggle. The camera is implicated in relations of gazing that Joy playfully subverts by conflating oppressive gender and racial representations in her performance. From the point of view of the standing male subject, the camera’s gaze on Joy’s face engenders quasi-pornographic references in his anonymous presence behind the lens. Fatiguing repetition of struggle teases, yet debunks the notion of gendered oppression through the revealing of her unrestrained hands, which allude to her agency. Her performance is reminiscent of Vito Acconci’s *Pryings*, where feminist critique of female submission is enacted through deliberate abuse of the female subject. However, enjoyment is demonstrated by Joy’s willful sucking of the camera operator’s big toe. Like its use in *Running Outburst*, the camera enables the orchestration and witnessing of the private; had these videos not been captured, such intimate expressions would not reveal themselves in public consciousness.

As if at war, acts of strangeness render the performing body a carnivalesque theatre in which all sources of stigmatized social cruelty are played out. In *Operation*, Jubal Brown directs the camera at his abdomen and silently extracts small pieces of fat from underneath his ribcage. The bleeding orifice is an uncanny reminder of the pain experienced in body modification for the sake of beauty. A brief appearance of a COSMO magazine in the background suggests his opposition to physical idealism. Much like the simulacral assault in his hour-long videocollage *TOTAL WAR*, Brown’s visceral videography would be regarded by Jean Baudrillard as spectacular overkill. The assumption that our brains will be hypertrophically overfed with images of horror to the point of desensitization stops short of discovering video’s ethical and political determinants. My interest is to uncover the liminal relationship between the performance of confrontational subject matter and social affect.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I believe this viewpoint has contributed to a redundant, dead-end analysis of visual culture and neglects the pleasures of wasteful mass [Internet] culture that audiences will continue to consume.

I insist on exploring the relationship of the audience to the performer, to foster engagement with images that surpass aesthetic or representational judgment (Deleuze 1997, 130). Assembling his formless extractions onto a log that he incinerates, Brown takes it upon himself to completely destroy subcutaneous fat on his body. In contrast to hegemonic notions of self-care and life preservation, the terror of self-harm bears no reference to social belonging or order. By elevating the extent to which it is socially acceptable to modify one's own body, Brown performs deleterious acts on himself to assert his separation from society. Yet his work relies on our sadistic attention to question ethics of self-care and bodily ownership. If tracing the alienated self in artmaking is to recognize one's own monstrosity, Brown demonstrates pain to "demonstrify" himself (Nancy 1996, 78). By performing self work through surgical operation, Brown attempts to reclaim personal sovereignty over his embodied identity in defiance of institutional regulation. Judgment becomes a secondary concern to the precariousness of performing bodies, even if observers may watch irresponsibly, distanced by the safety of the screen.

Networked media like TV and the Internet are sources for the continuous streaming of shameful entertainment based in reality—also known as “humilitainment” (Siggins 2005). The performance of failure entices our appetite for the comic relief of *schadenfreude* (Adorno 1969, 140). In *Hardcore Superstar*, Gale Allen and Karilynn Ming Ho compete to chug a gallon of homogenized milk along to an upbeat soundtrack of the same name. Feeling humored at expense of their struggle defers obligation to identify with their bodies in the throws of perpetual projectile vomiting. Like Peak's work, Allen and Ho attempt to overturn existing regimes of gender representation. They appropriate machismo challenges originating in *Camp Kill Yourself* and *Jackass* to subvert the aesthetics of youth cult reality television and Internet pranks. Beyond commentary on feminized practices of bulimia, their performance in the city center confuses judgment of vomiting in public spaces. They present an unapologetic performance of metaphorical bulimia pertaining to cultural consumption. As an involuntary process, vomiting is supposedly beneficial to our wellbeing as it eliminates harmful toxins from the body. The act of uselessly expelling ingested food demonstrates a lack of physical control—in which Allen and Ho are not afraid to display. Milk soils their clothes and hits the ground as they relentlessly chug, heave and vomit. Literally emptied, the artists clink their milk bottles at the end in celebration of undertaking the ridiculous challenge. Their feat is now vacant of meaning; the evidence is all over the ground.

**photo 6 + 7 of 7 | Jennifer Chan's Programme | Feeling Video: Are we done with Judgment?**



**From the video:**  
“Operation” by  
Jubal Brown



**From the video:**  
“Hardcore Superstar” by  
Gale Allen & Karilynn Ming Ho

Extending the trope of physical wastefulness, Paul Couillard's *REST* encapsulates the death drive to merge with nature and disappear. Externalization of the internal conveys the need to escape bodily containment, to transcend physical experience and access spiritual tranquility. Standing on one of the most popular sites for suicide in Ontario, the Bloor Viaduct, Couillard turns his body into a temporary monument that is drained of affect and inert to external forces, yet internally anxious. As if exclaiming with no sound, he tacitly opens his mouth on a wintery day in a stoic expression of grief, allowing unbearable weather to consume him. Over time, frost aggregates on his face, nose and tongue. As if his internal organs are decaying or thawing, saliva ebbs from his mouth, and eventually freezes into a pool of ice on the ground. His unaffected stasis and excretion on video transcribes durational endurance to ephemeral evidence. Resembling the trickle of blood in Brown's *Operation*, the slow marking of the body attests to the limits of the artist's agency over physical perception. Against nature, Couillard's static performance strives for minimal exertion of the embodied self and a masochistic rigidity of the total physical and mental stasis.

Should we shun videos of self-inflicted cruelty? If self-performed heinousness reveals intimate desires that target the corporeal, what makes the valuation of these videos so different from those of war and news violence? Does our pathos end at judging the demonstration of an unbecoming self? Sights of discomfort bear upon our visuality as bodily memory in both the viewer and performer. The visceral affect of painful performance is not only haptic, but also emotional. Voyeuristic endurance of the unimaginable experience of such acts allows the suturing of the visual to the cognitive. Aside from private viewing on a desktop interface, video screenings in artistic contexts are shared experiences that provoke discussion about the taboo of watching anti-social performance. The video screen becomes a site of emergence that opens a contemplative space for apprehending precarity and identity (Sontag 118; Butler 2009, 2). The appeals of anti-social video lie at these empathetic junctures of comedy, disavowal, disgust and unimaginability. My curatorial desires flirt with displaying the private in a public context, to combine the useful and the useless effects of technological expenditure on human desires. Watching and performing the trivial serves as a cathartic process for the videomaker and viewer to transcend moral righteousness, to do away with judgment. Perhaps we might reconsider our complicity in perpetuating a waste-based economy of voyeurism and develop critical discourse on how to *feel* video.

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## Feeling Video: Are we done with Judgment?



**Programme Notes** “What happens when devious performance is framed within the context of art and displayed publicly, online, or in a gallery? What does the deliberate performance of struggle suggest about the conditions of videomaking?”

