FUSE MAGAZINE

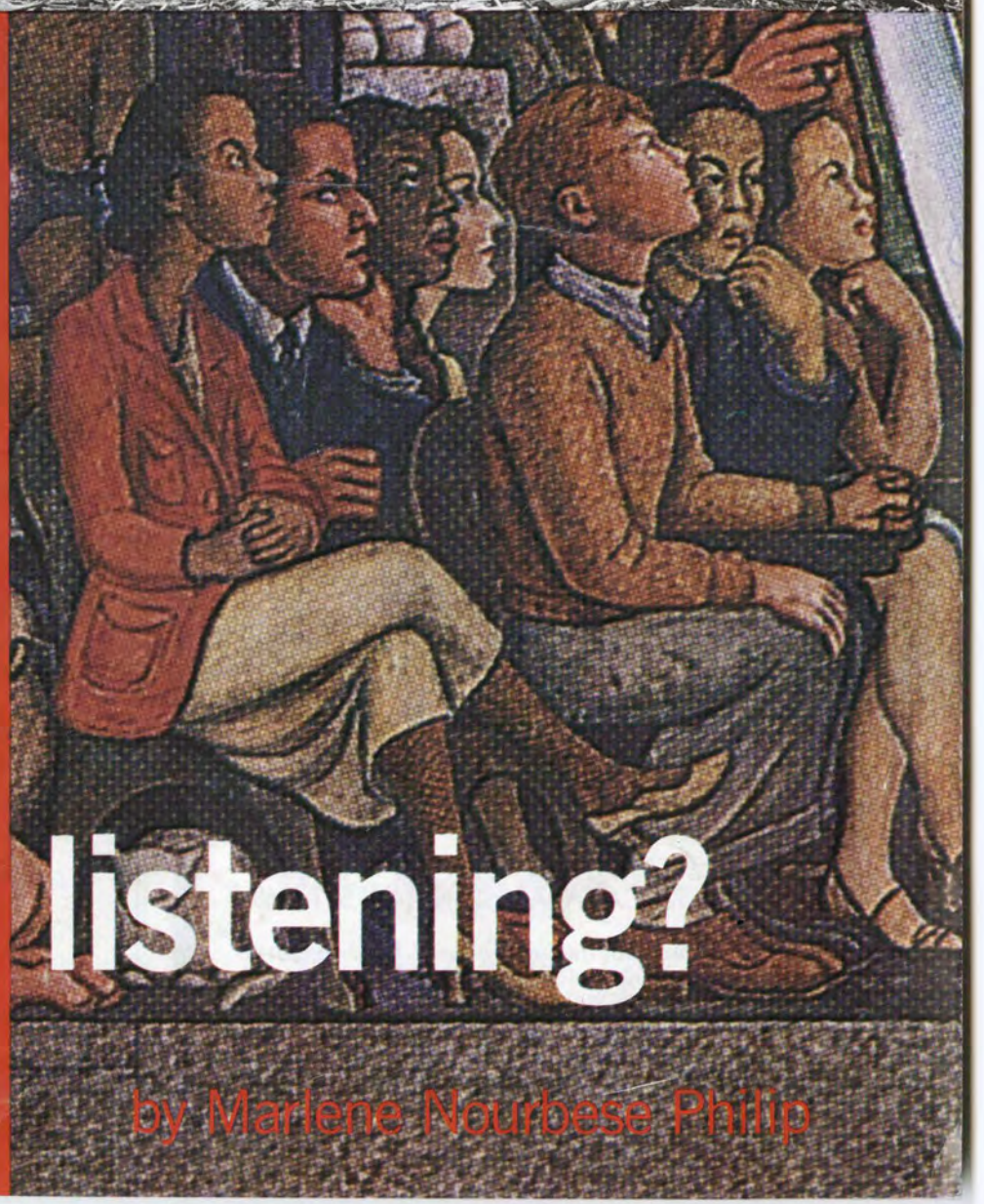
SEPTEMBER 1988 Nº 51
$3.00

making art in the state of TEXAS

a report from northern ontario by Lynne Sharman

Artists Audiences & Language

who's listening?



by Marlene Nourbese Philip

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FUSE
MAGAZINE
SEPTEMBER • 1988
VOL. XII NO. 1 & 2

FEATURES

14 **Who's Listening**
by MARLENE NOURBESE PHILIP
Thoughts on Artists, Audience and Language

25 **Making Art in the State of Texas**
by LYNNE SHARMAN
A Report from Northern Ontario
&
Fiddle Music, a story by JOSIE WALLENIUS

NEWS & REPORTS

2 **In Memoriam** by Lisa Steele
Lyn Blumenthal (1948-1988)

4 **Struggle Under the Umbrella • Spinning Sponsors • Son of Sold Out • No Deal, Eh? • Lock Out/Locked in**

8 **Lesbian and Gay Pride Day:** Dare to Wake Up

10 **Video News**

COLUMNS

12 **Coastal Lines** by SARA DIAMOND
The Boy's Club: Fear of Frying

32 **A Fair Day's Work** by KARL BEVERIDGE
Class Politics and Culture

ed to Fuck
MAN
A Winter Tan

Senses
R
a video interaction with

and the Ugly

chist Unconvention

Wonderful

t of the contemporary

battle cry and warning

KNIGHTS
Video and Labour at the Vancouver Mayworks Festival

47 **Hotline Hysteria** by NAOMI RICHES
A performance by Janine fuller and Shawna Dempsey provide a women's perspective on AIDS

48 **Feminist Voice Falters on the World Stage** by SUSAN FELDMAN
Harbourfront and duMaurier stage a world theatre festival

51 **Giselle From Hell** by GLENN COOLY
The Natural Ballet reworks a 19thC dance piece

52 **Index for Volume 11**
Listed by subject

56 **SPRAY PLAY**
Found art not lost on ***the Summit***

FUSE
MAGAZINE
SEPTEMBER • 1988
VOL. XII NO. 1 & 2

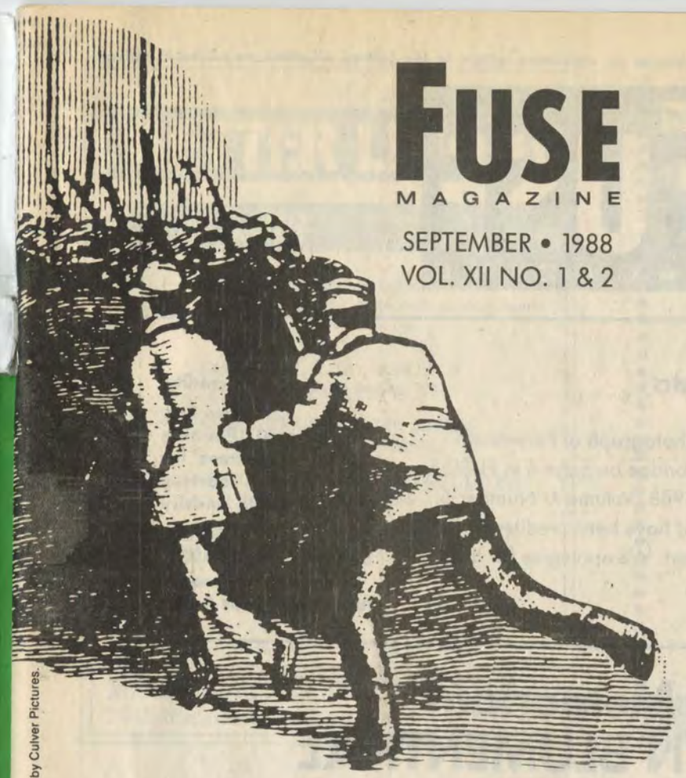

Illustration by Culver Pictures.