Jennifer Chan, Toronto, 2010

[view all 7 videos](#)

### Charlemagne Palestine *Running Outburst*

A sublimation of internal frustration, Palestine's physically activated performance portrays the indescribable weight of personal trauma.

5:56 minutes, 1975

### Paul Couillard *REST*

Standing on the Bloor viaduct on a wintery day, the artist opens his mouth, remains still. So still.

4:20 minutes, 2006

### Mark Karbusicky & Mirha-Soleil Ross *G-SPrOut!*

Members from the vegan community speak up on romantic needs, queer desires, and political rights in omnivorous society in this enthusiastic documentary.

12:00 minutes, 2000

### Anna Peak *Lokhalle*

“Performing being human,” a female protagonist acts out in the empty space of a ship deconstruction warehouse. Gender, civilization and judgment are all abandoned.

7:50 minutes (excerpt), 2009

### Jubal Brown *Operation*

The artist silently extracts pieces of fat from his lower abdomen and destroys them.

10:00 minutes, 1999

### Jesika Joy *Subject to Subject*

Floored by a Black man's foot, Joy toys with supposedly oppressive racial and gendered representations in a permissive struggle deliberately enacted for the camera.

4:24 minutes, 2006

### Gale Allen & Karilynn Ming Ho *Hardcore Superstar*

Two girls ambitiously take on the epic “milk chug” challenge, popularized by YouTube involving the fastest possible ingestion of a gallon of homogenized milk. The results are epically excremental.

3:08 minutes, 2003

## Biographies

### Jennifer Chan's Programme

 **Gale Allen** is a visual artist currently based in Toronto Canada. Allen's practice investigates the aesthetics of revolt present in popular culture. Allen has recently exhibited with the Harbourfront Centre's HATCH: emerging performance projects (Toronto), "All I Ever Wanted" Pleasure dome (Toronto), "Must be the colours and the kids that keep me alive" (Toronto), TAAFI (Toronto) "Play", and the First International Prize for Performance (Italy) "I need you to need me."

 **Jubal Brown** is a video maker, multi-media artist, organizer, and writer and based in Toronto. His work has been exhibited in England, Scotland, Holland, France, Belgium, Africa, Hungary, the U.S. and Hamilton Ontario. His organizational involvements include: co-founding the Jawa collective, pioneers of the sex and death machine gun editing style; co-founding the PO-PO seditious action team responsible for Toronto's legendary WASTELAND event series; co-founding the ART SYSTEM Cultural Center in Toronto, 2000-2003 where he also served as Director; co-founding the multimedia label FAMEFAME notorious for producing, programming and promoting experimental, cutting edge audio / visual culture, 2002-2007. Some of his recent projects include the relational aesthetics instances UNKNOWN UNKNOWN and The Land of the Lost. His work has been exhibited recently at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Art Mur, and the Horse Hospital.

 **Jennifer Chan** is an interdisciplinary artist-curator specializing in Visual Culture & Communication at UTM/Sheridan College's joint Art & Art History program. She was emerging curator at InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Centre (2009), formerly a research intern at Vtape and currently programming for the Gendai Gallery. Chan has received a Trinity Square Video Award (2009) and Mississauga Arts Awards for Emerging Talent in Visual Arts (2008). She has exhibited at Nuit Blanche (Toronto), Gallery

1313 and University of Toronto Art Center. Her research and practice explores the intersections of technology and culture in the formation of postmodern subjectivity.

 **Paul Couillard** has been working as an artist, curator, and cultural theorist since 1985, focusing on performance art with forays into video, installation, and holography. He has created well over 100 solo and collaborative performance works in 20 countries, often working with his partner Ed Johnson. His work seeks to build community and address trauma through explorations of our bodies as vessels of sensation, experience, knowledge and spirit.

 **Karilynn Ming Ho** is a visual artist based in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her practice involves the research and exploration of various formal and conceptual frames existent in performativity. Her work exists through live actions, video, installation, and photography. She has exhibited her video and performance-based works extensively throughout Canada.

 **Jesika Joy** is a Toronto based artist and theorist for whom art-making is an act of faith. She uses gesture and creative movement to create abrasive imagery for live audiences and the camera. Through exaggerating normalized social practice and incorporating abject imagery, she creates work that speaks to radical feminist political concerns through the use of poststructuralist tools. She strives towards honesty in rearticulating gendered psychic experience while hoping her work speaks to larger existential concerns that span the specificities of embodiment. Joy has exhibited at numerous venues including Images, Nuit Blanche, Inside Out, the Paris Lesbian and Feminist Film Festival, Boston Underground Film Festival, Sixty Second Film and Video Festival, herland, Queer City Cinema, International ArtExpo, the Art Gallery of Ontario's Massive Party and as part of the Art Gallery of York University's "Hot... New... Video... Art..."

 **Mark Karbusicky**, accomplished artist, director and editor. Director of Rod Coronado: A Voice for Liberation (2001). Collaborator with Mirha-Soleil Ross, selected works: Journée Internationale de la Transsexualité (1998), Tales from the Derrière (2000), G-SPROU! (2000), Tremblement de Chair (2001), Lullaby (2001), Proud Lives (2002), ALLO PERFORMANCE! (2002), Live eXXpressions: Sex Workers Stand Up (2006), and Brandee aka Al Lana Lamarre (2007). Assistant Editor on Proteus (2004) by John Greyson. Editor of Tom (2002), Imitations of Life (2003), In the Dark (2003), Public Lighting (2004), and Fascination (2006) by Mike Hoolboom.

 In the 1970s, **Charlemagne Palestine** produced a seminal body of performance-based, psychodramatic videotapes in which he ritually used physicality, motion and sound to achieve an outward articulation of internal states. Intense and often violently charged, these exercises are characterized by a visceral enactment of physical and psychological catharses.

 **Anna Peak** grew up in Berlin, Germany. After years of working as a carpenter and travelling all over Europe she went back to school to study communication design at FH Potsdam, Germany. She does performance and video art as well as social justice motivated queer activism and radical sex politics including feminist porn. She immigrated to Canada in summer 2008.

 **Mirha-Soleil Ross** is a transsexual video maker, performer, sex worker and animal rights activist originally from Montréal, Québec. Her videos have been screened at queer, women, trans and art festivals in Melbourne, Amsterdam, London, Dublin, across Canada and the US. She presented her first solo video exhibition "Tremblement de Chair and Other Trans-

sexual Tremors" at AKA Gallery in Saskatoon. In 2004, she presented "It was a Pleasure Meeting You", a piece about intimacy and the transsexual body at the eBent Performance Art Festival in Barcelona. Her show "Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thoughts from an Unrepentant Whore" was produced as part of the 2004-05 Buddies in Bad Times Theatre season.

# Ted Kerr

## white buffalo's return to emerald island



All Hail to the Queen  
The fags bash the bulbs to make the stars brighter.

All Peace to the Earth  
As orbs of white light moat Emerald Island.

**From the video:**  
**"Quicktime Interruptus"** by  
Stephen Andrews

2,000 years ago a young woman appeared in the shape of a white buffalo. She gave a family a sacred pipe and made them guardians of the Black Hills. Before leaving, she prophesied that one day she would return to purify the world and bring back spiritual balance and harmony. The birth of a white buffalo calf would be a sign that her return was at hand.

With vast wide shots and landscapes in full view, Marlene Millar and Philip Szporer's *Butte* (2006) reminds us that before man, was land. The elegant body of choreographer and dancer Byron Chief-Moon sweeps across the prairies. His 20th century body communicates to us through movement and through his warrior face: Queerly we are nothing new, clearly we queers have always existed.

In 1994 a white buffalo was born in Wisconsin. In many communities there is an aboriginal renaissance occurring, manifesting as a return to the land.

"Remember that I am the cause of your journey, don't leave me on the way," starts Jean-Gabriel Périot's journey in *Dies Irae* (2005). A race across the globe – we travel a straight line from land to modern times, traversing through images as if hurtling down a narrow tunnel. Time is not a line, life will double back at will.

We hit a wall. All the freedom our bones, our cocks, our psyches were reaching for recoiled in crisis, reorganized in response. Some never made it out, some never made it back, others kept calm, carried on. Others just carried on.

We fought back, fought AIDS, fought injustice, fought homophobia. We found the truth in the misery. Understood why we were dying. "If I'm dying from anything, it's from indifference and red tape, because these are the things that are preventing an end to this crisis," Vito Russo can still be heard saying.

I say "we" but I mean "they" – I am just a benefactor, a safe boy on the platform maneuvering my head to look back. They did all the work, they did all the figuring out, finding patterns in the random, music in the screams. Nelson Henricks walks Montreal looking for rhythm on the trains, *Comédie* (1994) in the solitude. It can make sense, it can fuel the push forward. The heat will return, we can laugh.

In 1998 *Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures* was published. Writer Eric Rofes put forward the idea that the AIDS-as-crisis model was long outdated and a new era focused on gay men's wellness had arrived.

It's now 2009, 2000-and-mine, and I wander the urban Canadian terrain for white buffalo tracks and modern gay male culture. A pull back, a pull forward. A pull within, a look outside.

Remember that I am the cause of your journey, don't leave me on the way

Dry bones breathe  
 Gay men break backs  
 First Nations women get ignored  
 The land heaves and sighs

PAUSE. This is my *Quicktime Interruptus* (2004) as Stephen Andrews calls it. I got my panties in a knot a few months ago when I started visiting gay guy social networking sites like manhunt.net and dudesnude.com. At first I was just jealous of all the lovely bodies that will never be mine that I will never have.

Here they all are:stretched,  
 flexed, out,  
 aching to be clicked,  
 hooked,  
 favoured,  
 chatted,  
 and poked.

**photo 2 + 3 of 6 | Ted Kerr's Programme | White Buffalo's Return to Emerald Island**

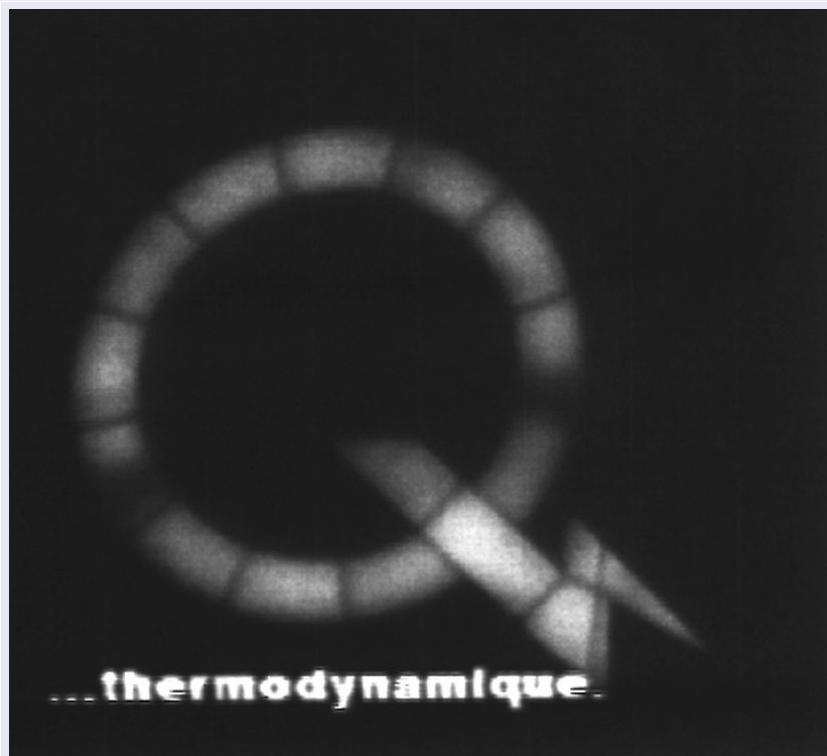


**From the video:**  
**"Butte"** by  
 Marlene Millar and Philip Szporer



**From the video:**  
**"Dies Irae"** by  
 Jean-Gabriel Périot

photo 4 of 6 | Ted Kerr's Programme | White Buffalo's Return to Emerald Island



From the video:  
“Comédie” by  
Nelson Henricks

My Quicktime Interruptus? I found myself heavy and full with minor outrage. The gall: Where do these guys get off?!

But then I got over myself and I meant it... Where do these boys get off?

My Quicktime Interruptus? Where is public sex? Do these dudes nude know that their flesh is for the viral masses? If so, great: we should all be so proud of our bodies. Or do websites create a sense of enclosed space so that these dudes think they are in some version of inside? That they are safe?

Computers can only take us so far. Continuing the journey towards modernity cannot be mediated through a screen. Maybe we flocked to the screen because the scream of friends trying and then dying was too much. But not for those who never heard the sounds, who never lowered men as young as them into the ground – why do they want to meet online? What stops them from going outside?

Last summer when I was accepted into Vtape’s Curatorial Incubator I thought that I would use it to explore how sites like Manhunt and Dudes Nude were changing the sexual landscape for gay men.

I had it on my mind that in the face of AIDS, in the face of the Internet, sex had not only gone underground, it had gone post-ground: cruising now existed only in the ether. I was wrong. The beauty of me is my ability to be wrong, my ability as a vegetarian to eat bacon and crow.

A figure walks towards me. There is a gulf that needs diving. *man. road. river.* (2004). He ignores it, or does not see it. He walks. And I walk. And they walked so we could walk. Marcellvs L. captures it without judgment. The man makes it. They made it. I make it. We make it. He makes it across and it makes it to the other side. He triumphs. He is still standing.

Sitting after dark in Toronto’s Queen Park I befriended a man who had been cruising this park all his adult life. The year that Rock Hudson died of AIDS, this guy, this man, decided to come out. It has made him, if he does say so himself, an expert at giving blowjobs.