CONTENTS

NEWS & REPORTS

2 **In Memoriam** by Lisa Steele
Lyn Blumenthal (1948-1988)

4 **Struggle Under the Umbrella • Spinning Sponsors • Son of Sold Out • No Deal, Eh? • Lock Out/Locked in**

8 **Lesbian and Gay Pride Day:** Dare to Wake Up

10 **Video News**

COLUMNS

12 **Coastal Lines** by SARA DIAMOND
The Boy's Club: Fear of Frying

32 **A Fair Day's Work** by KARL BEVERIDGE
Class Politics and Culture

FEATURES

14 **Who's Listening**
by MARLENE NOURBESE PHILIP
Thoughts on Artists, Audience and Language

25 **Making Art in the State of Texas**
by LYNNE SHARMAN
A Report from Northern Ontario
&
Fiddle Music, a story by JOSIE WALLENIUS
(p 30)

REVIEWS

34 **Maryse Holder Liked to Fuck**
by SHONAGH ADELMAN
A sex positive take on **A Winter Tan**

37 **In the Realm of the Senses**
by GWEN McGREGOR
***Quartet for Deafblind**: a video interaction with deaf and blind children*

38 **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly**
by DOT TUER
Resistance at the Anarchist Unconvention

42 **How the West Was Wonderful**
by GARY KIBBINS
***Buck** reflects on the lot of the contemporary cowboy*

44 **Art in an Army Tent**
by RANDI SPIRES
***Northern Images** both battle cry and warning*

45 **It Works** by KAREN KNIGHTS
Video and Labour at the Vancouver Mayworks Festival

47 **Hotline Hysteria** by NAOMI RICHES
A performance by Janine fuller and Shawna Dempsey
provide a women's perspective on AIDS

48 **Feminist Voice Falters on the World Stage** by SUSAN FELDMAN
Harbourfront and duMaurier stage a world theatre festival

51 **Giselle From Hell** by GLENN COOLY
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52 **Index for Volume 11**
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56 **SPRAY PLAY**
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FUSE
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VOL. 12 NO. 1&2

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PRINTING
Delta Web Graphics, Scarborough

PUBLISHER
Artons Publishing

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Subscription rates: Individual $12 per year, Institutions $18 per year (in Canada only). For U.S. and elsewhere add $3.00. Decisions regarding who qualifies as 'individual' subscriber remain the right of the publisher. Printed in Canada. ISSN 0838-502X.

FUSE acknowledges partial assistance from the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, Ontario and the many hours of volunteer and partially paid labour which are provided by everyone listed on our masthead.

FUSE Magazine welcomes letters to the Editors. All letters are subject to editing.

FUSE MAGAZINE

Errata

The photograph of Persimmon Blackbridge on page 6 in FUSE, July 1988 (Volume XI Number 6) should have been credited to Laura Hackett. We apologize for this error.

Cover credits:

Mexico City (above) "Planting 'living forest trees' for profit" photo courtesy of Bill Lindsay

(below) Detail of mural by Diego Rivera, 1934. Courtesy of Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes,

In Memoriam
LYN BLUMENTHAL (1948-1988)

In 1976, Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield founded the Video Data Bank. Housed within the Chicago Art Institute, the VDB has become one of the most important collections of contemporary art documentation around today. Together, Blumenthal and Horsfield produced over 160 interviews with contemporary artists. The two were/are consummate interviewers. In an age where the interview descends to unimaginable depths of banality thanks to the trivial pursuits of Entertainment Tonight et al, the artists in the VDB collection actually engage with the audience. At a time when art theory and criticism threaten to develop a specialized vocabulary second only to geophysics, the artists in the Blumenthal/ Horsfield interviews talk smart and talk straight.

But Blumenthal's work didn't stop with these interviews, impressive as they are. In the early '80s, the Video Data Bank became a major distributor of video art, with over 400 tapes in distribution at present. Blumenthal's latest efforts were directed at the production of a series of compilation tapes of women video artists' work. Entitled "What Does She Want," this 6-tape series is packaged on VHS cassettes and is one of the first major initiatives aimed at direct marketing of artists' videotapes to the public.

Perhaps most important — as the reign of conservatism spins on throughout North America — is Blumenthal's commitment to progressive — and political — art. Always outspoken, often abrasive, she spoke up on behalf of content, focussed political critique, feminism, and the right of artists to make work with a "message." She was, ever, loyal to her friends. Lyn Blumenthal died in New York this summer. She will be missed.

LISA STEELE

IFVA AGM

Struggle Under the Umbrella

BY ROSS TURNBULL

VANCOUVER — If in the conception of "independent" film and video there is the implicit notion of struggle — for one's "vision," for recognition, for funding — then the core of the independent "movement" is surely found each year at the annual general meeting of the Independent Film and Video Alliance de la Video et du Cinéma Indépendent. Founded in 1980, the Alliance was formed as an umbrella organization to facilitate information-sharing amongst the Canada Council-funded film co-ops. Since then, the Alliance has broadened its mandate to address the interests and concerns of videomakers and organizations and has taken an increasingly active lobbying role on behalf of its members. It boasts at least one member group from every province and at last count represented over forty groups in total. Delegates from production co-ops, video access centres, distributors, exhibitors and one or two "commercial" companies with ties in the independent community, as well as individual artists, gather at each AGM to hash through the year's problems, talk with one another and build the links that provide us with strategies for answering the problems of funding, distribution and exhibition.

The Alliance AGM (held this year in Vancouver, June 2-4) also provides an opportunity for the community to see work from across the country. Traditionally, this has meant an indulgent, massive, free-for-all screening, usually lasting about four hours a night over three or four nights. This year, two curators (Paul Wong, video; Maria Insell, film) pared the screenings to ninety minutes of each medium over two nights. Entitled *In Absentia*, there was a definite feeling that an improvement had been made, even if all the problems of addressing the myriad production interests from across the country have still to be met.

In Absentia was a more conscious attempt than in previous years to go public, to draw on not only the conference delegates and their friends but on the broader arts-going community as well. A catalogue with curatorial statements and title synopses, a professionally produced poster and a concerted publicity effort contributed to a more dynamic, vital showcase than has been seen for some years. The curators were also anxious to have the show tour across the country, an excellent idea momentarily stalled for (what else?) lack of funding.

While the showcase can be held as an example of the vitality of the film and video communities, one can still see in the tone of the discussions at the AGM that this vitality is born out of difficult circumstances. The work is still made, by and large, on volunteer or severely underpaid labour. This is echoed in the organizations representing the work where, with one or two exceptions, part time work, the long hour/low wage syndrome and the resultant problems of turnover and lack of continuity are the norm. Inevitably, the discussion turns back to fundamental contradictions: for example, the emphasis at the various industrial funding agencies (say, Telefilm Canada) is by and large on the commercial, market driven "product," yet the demonstrably underfunded independent sector is "where it's at" in terms of talent and ideas. To connect the two was (is) the challenge and traditionally becomes the focus of many lobbying resolutions arising from the floor.

Effective strategies for mitigating these kinds of contradictions are invariably long term. The Alliance has therefore started to address itself to the Department of Communications, the funding agency for all of the various "money" bodies: the Canada Council, Telefilm, the National Film Board, etc. At the DOC, it is assumed, input at the policy level might initiate a change in attitude at other institutions.

An ongoing concern was raised regarding the National Film Board's overburdened Program of Assistance to Filmmakers in the Private Sector. The so-called PAFPS program, despite its popularity amongst filmmakers, has many, many anomalies and problems, not to mention that videomakers are completely alienated by a total lack of recognition at the Board. There are widely varying accounts of what one can obtain from PAFPS as a filmmaker as well. Individuals will never get cash, but may be eligible for various services, while the production co-ops which are also recipients of PAFPS largesse may get anything from film stock to cash to the services offered individuals. Consistent it's not.

It was pointed out that the NFB allocates something like .6% (yes, that's just over ½ of 1%) of its total budget to PAFPS, a paltry sum given the number of productions that it facilitates. This kind of ratio, between total money or services given and total number of quality productions resulting, is one that the independent sector must research and on which it should construct its arguments. The "market driven" types like to hear about things like cost efficiency, and you can't get much more cost efficient than the independent sector.

Overall, despite the problems of profile, access and funding, there was a consensus that the Alliance had solidified its infrastructure and is finally ready to address these larger concerns. The professionalism recently brought to the organization of the conference sessions, the videothèque, the showcase, and of course, the parties. ■

BUSINESS AND THE ARTS

Spinning Sponsors

BY CLIVE ROBERTSON

OTTAWA — On Saturday, June 18th two Ottawa artist-run centres, Galerie SAW Vidéo and Galerie 101, co-sponsored an event protesting the United Technologies' sponsorship of the Degas exhibit at the National Gallery. The event, organized by the Independent Artists Union (Ottawa), followed public "exchanges of opinion" surrounding the value of Hans Haacke's "Voici Alcan" work (also currently on display at the National Gallery).

First came the "moral outrage" from Alcan up to and including legal threats; then followed an attack by John Bentley Mays ("the artists' friend") accusing Haacke of "unsupported innuendos and veiled, undocumented allegations of wrongdoing," (*Globe and Mail*, June 14th, 1988).

The Ottawa TV media picked up on Mays' mockery and went looking for passers-by who might find the National Gallery an inappropriate venue for corporate critiques. (Haacke finally answered Mays in the *G&M* on July 23rd.)

Meanwhile, United Technologies Corporation (see *FUSE*, Bruce Barber, Winter 1987-88), second largest weapons manufacturer is cleansing its corporate self *and* picking up tax credits for arts patronage by sponsoring the Degas show. The Degas show is also being re-sponsored all over town through window displays, including the Bay, with United Technologies Corporation (UTC) sponsor-tags.

Board members from 101 and SAW as well as local IAU members talked with visitors outside the National Gallery and distributed 500 information sheets. Though there were instances of hostility ("you're lucky this is not private property otherwise you an' your garbage would be thrown out"), most gallery viewers were unaware of who UTC was and welcomed the information.

An editorial cartoon portraying the National Gallery's contradictory controversies appeared in the Ottawa *Citizen* (June 21st), while letters defending Haacke were published by the *Citizen* on the 20th.

Finally, Jim Manly, NDP-MP for The Islands (B.C.) made a statement protesting the UTC sponsorship from the floor of the House of Commons, and Pierre Francois Ouelette, Executive Assistant to the National Gallery's Director informs us that the National Gallery is currently reviewing an appropriate future sponsorship policy. ■

"HOW TO GET KNOWN AS A HOT COMPANY IN MILITARY AND SPACE SYSTEMS"

(United Technologies full-page ad in Aircraft magazine.)

*United Technologies Corporation is the second largest defence contractor in the United States occupying 7th position on the Fortune 500 index of corporate standing.

*UTC spends $12 million per annum in contributions, much of it to cultural institutions. Most of this money can be written off in tax breaks. The surplus value that allows for this corporate beneficence arises from,in the case of UTC and its nine operating groups (Canadian subsidiary, Pratt and Whitney included), military contracts.

*UTC's opinion editorials (propaganda statements) and their sponsorship of cultural events have been the target of many protests and boycotts in the US,England and Canada, e.g.American Folk Art exhibit.

Excerpt from information sheet supplied by protestors.

"So many think the solution is just to leave . . . Maybe the situation will change if people have the opportunity to speak."

Son of Sold Out

BY JOAN SULLIVAN

ST. JOHN'S — "No doubt about it — when a person speaks in their own words in their own way to an audience, there's a greater investment of emotion, a greater truth passed to the spectator than when I'm pretending I'm someone like Hadrian the Seventh."

Charles Tomlinson would know. At thirty-three he has had extensive theatre and film experience in St. John's and Toronto, and has spent the past year as an *animateur* at Resource Centre for the Arts. And he's about to see one of his personal visions take the stage in the artist-run theatre: a collective of unemployed teenagers presenting their own collaborative play.

"I knew there was a hard core music scene on the go, and I liked it. I thought the environment around it could be used to tell a story. It's definitely part of what Resource should be doing."

With funding from CEIC, Oxfam, PLURA (a coalition of local church groups) and the provincial arts council, the tentatively titled *Son of Sold Out* will run from August 23 to 28. Its cast will involve fourteen people, including musicians Sue Jackson and Jody Richardson, and actors Ashley Billard and Andrew Younghusband.

"This will include three or four people in a band," said production assistant and performer Eva Madden. The nineteen-year-old Concordia film student said that most of the actors will be even younger than she is and "everyone will write the lyrics and the music for the band, and the band will be involved in writing the script."

Besides providing the cast with employment, the play will give Newfoundland youth a platform for their problems.

"From the people I've talked to, one big thing is they don't want to leave Newfoundland, but they see nothing here for them. Almost no one has employment prospects," Madden continued . . . with this kind of show, they can talk about their own problems. A lot of people have no chance to express themselves, to say things. They were surprised and interested to know that they could write this themselves."

At the audition, interested actors were asked what they would say to the Premier if he was standing in front of them.

"We got some surprising answers, as you can imagine," said Tomlinson. But it was all part of the collective process, which could lead the script into a full-length, three act play, or a collection of skits.

"This type of work evolves much better through that collective process," said Tomlinson. "Adults have an image of what they want young people to be. A show like this enables young people to be themselves, in front of

continued page 6

adults. The process will be new to them, but not to Resource and not to me."

Resource makes a point of involving 'real' people in at least one production a year. Last year, *CODCO*'s Mary Walsh went to Northern Labrador and recruited some young Inuit people to write and tour with *Ntesinian (Our Land)*, a show about the erosion of Native lifestyles. Tomlinson directed one of the most successful and well remembered of these community productions, *The Burin Show*, which followed the real-life drama surrounding the attempted closure of the Marystown fish plant.

As *animateur*, one of Tomlinson's priorities has been to sustain, if not increase, this type of theatre. Another reason for this play is the emergence of young artists in the St. John's arts community. Billard and Younghusband are part of a comedy troupe that enjoyed a solid reputation for inventive routines before the members were finished high school. Richardson and Jackson have played with several high profile local bands, most recently *The Dirt Buffalos* (the name comes from a Gary Larson cartoon). Not to mention those interested in the visual arts, such as Madden, or a group made up mostly of teenagers who put together a May exhibition called *I.D.s Required*.

But these young people face the same problems as their less artistic friends: nowhere to study, nowhere to work.

"So many think the solution is just to leave," said Madden. "Maybe the situation will change if people have the opportunity to speak."

"It's not going to be *Colors*," said Tomlinson who will probably "do a Hitchcock" in the production. "We're not living in Los Angeles. We're living in the oldest city in North America, in the most beautiful place in the world, and we have specific problems. I think the biggest problem is linked to the question of so many people thinking that they have to go away."

Whatever form the show takes, it's certain to involve a lot of talent, a focus and a strong message.

"I want it to have amazing brilliance," said Tomlinson. "It's sure to have emotion and quality. A small group of people will feel empowered to speak their minds." ■

No Deal, Eh?