He tells me how he calls this park Emerald Island, because basically we are sitting in a large traffic circle in the middle of a city, surrounded by trees, our feet thick in luscious grass and roots aching to come up, roots aching for freedom.

He tells me that every few years the city tries to make the park less welcoming by taking down trees or adding more lights. He laughs and says it doesn't matter – the fags just bash the bulbs to make the stars brighter.

The beauty of dry bones breathing is tempered only by the fact that parks such as this still echo all that is hurt inside of gay bones. We made it across but now what do we do?

Not only is this place a hunting ground for the great white cock, leaving brown, yellow, red cocks dangling in the wind – there is no room for dudes without cocks or cocks without dudes. Desires are still so repressed that getting laid under the stars, white buffalos winking from the road, is still a revolutionary act. And there is no room for openness, no room for further transgression. “We have done our part by coming out,” they seem to say.

*Remember that I am the cause of your journey, don't leave me on the way*

Before I ever went to a cruising park I romanced the idea that in such places you fucked whoever was there. The beauty became relative and a bell curve of hotness was recreated every time someone came, left.

And this is true. And this is not true. Our culturally informed idea of beauty still permeates past the trees. Old guys walk around with nary a wink, fat guys sit dejected, staying in the background instead of being rejected.

We must remember ourselves, our shells and our skin intact. Our bark, our roots, our cocks and the land in hand. *Nikamowin (Song)* (2007), Kevin Lee Burton tries to teach us, flirts with us so we can learn, draws us in with his voice to help us find our own voice. How did we learn to open our eyes? Make love with other men?

**photo 5 + 6 of 6 | Ted Kerr's Programme | White Buffalo's Return to Emerald Island**



From the video:  
“man.road.river.” by  
Marcellvs L.



From the video:  
“Nikamowin (Song)” by  
Kevin Lee Burton

Queerly I am nothing new – the land knows this and begs us to return.

White buffalo breath revives dry bones.  
But animals we are not.  
But just spirits we are not.  
But online profiles we are not.  
But post-AIDS we are not.

Take off your shoes, your socks, your shirt and your pants.  
Walk barefoot on the land. Naked.

Find a place to lie down in the grass.  
Press your sex to the ground and feel the flex flux of 6 billion souls.  
Get off.  
Get up.  
Keep going.

White buffalo breath revives dry bones.  
Fucking strangers revives faith in humanity.  
Being outside reminds you that you are human, reminds you of the cause, of your journey.

Take off your shoes, your socks, your shirt and your pants.  
Walk barefoot on the land. Naked.  
Find a place to lie down in the grass.  
Press your sex to the ground and feel the flex flux of 6 billion souls.  
Get off.  
Get up.  
Keep going.

Take off your shoes, your socks, your shirt and your pants.  
Walk barefoot on the land. Naked.  
Find a place to lie down in the grass.  
Press your sex to the ground and feel the flex flux of 6 billion souls.  
Get off.  
Get up.  
Keep going.

## White Buffalo's Return to Emerald Island



**Programme Notes** “For this project, I thought I would explore how sites like Manhunt and Dudes Nude were changing the sexual landscape for gay men. I had it on my mind that in the face of AIDS, in the face of the Internet, sex had not only gone underground, it had gone post-ground: cruising now existed only in the ether. I was wrong.”

Ted Kerr, Edmonton, 2010

[view all 6 videos](#)

### Marlene Millar and Philip Szporer *Butte*

Butte unfolds over the course of a day, marking the progression of time at four key points: sunrise, mid-day, late afternoon and sundown. Filmed on the Blood Reserve in the plains and ancestral grounds of Southern Alberta, the camera instinctively accentuates dancer-choreographer Byron Chief-Moon’s deep connection to the land (Mouvement Perpetuel).

5:42 minutes, 2006

### Jean-Gabriel Périot *Dies Irae*

A global journey through collaged paths, tunnels, hallways, train tracks and land masses.

10:00 minutes, 2005

### Nelson Henricks *Comédie*

This video in two parts: a newcomer’s portrait of Montréal and two of the artist’s architectural obsessions: the Hydro Québec building and the Métro as a man searches for the meaning of life in the tile patterns of Champ-de-Mars station. The moral of these two tales is: “Don’t lose your sense of humour.”

7:00 minutes, 1994

### Stephen Andrews *Quicktime Interruptus*

An exploration of the frustrations with online porn.

1:30 minutes, 2004

### Marcellvs L. *man.road.river.*

Watch as a man crosses a river, no flinching, no notion that it is not even possible. Some may see his small feat as symbolic of larger gulfs that have been crossed.

9:27 minutes, 2004

### Kevin Lee Burton *Nikamowin (Song)*

This audiovisual experiment begs questions of how languages exist, emerge and survive.

11:15 minutes, 2007

## Biographies

### Ted Kerr's Programme

 **Stephen Andrews** was born in 1956 in Sarnia, Ontario Canada. Over the last twenty five years he has exhibited his work in Canada, the U.S., Brazil, Scotland, France and Japan. He is represented in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Belkin Art Gallery, the Schwartz Collection, Harvard as well as many private collections. His work deals with memory, identity, technology and their representations in various media including drawing, animation and recently painting.

 **Kevin Lee Burton** is a director, film festival programmer, offline editor and freelance camera operator who is Swampy Cree from God's Lake Narrows, Manitoba. In his directorial works he has designed a niche by specifically working in his ancestral tongue, Cree. Kevin has worked for the Native and Indigenous Initiatives at the Sundance Institute/Film Festival, programmed for IMAGeNATION and Out on Screen film festivals, and has co-developed and written for *Nehiyawetan*, a children's Cree language series. <http://www.myspace.com/mahkos>

 **Nelson Henricks** was born in Bow Island, Alberta and is a graduate of the Alberta College of Art (1986). He moved to Montréal in 1991, where he received a BFA from Concordia University (1994). Henricks continues to live and work in Montréal, where he has taught at Concordia University and McGill University. A musician, writer, curator and artist, Henricks is best known for his videotapes, which have been exhibited worldwide. A focus on his video work was presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as part of the Video Viewpoints series (2000). His writings have been published in *Fuse*, *Public*, *Coil* magazines, and in the anthologies *So, To Speak* (Editions Artexte, 1999), *Lux* (YYZ Press, 2000) and *Caught in the Act* (YYZ Press, 2004). With Steve Reinke, Henricks coedited an anthology of artist's video scripts entitled *By the Skin of Their Tongues*

(YYZ Press, 1997). Henricks was the recipient of the Bell Canada Award in Video Art (2002) and the Board of Govenors' Alumni Award of Excellence from the Alberta College of Art and Design (2005). <http://www.nelsonhenricks.com>

 **Ted Kerr** is a writer and artist whose work focuses on queerness, HIV / AIDS and expression. He was HIV Edmonton's first Artist in Residence as well as a founding member of Exposure: Edmonton's Queer Arts and Culture Festival. He writes regularly for XTRA.ca and VUE Weekly's Queermonton. [www.tedkerr.org](http://www.tedkerr.org)