ANTI-FREE TRADE RALLY

BY BRUCE BARBER

HALIFAX — The June 12th nation-wide rally against the Reagan/Mulroney trade deal was the result of the combined efforts of hundreds of volunteers working as a loose network of groups in all of the major centres across Canada. In Halifax, the Metro Coalition Against the Free Trade Deal organized an ambitious rally under the banner "Not Sold Out Yet" at Dalhousie University's Rebecca Cohn Theatre. Under the direction of emcee John Dunsworth, the fourteen speakers and twelve performers provided an exciting evening's entertainment to an audience of some 700 people. The Coalition attempted to attract speakers from all sections of the political spectrum and managed to secure representatives from the academic community, business, labour, women's groups, the church and more traditional activist groups such as Ecology Action. The performers included veteran anti free-trader Don Harron, the Black a cappella group *Four the Moment*, *Jest 'n' Time Theatre*, Maritime folk music group *McGinty*, *Theatresports* and the popular theatre group the *Mulgrave Road Co-Op Theatre*.

To the obvious amusement of some in the audience, the evening opened with some good ole down home 'quintessentially Canadian' entertainment — square dances performed by *Jim Alguire and his Nova Scotia Square Dancers*. Thankfully this was followed with some hard hitting reflections on the effect the deal will have on the garment industry in Nova Scotia from Joanne Galley (Local Union President at Windsor Wear). The themes established in Galley's speech were taken up by many of the subsequent speakers: that this was a deal that would reinforce the inequities that already exist within Canada, and between Canada and the U.S.; that it would cause the closure of many small businesses; that it would cause massive unemployment; and that it would eventually lead to the erosion and subsequent destruction of many of our social programs, including those under health and welfare. Many of the groups (Jest 'n' Time, Theatre Sports and Mulgrave Co-Op) underlined these criticisms of the deal with humorous sketches of life in Canada "the day (or ten years) after."

Jest 'n' Time produced a gem of a performance which lasted for only a few minutes but which encapsulated, in an image worthy of Beckett, the subconscious fears in each of us — health and old age. An arthritic, elderly man slowly wheeled an elderly woman across the stage in a silent, stately manner. At centre stage the old man stopped the wheelchair and painfully applied the brake. He then moved around the woman, lifted up the safety bars, let down the step and offered his hand to her. The woman, equally arthritic, raised herself out of the chair, to be replaced by the man, while she took his place pushing the wheelchair. After his "expert" assistance in releasing the brake, they resumed their stately tracking across the stage.

There were several potent speeches given by the participants. Those delivered by Wayne Easter, President of the National Farmers' Union and P.E.I. Farmer; Chris Pekarik, Co-Director of Ecology Action; Phyllis Price, Women's Action Coalition of N.S.; and Mary Boyd, Social Action Commission, Diocese of Charlottetown Roman Catholic Church, stood out for their conciseness in dealing with some of the complex issues relating to the effects of the free trade deal. Pekarik was particularly eloquent, clarifying the multiple dangers associated with selling out our natural resources to the Americans, and reversing hard won environmental protection legislation in favour of increased profits demanded by U.S.-controlled businesses.

Corporatization as a major free trade topic was not fully addressed in the speeches. Apart from the references in Easter's speech to statements by Reagan suggesting that the deal would initiate "an economic constitution for the continent," few participants addressed the issues associated with the subordination of state power to private interests which is an underlying feature of the free trade bill. Most of the speakers endorsed the general principle of "taking the deal to the people" directly, as an election issue.

The number and timing of the performances did not allow for any interventions from the audience. Emphasis was placed on showing the flag, and revealing the extent of popular protest against the Deal. As such the turn out by Halifax standards was large. There was still a sense, however, that much work had to be done. The full airing of all the issues is still, it seems, beyond the scope of the local media, and few public forums on the topic have been held.

With the exception of Black poet Maxine Tynes and English Prof and writer Donna Smyth, who represented publishing issues, there was no representation among the speakers from the broader Nova Scotian cultural community. Perhaps the coalition felt that the cultural community was well represented in the performers. The absence of representation from the Nova Scotian Arts Coalition was conspicuous, particularly as this group has actively debated the negative effects the Free Trade Deal will have on local cultural industries. Still, as this first rally proved to the organizers at least, there is a solid base of opposition to the Reagan/Mulroney free trade deal within a number of constituencies throughout Nova Scotia, and there are many in this province who would endorse the words of itinerant anti-free-trader from B.C., Johnny Canuck who, travelling the country with his message, says, "No deal is a good deal . . . eh?" ■

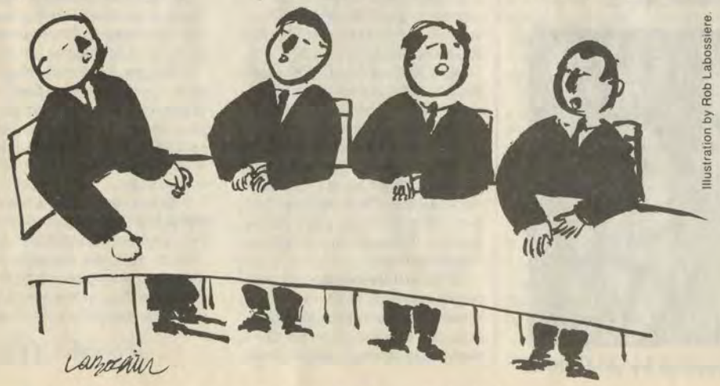
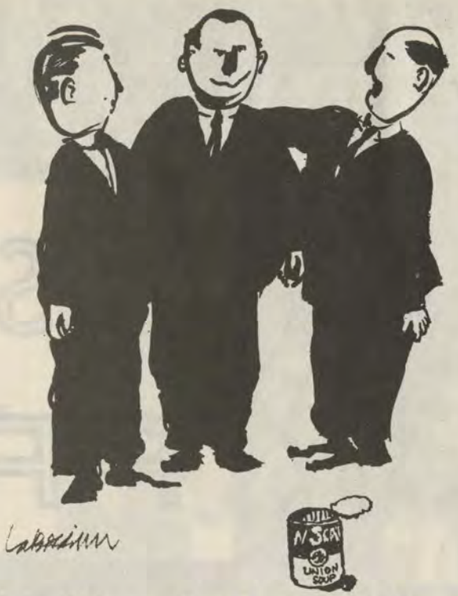


Illustration by Rob Labossiere



"The Board felt that, as part of your severance package, you might like to have one last kick at the can."

Lock Out Locked In

NSCAD BOARD PLAYS HOOKIE

Editor's Note: *Since this report was written, the labour dispute at NSCAD has been resolved, and the college will be opening as originally scheduled. During the negotiation process, the animosity between the two negotiating teams was so great that the mediator was obliged to conduct the actual communication; at no time did the two sides physically face each other. NSCAD President Garry Kennedy has two years left on his present contract, after which he will be leaving his position. The union, however, will also be actively seeking the resignation of two Board members whose "anti-union fantasies" are largely perceived to be exacerbating the problem.*

HALIFAX — In a letter dated July 1, 1988, and signed by Garry Kennedy, President of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, students at Canada's only degree granting art college were informed that the upcoming Fall semester has been cancelled. Already notorious for their 1986 attempt to deny standard employment protections to their faculty, NSCAD's Board of Governors have now managed to eclipse their own previous reputation. No other university Board in Canada has ever shut down a College as a negotiating strategy.

In October, 1986, it took a 20-day strike for Faculty to win the right to a grievance and arbitration procedure, academic freedom, fair hiring practices, and a structured salary scale. That first contract expired on July 1, 1988, and after only 10 days of bargaining for a second agreement the Board of Governors presented the Faculty Union with their final package of proposals and the ultimatum: sign or we'll cancel the Fall semester.