 **Marcellvs L.** (1980). Born in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, he is currently living in Berlin. Working in both video and sound, his work has been exhibited in the 16th Biennale of Sydney, 9e Biennale de Lyon, 27<sup>a</sup> Bienal Internacional de São Paulo; Vertrautes Terrain – Aktuelle Kunst in/über Deutschland, ZKM, Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany, ars viva 07/08 sound, (touring) Museum Schloss Morbisch, Leverkusen, Germany, Kunstverein Hannover, Contemporary Art Centre Vilnius, Lithuania, Cine y casi cine 2005, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid. He has won a number of prizes including the Nam June Paik Award, Museum of Applied Art, Köln, Germany and the main prize of the 51st International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Germany. [www.caosmos.org](http://www.caosmos.org)

 **Marlene Millar** has a background in design, contemporary dance, and film. She has been producing and directing documentary and experimental films for the last several years and is a member of the executive committee of Main Film and the Documentary Organization of Canada, Québec chapter.

 **Jean-Gabriel Périot**, based in France, is a self described "baby-sitter, barman, clothes and handcrafts salesman, videotapes program clerk, assistant director, editor, mime, auction sales assistant, journalist, dance filmmaker, artist..." Between documentary, animation and experimental, most of his works deal with violence and history. His last works, including *Dies Irae*, *Even if she had been a criminal... and Nijuman no borei*, were shown worldwide in numerous festivals and were honoured by many prizes. <http://jgperiot.free.fr>

 **Philip Szporer** is a freelance writer, broadcaster, filmmaker and international lecturer living in Montreal. He is Scholar in Residence at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and was awarded a Pew Fellowship for the National Dance/Media Project at the University of California (Los Angeles). He also is lecturer in Dance Traditions at Concordia University. In 2001, **Marlene Millar** and **Philip Szporer** founded the production company Mouvement Perpétuel. <http://www.mouvementperpetuel.net>

# Mireille Bourgeois

## growing up stupid



"This is so stupid."

From the video:  
"Skinny Teeth" by  
Jennifer Reeves

This dismissive phrase is often used to veil the confusion felt at the sight of something that seems banal or talentless in the traditional notion of the word, that seems to *want* to humiliate itself or others, or that seems almost congested with meaning, unable to focus on one distinct thought. We have a deep need for social order or structural analysis of recognizable visuals that *speak* to us; this need sometimes creates a barrier to the reading of an artwork that takes a different approach. The kind of dare-to-act stupid seen in some current experimental video artwork follows in the footsteps of early 1920s Dada, avant-garde films, and conceptual art of the sixties through to the eighties. It is usually described as *performative*, *experimental*, and *abstract*. The videos in *Growing up stupid* could be described as all – or none of these occasionally interchanged terms. The four artists in the program employ non-narrative forms of video, using disorder, chaos, or the ridiculous to subvert and revolt against overbearing structures such as war, mass-produced culture, and the rhetoric of power. The work of Penelope Buitenhuis, Istvan Kantor, Jennifer Reeves, and Ryan Trecartin each in their own way, derive from an eighties aesthetic. Their videos are digitally multi-layered; some are abrasive and loud in visuals and in sound. They use dynamic editing tricks or MTV music video-type formats, and also critique the alienating outburst of pop media culture, sometimes capitalizing on the political tidings of previous decades.

The original intention of the dunce cap was to funnel knowledge into the mind of the wearer.<sup>1</sup> This made the dunce a powerful thinker, one that would allow him/herself carte blanche to conceptualize anew – free from existing histories. In today's terms, the dunce is lazy and ignorant, not bold and willing to act ridiculously in the name of innovation. However, Avital Ronell, contemporary theorist and author of *Stupidity* (2004) states "That which disrupts understanding" is what is the most feared by hierarchical structures.<sup>2</sup> Stupidity is an act so powerful that it can interrupt the very foundation of thought. It can be a tremendous momentum for revolt, and is very pertinent to the videos in *Growing up stupid*. Perhaps the shared principle linking the following videos together is that they lift out an essence of humanity usually hidden within a mainstreamed quality of life, and they propose to bring

<sup>1</sup> Historically, the Dunce cap was strongly related to the fool, or to the ungodliness of curiosity. As a strike against it, curiosity implied a momentary decision, a rash, and somewhat unfounded choice based on assumptions. Theories around the theme of curiosity are linked to philosophers from this time (John Duns Scotus, 16th century theorist and inventor of the Dunce cap) because man-made knowledge and innovation threatened the theological concept of "truth". Subverting the status of the Dunce as an avant garde him/herself.

<sup>2</sup> Avital Ronell speaking at the Public open video lecture session given at the European Graduate School, Media and Communication Studies Department Program in 2000. EGS, Saas-Fee, Switzerland, Europe. <http://www.egs.edu/>

forward an awakening to our daily actions. Acting outside the bounds of social behavior is a way to at once distance oneself from society and history, and bring oneself closer to humanity, by communicating in a way that does not need language to be implicit or shared. Artwork that disrupts understanding like the Dada films of Hans Richter and Man Ray, Nam June Paik's digital collages,, or Valie Export's performative videos can also be seen as anti-social where clear communication of an idea to a collective of people is impossible, since it creates a kind of tunnel-vision effect when considering the individual. Reeves' *Skinny Teeth* (2001). Trecartin's *What's the love making babies for* (2003), Buitenhuis' *Drawing Attention* (1984) and Kantor's *Black Flag* (1998) use non-narrative methods of video making as a way to express a kind of protest that otherwise would be too difficult to convey using conventional structures. The unconventional act – the act of stupidity – has the power to reclaim motivations that brought the avant-garde into important histories, and a contemporary conceptual freedom into a kind of (at least meager) renaissance.<sup>3</sup>

### Unforgettable idiot

Jennifer Reeves' *Skinny Teeth* (2001), in which two teenage punk girls disrupt the *stepford* stale air of an Ohio shopping centre, challenges the expectations of social class and normative behaviour. Reeves filmed the original footage in 1988 (the two teenagers were her friends at the time); it is a reflexive look at the angsty environment of her past. The girls are dressed in oversized flannel shirts and have grungy hair; they perform the proverbial misbehaving pubescent persona. A handheld camera shoots in slightly polarized color (deteriorating footage from a VHS tape – so eighties) and has a feeling of pixellated security camera footage or an instructional video following subjects who perform menial actions. The audio track contrasts the teens' dark humor with peppy instrumental music, sex phone chatter, heavy breathing and clips from motivational videos such as the following:

America is a great nation where boys look like boys with one head of hair and girls look like young ladies with proper length skirts and wear them to be respectful for God, for church, for their parents...

<sup>3</sup> Most often the motivations were to revolt against patriarchal structures detrimental to humanity. i.e. The Dada and the Fluxus movements are marker examples.

photo 2 of 4 | Mireille Bourgeois | Growing up Stupid



From the video:  
"Drawing Attention" by  
Penelope Buitenhuis

photo 3 of 4 | Mireille Bourgeois | Growing up Stupid



From the video:  
"Black Flag" by  
Istvan Kantor

Here, teenagers are the irrational characters wasting time, and acting out ridiculous dialogue with each other, slogans they've most likely heard from so-called rational adults:

I cannot go against society any longer, you'll realize it someday! Someday you'll become an adult.

Other than the familiar cringe factor of teenage-hood, the sarcasm (and bite) in *Skinny Teeth* is a reminder of the gloomy subtext in the rebellious antics of youth. Boredom in this video provokes a disengagement from an unfulfilling environment, and *acting out* — even in an impulsive or automatic display — is a form of protest masked in idiotic gestures. The young women infiltrate a hierarchical structure that even if accessible to them is ultimately unbreakable (i.e. words alone wouldn't change their world, so why not misbehave in the midst of order? Reeves says they were eventually kicked out of the shopping centre). There are also questions on pubescent boundaries of sexuality; a psychoanalytical view of the girl's appearance would read as confused due to their androgynous dress and their interaction with each other (i.e. the suggestive audio clip about "boys looking like boys" and the use of phone sex sound clips teamed with a later scene of the girls making prank calls from the mall phones and making sexual noises). The unremarkable and *idiotic* disruptions caused by the young women's status in conventional society are anti-climatic even if the memories are steeped in drama — much like average teenagehood. We might ask ourselves why the actions of idiots are worth considering as markers of *humanity*. Reeves describes that there is more to the video than can be seen at face value: "I kept the tone of the piece true to my perspective of the world at the time. The time period depicted in *Skinny Teeth* was by no means as fun as this particular day captured on video."<sup>4</sup> During a public open video lecture session given at the European Graduate School in 2000, Ronell considered Walter Benjamin's statement about the unforgettable nature of the idiot:

"...the idiot has no testimony or memory... but is completely downtrodden, exhausted as a being and yet unforgettable." Benjamin's observations offer an insight into a figuration of that which is so simple and unaccounted for, refuses monument or testimony, the predicament of the idiot.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Video description, Jennifer Reeves, 2001, V Tape online Catalogue

<sup>5</sup> Avital Ronell speaking at the Public open video lecture session given at the European Graduate School, Media and Communication Studies Department Program in 2000. EGS, Saas-Fee, Switzerland, Europe. <http://www.egs.edu/>

The banality of Reeves' day at the mall doesn't literally account for the entire vacuum of adolescence (i.e. as a monumental day), but it refuses to be understood using conventional communication, by creating ambiguity surrounding the reason for the slight uproar as a conduit of expression, preserving the era as unknowable, at the same time; unforgettable.

### Humiliated earth

"I've given you this world, with the understanding that you are phallus."<sup>6</sup>

Inducing controlled chaos is meant to bombard the viewer with information that uses familiar signifiers to bring about subconscious thoughts. This is obvious in Ryan Trecartin's *What's the love making babies for* (2003), where language takes the form of disjointed sentences based on media advertisements and popular music lyrics. The premise of the video is ironic: girl God gave boy God earth to "exercise my penis influence". Boy God wants to make a commercial to "address his people, using penetrative techniques". Girl god says there is no point since she is working on new genetic sexes that will take over the universe and make the earth's people feel inferior, turning them all into "faggy gay." Girl God gives boy God an assignment instead: to "find out where you're going and make a note of it." This sets off a whirlwind of ridiculous digressions. The 20-minute video is an entanglement of chaotic storylines interrupted by moments of lucidity. The piece is separated into two parts. The first sets up the relationship between the girl God and boy God, and eventually presents the commercial he's made in spite of girl God. The second portion is entitled "Let's talk about it" and is dedicated to a backyard audience questioning sexuality, reproduction and morality through characters that are physical manifestations of these topics. The dialogue takes the form of text messages, propagandist statements, ad slogans and trash TV quotes:

**Moral female performer:** Reproduction is the lure that drives productivity, and that is the will of nature.

**Angry female performer:** Shut your fucking look fuckhole!

**"Preggers" female performer:** We take the viewpoint that all people are created gay unless notified by Jesus.

Trecartin's videos can be maddening at times, leading us through storylines that never conclude, pummeling us with color and nauseating but masterful computer graphics. It screams for us to turn away, to escape the insanity. Surely, Trecartin is only trying to embarrass us, or question our intelligence... Despite its disorder, the artist's work is precisely scripted and determined in its meaning. In *What's the love making babies for*, we face a very nasty human condition; the video operates as a portal from Alice in Wonderland, connecting us with the morbid reality of earth's chaos. What is the love making babies for? (Or perhaps, what is the point of reproduction?) Disenchanted with the world, Trecartin reflects nonsense much as Dada performance did after its practitioners had witnessed the horror of war and technology and renounced anything infiltrated by empirical power.<sup>7</sup> But instead of renouncing it from his performance, the artist shows it to us face on, and adds just enough humor to make it digestible. In theory we should all be able to understand his pattern of thought, his material being the stuff of life we encounter everyday. As with Dada, Trecartin's predicament is better understood in his disorder.

**First I said less, then I said more, so I'm bashing my head against the wall**

Penelope Buitenhuis' *Drawing Attention* (1984) and Reeves' *Skinny Teeth* could be kindred spirits; they both speak from the position of youth in critical interaction with a world from which they want to liberate. Over four days in West Berlin 1984, Buitenhuis gathered artist friends to shoot a film. They set up some chairs and used the graffitied Berlin wall as a backdrop for six short mise-en-scènes. Due to the complex phrasing of simple poetic words that lure us away from linear narration and into an underlining web of meaning, the characters take the form of punk Shakespearians. They are set up in pairs for the most part and speaking to each other within a script devised by Buitenhuis.

<sup>6</sup> Quote from video *What's the love making babies for* where girl god is talking to the other dimension boy god.

<sup>7</sup> I.e. this included language, which is most noticeable in Dada sound poems or the Cabaret Voltaire.