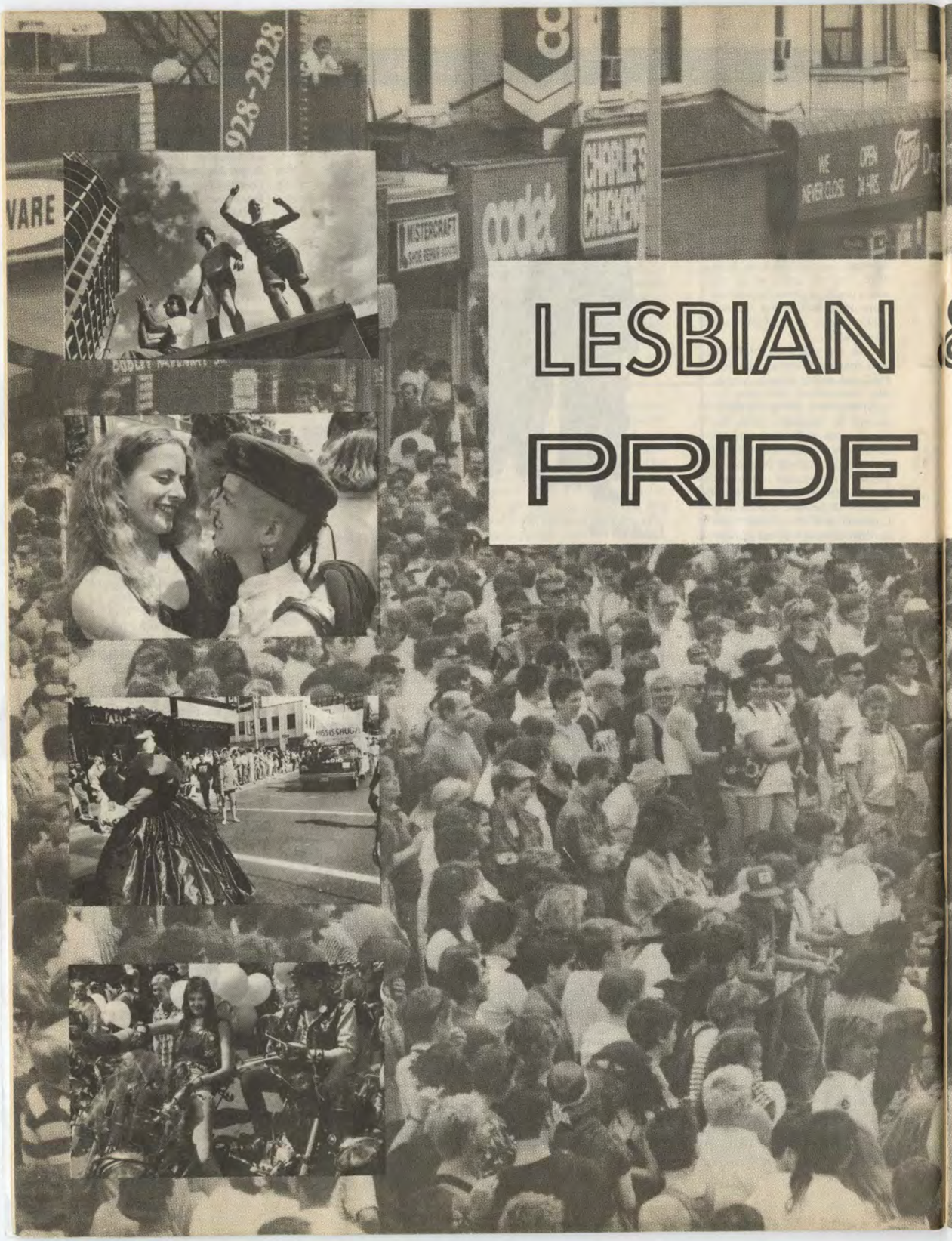
This arbitrary deadline was designed to precipitate a crisis where none existed. The Union is not in a legal strike position, no strike vote has been taken, and both negotiating teams were agreed that good progress was being made at the bargaining table. This ill-considered decision by the Executive of the Board of Governors to close the College is seen by students and faculty alike as a violation of the Board's role as public trustees of an educational institution. The Board has irresponsibly threatened the best interest of the College community.

Under this threat, NSCAD's art and design majors have discovered that they also have a talent for political action. Students at the College were quick to respond with emergency information meetings, a protest march, government lobbying, and a petition demanding the resignation of the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors and members of the administration. In addition, the Canadian Federation of Students has provided the NSCAD Student Union with legal assistance in order to seek a Nova Scotia Supreme Court injunction forcing the College to hold fall registration as originally scheduled. Courts have previously ruled that a university calendar constitutes a legally binding contract to provide students with a complete program of study.

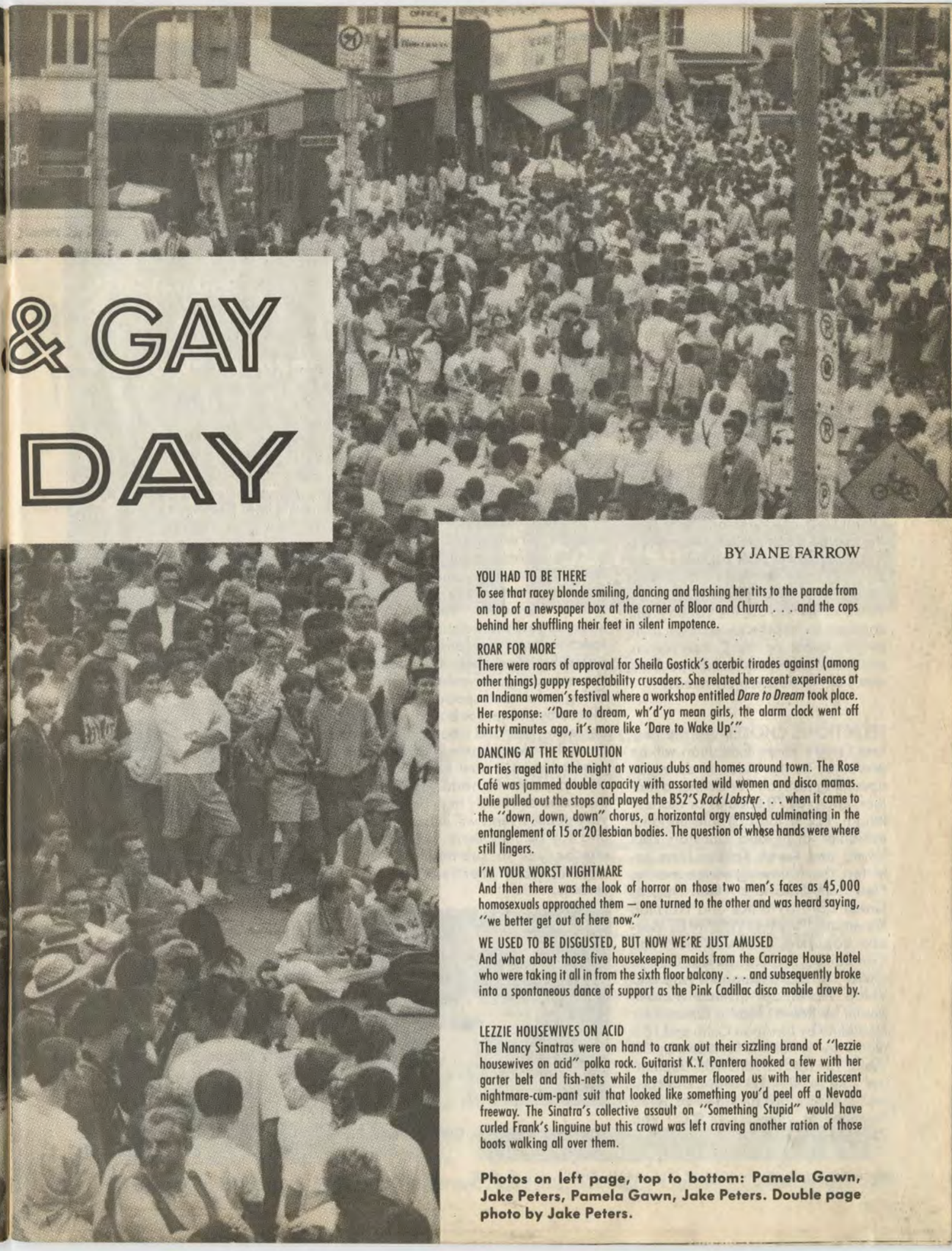
In the spring of 1987, the Union certified a second bargaining unit representing Technical, Gallery and Library Staff. After 10 months of negotiations, Unit II now faces the possibility of layoffs even before their first contract is signed. In an unfortunate replay of the faculty's first round of negotiations the academic support staff are still struggling to achieve what other universities would recognize as standard articles on job security and salary equity.

With an enrolment of approximately 500 students, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design offers undergraduate programs leading to the Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Design, Bachelor of Arts in Education, as well as graduate degrees in Art and Art Education. Faculty and graduates have distinguished themselves internationally and have earned NSCAD the reputation of being one of Canada's most valuable art and educational resources. Once again, it's clear that NSCAD's reputation for nurturing new ideas does not extend beyond the classroom into the Boardroom. Hopefully, the art community, government officials, and other university faculty across Canada, will not allow a few Board members to take advantage of their public trust in order to act out their personal anti-union fantasies. ■

—A Halifax Correspondent



LESBIAN & GAY PRIDE DAY



BY JANE FARROW

YOU HAD TO BE THERE
To see that racey blonde smiling, dancing and flashing her tits to the parade from on top of a newspaper box at the corner of Bloor and Church . . . and the cops behind her shuffling their feet in silent impotence.

ROAR FOR MORE
There were roars of approval for Sheila Gostick's acerbic tirades against (among other things) guppy respectability crusaders. She related her recent experiences at an Indiana women's festival where a workshop entitled *Dare to Dream* took place. Her response: "Dare to dream, wh'd'ya mean girls, the alarm clock went off thirty minutes ago, it's more like 'Dare to Wake Up'."

DANCING AT THE REVOLUTION
Parties raged into the night at various clubs and homes around town. The Rose Café was jammed double capacity with assorted wild women and disco mamas. Julie pulled out the stops and played the B52's *Rock Lobster* . . . when it came to the "down, down, down" chorus, a horizontal orgy ensued culminating in the entanglement of 15 or 20 lesbian bodies. The question of whose hands were where still lingers.

I'M YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE
And then there was the look of horror on those two men's faces as 45,000 homosexuals approached them — one turned to the other and was heard saying, "we better get out of here now."

WE USED TO BE DISGUSTED, BUT NOW WE'RE JUST AMUSED
And what about those five housekeeping maids from the Carriage House Hotel who were taking it all in from the sixth floor balcony . . . and subsequently broke into a spontaneous dance of support as the Pink Cadillac disco mobile drove by.

LEZZIE HOUSEWIVES ON ACID
The Nancy Sinatras were on hand to crank out their sizzling brand of "lezzie housewives on acid" polka rock. Guitarist K.Y. Pantera hooked a few with her garter belt and fish-nets while the drummer floored us with her iridescent nightmare-cum-pant suit that looked like something you'd peel off a Nevada freeway. The Sinatra's collective assault on "Something Stupid" would have curled Frank's linguine but this crowd was left craving another ration of those boots walking all over them.

Photos on left page, top to bottom: Pamela Gawn, Jake Peters, Pamela Gawn, Jake Peters. Double page photo by Jake Peters.

VIDEO NEWS

Kim Tomczak

THE ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL has just announced David Craig of Halifax, Nova Scotia as the successor to Judy Gouin for the position of Film, Video, Photography and Media Arts Officer. Mr. Craig has recently been involved in the production of Bill MacGillivray's feature film entitled *Life Classes*. Previous to that he was the director of Eye Level Gallery, an artist-run centre in Halifax. David Craig will assume responsibilities for this rather large portfolio in the fall of 1988.

THE MEDIA ARTS SECTION of the Canada Council has just announced the end of their tape fund program, citing a lack of funds from the feds as the reason. The tape fund was set up to assist artists producing video tapes by supplying them, on request, with up to six hours of blank tape stock. Video artists across the country will continue to feel the squeeze on their pocket books as the Conservatives continue to deny the funds the Canada Council desperately needs.

SELECTIONS CHOSEN for the Feature Length Video Exhibition will be presented by the Video In during its upcoming festival. FLV defines a feature length as 70 minutes or more in length. FLV is the first international exhibition of its kind. Curators Paul Wong and Karen Knights have selected the following video works: *New York Batavia* by Rien Hagen, *Green Card* by Bruce and Norman Yonemoto, *Playing With Fire* by Marusia Bociurkiw, *Gertrude Stein and Companion* by Ira Cirkir, *Out of Order* by the Birmingham Film and Video Workshop, *Tristesse Modele Reduit* by Robert Morin, *Quartet for Deafblind* by Norman Cohn and *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like* by Bill Viola. The festival runs from September 15th to 18th. For more info contact the curators at Video In, 1160 Hamilton St., Vancouver B.C., V6B 2S2, (604) 688-4336.

Photo by Katie Thomas.

Still from *Say It*, Cherie Moses and Coleen Finlayson, 1987.

LAURELS go out to the filmmakers, videomakers and organizers of two recent film and video exhibitions. *Images 88*, a Festival of Canadian Film and Video held in Toronto, and the Independent Film and Video Alliance's show entitled *In Absentia* held in Vancouver, refused to acknowledge the jurisdiction of their respective Provincial censor boards by not submitting their selections to these quasi-government agencies. Citing unfair and special restrictions placed by the censor boards on their art forms, film and video artists continue their long battle against prior censorship as it now exists in many provinces in Canada. Hopefully these two extremely high profile and very public events will illustrate once and for all that there are positive alternatives to submitting to the questionable practices of state censors.

Photo by Katie Thomas.

Still from *Why You, Why Anyone*, Ric Amis, 1988.

TIME TO SUBMIT your tapes to the 17th Festival international du nouveau cinema et de la video Montréal. This is a large, well attended festival with work from all over the world. Video categories include fiction, documentary, animation, experimental and art. Unfortunately they require an entry fee. When you enter your tape write them to let them know your feelings on entry fees; 3724 boulevard St-Laurent, Montéal, Québec, H2X 2V8, (514) 843-4725.

WHAT DOES *SHE* WANT is the title of an interesting video project organized by Lyn Blumenthal of the Video Data Bank in Chicago. The VDB has put together six compilation tapes, packaged in artist-designed sleeves (Lynda Barry, Barbara Kruger and Nancy Spero) and aimed at the home market. Each cassette is individually titled and includes: *We are not sugar and spice and everything nice, Fact is Stranger Than Fiction, Bad Attitude, A Crack in the Tube, Variety is the Spice of Life* and *Women With a Past*. To quote the promo material for the series, it features "thirty of the most innovative women working in film, video and the performing arts into one groundbreaking collection." If you can ignore that the selections are exclusively American it's a very good attempt at compiling a lot of important work into an attractive format. If you want more info on WHAT DOES SHE WANT, contact the Video Data Services toll free number 1-800-634-8544.

IN SIGHT is Edmonton's first festival of Women's Film and Video. This three day event will showcase films and videos made by Canadian and international women directors, both shorts and features. The Festival will take place from Oct. 28th to 30th, 1988 and you can get more info from In Sight Film and Video Festival, Women's Program, 11019 - 90 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2E1.

COASTAL LINES

THE BOYS CLUB

Boy: n. (plural, boys.) Male child, strictly until puberty, loosely until 19 or 20; person who retains taste or simplicity of boyhood . . .