The scene is caught between English and German language as the stranger listens and tries to console or respond but ultimately the women leave the scene, undramatically, to catch an imaginary train. The high intensity of the emotions surrounding the political contention of West and East Berlin is folded into everyday life scenarios in this piece. The dialogue seems to speak to the claustrophobia experienced in regards to the social repercussions of a divided Germany, despite never clearly naming it as such; the wall is the elephant in the room. The film is a visual illustration of tumultuous times; the actors' faces are blurred by film grain and some of the audio is also a little difficult to hear and pulsates with a guitar base weaving in and out of the audio track. Their clothing also has a painterly look, colorful and geometrical to draw attention, although sometimes it blends in with the graffiti as if speaking the same message. Though the presence of dialogue may imply that we can follow a certain thought pattern, the script is cut up into word games:

<p><b>Woman</b> Hey close that fucking window!</p> <p><b>Man</b> Ja, gehen ins auto. What does that mean?</p> <p><b>Woman</b> What do I mean by that? ... all talk.</p> <p><b>Man</b> that's it, too simple. Talk is only good for the bottom of rat cages. Different opinions and all that.</p> <p><b>Woman</b> If you were to ask me, I know you believe you understand what you think I've said. But I'm not sure if you realize that it's all inside your fucking head.</p> <p><b>Man</b> I seem to be saying less.</p> <p><b>Woman</b> What you're trying to tell me is not what I need to hear, considering that you want my conscience to come out clear.</p> <p><b>Man</b> My friend and her friend and her friend's friend and his friend and our beers... Then we seem to be saying more.</p> <p><b>Woman</b> What you saw me writing down was something else instead; just my mind and not what my feelings said.</p> <p><b>Man</b> first I said less, then I said more, so I'm bashing my head against the wall.</p>	<p><b>Woman</b> the awful secret of his doubt. Chewing thoughts and then spitting them out. Like tobacco. Hey, where is it anyway?</p> <p><b>Man</b> how long have I been here? I mean days go by day by day...</p> <p><b>Woman</b> what you heard was not quite what I wanted me to say. Maybe it should've stayed unsaid, it's easier that way.</p> <p><b>Man</b> hey look at these people with their lives that we know nothing about.</p> <p><b>Woman</b> something's gotta change.</p> <p><b>Man</b> the radio..</p> <p><b>Woman</b> come "in" Peter.</p> <p><b>Man</b> how "symbolic."</p> <p><b>Woman</b> I doubt it.</p> <p><b>Man</b> do you?</p> <p><b>Woman</b> how symbolic?</p> <p><b>Man</b> I doubt it.</p> <p><b>Woman</b> Do you?</p> <p><b>Man</b> Silence is guilty.</p> <p><b>Woman</b> watch out, he said so. [points at wall]</p>
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While a second reading may prove that the dialogue isn't performed at random, it is still up for interpretation. Should we place ourselves in Buitenhuis' film as the oppressive wall? Is our silence guilty? Or are we the rebels subverting the relative passivity of the monument (the wall is in the backdrop but never far from thought). The theme of *them* versus *us* is strong and is symbolized by the overall attempt to "draw attention," all the while not being able to "get through". The artist describes that these politics even entered the filmmaking process:

As we were shooting *Drawing Attention*, East German soldiers suddenly appeared above our set on ladders informing us that the Berlin Wall is East German property. We only had the right to shoot within 10 feet of the wall. We responded defiantly, asking if they were going to breach the wall to arrest us? That they couldn't do, so we continued shooting and they eventually left.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the rebellious appearance of the young punks, their demeanor may be better linked with a beat-poet aura, witnessing injustice, embodying the "down-and-out" persona and speaking in a language departing from literary tradition. Their performance is presented as a guerrilla theatrical performance for their own entertainment, but doesn't quite cross over the line of protest or confrontation (as did many others who attempted to climb the wall to "freedom" only to suffer severe consequences). The young performers don't need the audience to validate their position; instead, their protest is built in.

<sup>8</sup> Unpublished email correspondence with the artist, December 7, 2009

photo 4 of 4 | Mireille Bourgeois | Growing up Stupid



From the video:

"What's the love making babies for" by  
Ryan Trecartin

Set as a world stage, the Berlin wall is alone only in object form, but immediately politicizes the youths' actions and script as it stands behind them, a backdrop for the telling of personal accounts through humorous retort. Though the spirit of the eighties is mostly characterized by Pop aesthetics in art, fashion, film, the creation of the "music video", the rise in video game culture, glam metal, synthesizers and big hair, its response to the preceding decade is visible in monumental events such as the beginning of the end of the Cold War, significant population increases, the AIDS crisis, the onset of the digital age and of course the fall of the Berlin wall. *Drawing Attention* offers a glimpse into how an era steeped in geopolitical growing pains manifests on the ground level.

#### The monument, the myth

In Istvan Kantor's *Black Flag* (1998), text rolls across the frame as if a latest update on the 24-hour stock exchange screen. The text feels authoritative, the catchall slogans one of the very few 'narrators' in the video.

The government that makes war on the poor is the enemy of the people and should be charged as criminals of war.

The green lettering at once impedes and acts didactically on our view of either a woman repeatedly smacking a piece of black fabric against a wall, or a table surrounded by hungry kids tapping feverishly on steel plates and bowls with steel spoons and butter knives. *Black Flag*'s audio rhythmically conveys the visuals of anarchy. The only subtlety is the separation of the three sections: "The Ambience" (which sets the context of his political interests at the time), "The Song" (a type of chorus strung together from various influences), and "The Concert" (the "call for revolt").<sup>9</sup> Texture is important in Kantor's video work, he uses three-dimensional boxes of text often closing in on the characters and quick-paced editing that often lets in tiny psychological synopses through fragmented body movements cutting across the screen. From the primary slogan of the video "Down with the government that starves us", a phrase used in Joris Ivens' (at one time believed to be a communist) propagandist films we could say that Kantor's concepts are rooted in ideals of Anarcho-capitalism,

<sup>9</sup> "The Ambience" chapter refers to the Mike Harris years and the artist's confrontation with "the oppressive forces of the machinery". "The Song" is performed by artist Jubal Brown and inspired by the writings of Kathy Acker and Joris Ivens films. The artist describes "The Concert" chapter as a "call for revolt". These chapter descriptions come from an unpublished conversation with artist.

often subverting objects like the flag, the monument, and the political slogan as means of disruption.<sup>10</sup> Kantor includes characters (similar to Trecartin's actors) performing as media zombies either reflecting the over consumption and hypnotic effect of technology, or citing poetic manifesto statements:

The morning was still as death, not a whisper of wind was stirring. The lake was like polished glass. Down with the government that starves us.

Are we starved of food, or humanity? What can we do after all your choices have been taken away? Kantor's work very literally suggests we can create chaos out of what has been forced onto us; television, concrete, machines and shiny objects meant to distract. I would venture to say that chaos is a monument within itself, filled with rejected ideas, and used as a weapon against a system that seeks to drown society. At a crucial point in the video Kantor is seen standing nude, folding and unfolding his body at the waist and on a small platform as if being displayed in a museum. Steeped in dark-humor, Kantor's ridiculous actions (i.e. squealing into a loud speaker while convulsing on the floor) are disorienting. He can at times appear as if a monolith and at other times a misbehaving clown. In *The origin of Monty Cantsin(s), a biblical novel* the artist writes about a monument he made:

I piled up all the junk he left behind, put his armchair on a table and stuffed it with all the junk I found, typewriter ribbons, photos, a mirror, broken polaroid camera, video reels, audio cassettes, letters, scrap metal, lots of neckties, guitar strings, children toys, books, bottles, a broken clock, some of my masks, made a red graffiti on the wall "MYTH" and "MONTY CANTSIN"<sup>11</sup>

Kantor's body is standing in as a mythical statue in *Black Flag*. If we all were to revolt and adopt the persona of Monty Cantsin – or the monument – there would be no empirical monolith. The irony is that Kantor's version of the monument is a relic of nothing, made up of every ridiculous piece of scrap in his immediate surroundings. Much like the dunce cap, knowledge is not retained in the object itself, but in the mind of the wearer. The suggestion of revolt is always present, and perhaps simply needs to be awakened through the freedom of a ridiculous act.