Club: n. Association of persons united by some common interest meeting periodically for co-operation or conviviality . . . and having premises for resort, meals, temporary residence, etc.

Club: v. Beat with club; bring into mass, contribute money, ideas to common stock. (v.i.) combined together for joint action, making up a sum.; (Mil.) get one's men into a confused mass.

by Sara Diamond

Consider the definitions. Rumour has it that the institutional setting of contemporary art in the city of Vancouver (comprised of art galleries, teaching institutions, and more established artist-run centres) and the international representation of that production is controlled by a small, masculine, highly organized and certainly articulate breakfast club, known as the boy's club. The actual membership of the club remains uncertain, although it is purported to include instructors from the major art faculties, leadership figures from the local public galleries, as well as a number of established pundits from the parallel gallery system. Nor is it clear whether or not the club continues to meet officially.

Yet the boy's club exerts a pressure on two levels — as a networking function for a layer of established male artists, and as a shifting, flexible structure designed to maintain and expand art world power. And call it what you will, some girls want the keys to the clubhouse.

It would be wrong to define power itself as the problem, for power is a constant in all social interactions. The dynamics of its exchange reflect, contain and potentially transform established social relations. Nor is networking the problem. The parallel gallery system has established a networking system for the experimental reaches of Canadian art, and the women's movement has based itself on strong grass roots communication. A generation now in its forties developed at a time when artists were seizing the reins of exhibition, criticism, and production — exerting control over the entire art system, a process from which we have all benefited.

The difficulties arise through the manner in which power and the processes of networking are formalized and exercised. There are legitimate questions that must be asked of all clubs or networks: their tendency (however initially progressive) to exclude; what transpires in the movement from the margins of power to a more centralized form of control over institutions; and the extent to which a policy of cultural democracy is manintained once a relatively high level of power has been established.

Like a kingdom, the boy's club is hereditary, a part of the baggage of Western culture (a cynic could perhaps reduce Western culture to an endless parade of boy's clubs). Male avant-gardes strut their stuff like peacocks, battling it out on the terrain of an all-too-familiar art history. Initially conceived as an oppositional practice, it can rapidly — ironically, through success — be re-absorbed only to re-emerge, is if miraculously, at the centre.

An essential element in boy's clubs' survival is their ability to reproduce themselves. Like a guild, the masters select their apprentices who are groomed and sent out to do battle in the name of the Father. The original boy's club is kept vital while making its retreat to the upper echelons of the art world, a world reproduced in their image. Once there they can organize conferences such as the recent series on the post-war period in painting sponsored by the U.B.C. Art Department, with assistance form the Emily Carr faculty. The conferences, despite their rigour, were exclusive both of women speakers (with few exceptions) and of feminist perspectives on this critical period. An examination of sexual as well as political reaction would have helped to account for the difficulties faced not only by women but other artists as well. The practice of individual women who were part of the modernist school would have at least validated the existence of women artists, and revealed the difficulties working within a dominant critical paradigm not particularly sensitive to their concerns. The final poster in the series featured an image of a youthful, all-male sports team (in case we didn't already get the point).

What is disturbing is not the success experienced by male artists of a middle generation, but rather the lack of similar recognition for a parallel group of women. For example, Joey Morgan, Vancouver installation and performance artist, is one of the few younger women artists to have had a solo exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Gathie Falk and Betty Goodwin, both deserving senior

FEAR OF FRYING

artists and the no-longer-living Emily Carr represent other exhibitions of women's work. Of the 1987 VAG acquisitions, approximately 2% were works by women. Place this against the recent and planned exhibitions of Ian Wallace, Jeff Wall, Chris Dikeakos, Vincent Trasov, Michael Morris, and the curatorial or programming initiatives by Hank Bull, Eric Metcalfe, Serge Guilbaut. This is not to discount the importance of any of these individuals, but it is to question the lack of equal representation in a period when women artists have been increasingly prolific. And the VAG is no worse than other public institutions across Canada.

Clearly, sexual characteristics are not the basis on which to judge curatorial acumen or artistic ability. What is frustrating is the ability of the art system to understand this after 15 years of feminist intervention. Structures of exclusion are at best unconscious and at worst dismissive; in either case it requires imagination and faith to resist cynicism and continue to do battle for those who have been excluded. And this latter group extends beyond white women working within a traditon of Western culture.

Women artists have done their time in the fight for recognition, whether through constructing their own venues such as Women in Focus, through artistic collectives such as Worksite, or through intervention within Parallel galleries. Feminism is cited at the level of works, as a body of theory or as a cultural strategy at the margins. Discourses parallel to feminism emerge, however, bearing a similar rhetorical flavour but which speak from a different community and a different voice. These parallel discourses allow institutions to ignore the pressures applied from the margins — a disregard which only stops when institutions are directly confronted with a feminism rooted in activism as well as theory, one able to make concrete demands on these institutions' resources. I am not suggesting that the boy's club step aside in false humility; the community as whole should bear the responsibility of correcting the problem.

Nonetheless, the dinosaurs are rumbling in Vancouver. While overall the number of women instructors in post-secondary institutions is actually declining, more women teachers are being hired in art programs, women's studies programs are being established in art colleges, and regular feminist programming is beginning at the Vancouver Art Gallery.* The danger here is the familiar one of tokenism, expressed in the attitude that those who continue to ask for more are unreasonable, and that the guys really do understand what the problem is and have it under control. It remains a problem, however, to have only one woman on the curatorial staff of VAG, even if the entire boy's club can recite Griselda Pollack standing on their heads (although that would certainly be fun to watch). Feminism must remain a living movement. ■

*The recent modernist controversies series organized by Jeff Wall through VAG featured major women writers such as Rosilind Krauss.

Illustrations by Tony Hamilton

who's listening?

artists

audiences

& language

If no one listens and cries
is it still poetry
if no one sings the note
between the silence
if the voice doesn't founder
on the edge of the air
is it still music
if there is no one to hear
is it love
or does the sea always roar
in the shell at the ear?*

by Marlene Nourbese Philip

Male, white and Oxford educated, he stands over my right shoulder; she is old, black and wise and stands over my left shoulder — two archetypical figures symbolizing the two traditions that permeate my work. He — shall we call him John-from-Sussex — represents the white colonial tradition, the substance of any colonial education. Abiswa, as we shall call the other figure, represents the African-Caribbean context which, typical of any colonial education, was ignored. She is also representative of a certain collective race memory of the African.

*Nourbese Philip, Marlene, Anonymous, *Salmon Courage*, Williams Wallace, 1984.

Neither of these archetypes individually represents what I would call my ideal listener or audience. John-from-Sussex has always represented his standards as universal, but they all — with the exception of excellence which knows no race or class — bore the trademark "Made in Britain." Abiswa, through an artificially imposed ignorance which I have tried to correct, I know too little of. To partake in her wisdoms requires a different process from the one learnt from John-from-Sussex, and requires that one trust the body which together with the mind forms one intelligence. This was not what John-from-Sussex was about.

There has been a recent shift — since the completion of two manuscripts of poetry* — in my positioning of this audience of two: John-from-Sussex has become less substantial, more of an apparition; Abiswa has emerged even more clearly from the shadows. Bridging the split that these two archetypes represent is a difficult process: each represents what the other is not — each is, so to speak, the other's Other. A dialogue between the two is essential.

All of this may seem an unusual introduction to the issue of audience, but since I believe that each artist (artist here and throughout this piece is used inclusively to refer to all disciplines) has an ideal audience — made up of one or several individuals — lurking somewhere in her psyche, it seemed appropriate. These 'ideal' audiences have, I believe, some bearing on the real audience the artist and/or her work seek or find.