Buitenhuis' theatrics, Kantor's relic of nothing, Reeves' dysfunctional teens, and Trecartin's humiliation of earth's characters can be read as reflecting that which is not defined by a failure to uphold conventionality. These artists use boredom, anger, and chaotic nonsense as a productive method with which to work out ideas. All ideas are stupid until they become purposeful, in a sense we're all growing up stupid, the history of the so-called experimental, non-narrative, and avant-garde continues to grow through video making of today. Being innovative is beside the point; the guts are in the process. Penelope Buitenhuis, Istvan Kantor, Jennifer Reeves, and Ryan Trecartin's videos are complex works that deserve multiple viewings. They offer a kind of protest that is for the individual, not for the masses. They challenge the viewer in a way that would suggest total stupidity of the one who is willing to get close to the work only to become alienated by it. But they also offer a subtext completely visible – perhaps even progressive – if we chose to see it.

<sup>10</sup> Quote from unpublished conversation with artist: Kantor specifies that the origins of the quote is from activists. The artist has also completed a major work dedicated to the lifework of Joris Ivens which was commissioned by MonteVideo in Amsterdam in 1995. Anarcho-capitalism is an individualist anarchist political philosophy that advocates the elimination of the state and the elevation of the sovereign individual in a free market.– Wikipedia source

<sup>11</sup> THE ORIGIN OF MONTY CANTSIN(S) a biblical novel: Chapter 4, The Monument, Aug 25

## Growing up Stupid



**Programme Notes** “Non-narrative forms of video, using disorder, chaos, or the ridiculous subvert and revolt against overbearing structures such as war, mass-produced culture, and the rhetoric of power. Acting outside the bounds of social behavior is a way to at once distance oneself from society and history, and bring oneself closer to humanity, by communicating in a way that does not need language to be implicit or shared.”

Mireille Bourgeois, Ottawa, 2010

[view all 4 videos](#)

### Penelope Buitenhuis *Drawing Attention*

Buitenhuis speaks from the position of youth in critical interaction with a world from which they want to liberate. Due to the complex phrasing of simple poetic words that lure us away from linear narration and into an underlining web of meaning, the characters take the form of punk Shakespearians.

20:00 minutes, 1984

### Istvan Kantor *Black Flag*

Are we starved of food, or humanity? What can we do after all your choices have been taken away? Istvan Kantor's *Black Flag* very literally suggests we can create chaos out of what has been forced onto us; television, concrete, machines and shiny objects meant to distract.

9:00 minutes, 1998

### Jennifer Reeves *Skinny Teeth*

In *Skinny Teeth* two teenage punk girls disrupt the stepford stale air of an Ohio shopping centre, challenges the expectations of social class and normative behaviour.

7:00 minutes, 2001

### Ryan Trecartin *What's the love making babies for*

With Trecartin, we face a very nasty human condition; the video operates as a portal from Alice in Wonderland, connecting us with the morbid reality of earth's chaos.

20:00 minutes, 2003

## Biographies

### Mireille Bourgeois' Programme

 **Mireille Bourgeois** received a Bachelor in Fine Art in 2002 at NSCAD, and a Masters at the Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies in New York (2009). She has also independently curated/contributed to programs at the Eastern Edge Art Gallery, The NBCCD gallery, Electric Arts Intermix, Creative Times, Emerson Gallery and for the Canadian Museum of Civilization, as well as published critical writing in Visual Arts News, Creative Times Press, and C-Magazine.

 **Penelope Buitenhuis** was born in Toronto, studied at UBC and the Sorbonne in Paris, Penelope graduated from the Simon Fraser University film program in the eighties. In 1989, a retrospective of her shorts called *Guns, Girls and Guerillas* was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, JFK centre in Washington and in Berkley. Publications on her work include a lengthy piece in *Fringe Film in Canada*, by Mike Hoolboom. In 1990 Buitenhuis directed her first feature *Trouble*, a political rock and roll set in post-wall Berlin. The film won Best Film honors at Montreal Women's Film Festival and the Magdeberg Film Festival in Germany. Her NFB documentary *Tokyo Girls*, about hostessing and geisha in Japan, won two Geminis and two Leo Awards in 2002 and best doc at the Columbus Film festival. She is presently developing feature film projects *Midnight Climax*, *Punk Not Dead* and *Regenerate*. [www.penelopebuitenhuis.com](http://www.penelopebuitenhuis.com)

 **Istvan Kantor**, recipient of the 2004 Governor General's Award for Visual and Media Arts, also known as Monty Cantsin, open-pop-star, the founder of Neoism, "Self-Appointed Leader of the People of the Lower East Side," is an action-based media artist/subvertainer/producer, active in performance, robotics, mixed-media, installation, painting, sound, music, video and new media. Kantor was born in Budapest where he studied medical science. In 1976, at age 26, he defected to Paris and from there he immigrated to Montreal. He also received many awards among them the Telefilm Canada Award for Best Canadian Film and Video in 1998, in Toronto and the Transmediale Award in 2001, in Berlin.

 **Jennifer Reeves** (b. 1971, Sri Lanka) is a New York-based filmmaker. Her films have shown extensively, from the Berlin, New York, Vancouver, London, Sundance, and Seoul Film Festivals to the Robert Flaherty Seminar, Princeton University, and the Museum of Modern Art, and many independent cinemas in the US, Canada, and Europe. In late 2007 and early 2008, two major retrospectives of Reeves' films were hosted by the Kino Arsenal in Berlin, and by the San Francisco Cinematheque. Reeves has also been awarded a 2008 Media Arts Fellowship from Renew Media/Tribeca Film Institute, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, to develop a new experimental narrative feature FIRELIGHT SONG about the first female forest ranger in the United States. Reeves teaches film courses part-time at Cooper Union and the Bard College MFA Program.

 **Ryan Trecartin** is one of the most innovative young artists working with video today. Trecartin's fantastical video narratives seem to be conjured from a fever dream. Collaborating with an ensemble cast of family and friends, Trecartin merges sophisticated digital manipulations with footage from the Internet and pop culture, animations, and wildly stylized sets and performances. While the astonishing *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2005) has drawn comparisons to Jack Smith, early John Waters, and Pee-wee's Playhouse, Trecartin crafts startling visions that are thoroughly unique. (EAI)

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tel 416 351-1317  
fax 416 351-1509  
email info@vtape.org

[www.vtape.org](http://www.vtape.org)

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