If we take the example given above, for instance, both John-from-Sussex and Abiswa have some rooting in a certain reality which faces me whenever I write — often, if not always, making choices around language, not to mention place, both of which inevitably impact on audience. If I use John-from-Sussex's language will Abiswa and her audience understand and vice versa? Which audience is the more important? Which do I value most and from what perspective? Will Abiswa even care to understand a piece such as this? One audience may have more economic clout than others, and one, certainly in my case, offers me a more profound emotional and psychic satisfaction. And some may ask: why choose at all — why the need to have to choose any audience?

Unless the writer creates only for herself there comes a time when she must become aware, however vaguely, that there exists such an animal as an audience. It may only be an awareness that operates at a very basic level of trying to determine who will come out to a poetry reading, installation or display, or who will buy books, but it begins to make itself felt. And often the artist may only be aware of who her audience is not — often more predictable than who it is.

Audience is a complex and difficult issue for any artist particularly in today's world where any sense of continuity and community seem so difficult to develop. It becomes even more complex for the artist in exile — working in a country not her own, developing an audience among people who are essentially strangers to all the traditions and

*She Tries Her Tongue, (awarded the 1988 Casa de las Americas prize for poetry), and *Waiting for Livingstone*.

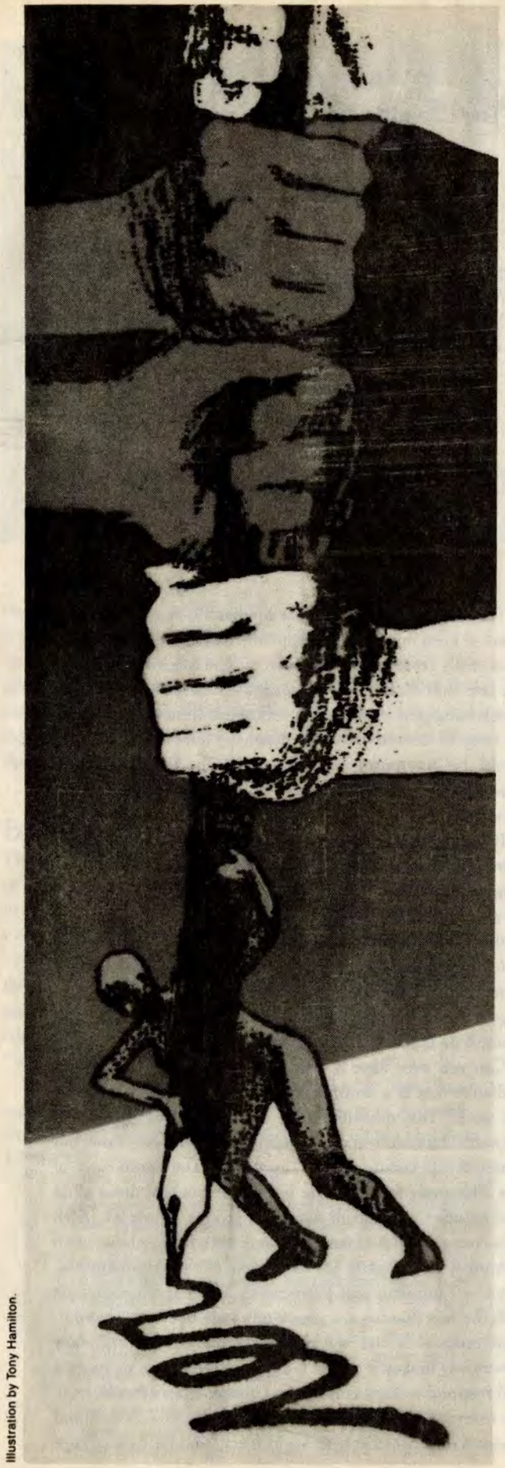


Illustration by Tony Hamilton.

continuities that helped produce her. Scourges such as racism and sexism also work so as to create a profound sense of alienation resulting in what can best be described as psychic exile even among those artists who are not in physical exile. The Canadian-born black artist, artist of colour, or the white lesbian artist for example, all face dilemmas over audience similar to that of the artist who has more recently — relatively speaking — arrived in this country.

It is as well to note that legal citizenship in no way affects the profound and persistent alienation within a society at best indifferent, if not hostile, to the artist's origins, her work, and her being. Many of us remain immigrants in a profoundly psychic sense. Some of us recognizing this, choose to emphasize that alienation — it appearing a more positive position. This latter position, however, results in all sorts of contradictions when it comes to funding and meeting funding requirements. Where the immigrant worker is required to have Canadian experience, the immigrant artist must show the Canadian component in her work to qualify for funding.

Even for those who have managed to adapt to Canada, there still remains the fact that much of their work will continue to draw on the imagery, rhythms, the emotional resources developed in their countries of origin. This was how an Australian painter described the issue for her: "As an artist you use certain reference points which have a bearing in a different geographic location — unless the viewer knows what these reference points are, there is no comprehension beyond organization of the work in terms of shape, form and colour." A more blatant example of this problem lies in the different sense of colour that countries have. A Jamaican artist described how her colours became more muted and sombre when she painted here in Canada.

Which Canada do I speak of — the West or the East? Urban or rural Canada? These are important questions since most immigrants come to the large metropolitan areas and that is where many artists attempt to carve out a niche, however uncomfortable, for themselves. My experience is with the urban East — Toronto to be more specific, and is that of a black, female writer. I do not pretend to speak for all of Canada, and although my experience may be easily transferable, only the audience of this piece will be able to judge whether that is so.

I cannot and do not intend to provide any definitive answers on the issue of audience for those in exile (by exile I mean not only those of us who have physically come to this country, but the many, many others who count themselves as in exile for any number of reasons, in this society). I don't think there are any definitive answers and I am not even sure whether the questions I pose are the right ones for anyone else but myself. What I want to do, however, is raise the issues and questions, reveal the contradictions as they have affected me and others like myself, and see where, if anywhere, they take us. More than anything else, what follows is a meditation on the issues of audience.

Reception, Response and Completion

One of the most important impulses in all art is, I believe, the impulse to communicate; this in turn depends on reception and response for completion of the work in question. The late Raymond Williams, the Marxist critic, wrote as follows: ". . . in the case of art, where simple consumption is not in question, no work is in any full practical sense produced until it is also received." How then is work from communities that appear marginal to the mainstream, with what Williams so aptly describes as their "emergent energies" completed — that is, received and responded to, both by audiences of the more dominant culture, as well as audiences that comprise the artist's natural community? A few examples will best highlight this dilemma.

The Rez Sisters. I saw this play several months ago among a predominantly, if not completely, white audience. Everyone appeared to enjoy the play tremendously, yet I was uncomfortable. Uncomfortable because although I was convinced that what I was watching was an authentic and successful attempt to portray one aspect of native life on the reservation, I felt that the audience, which was, in fact, a settler audience, was being let off too easily. I felt that they could, and I am sure they did, leave the theatre feeling that "reservation life wasn't so bad after all." Those who were feminist could comfort themselves with the remarkable strength of the women. I was equally convinced that a native audience would complete that play in a very different way — they could and would be able to contextualize much more completely the events that played themselves out before them. They would not leave the theatre as comfortably or as comforted as did the white audience.

So too with *The Coloured Museum* which also played to full houses of predominantly white people. Here was a powerful, painful, and at times funny collage of black American life over the centuries. There were many scenes that were "funny" which I laughed at, but my laughter was always tinged with pain represented in those opening scenes on the slave plane — a pain that circumscribes my history. Why were they laughing? Were they laughing at the same things I was laughing at, and if their laughter lacked the same admixture of pain, was it laughter which, having been bought too cheaply, came too easily? Were they, therefore, laughing at me and not with me?

These are but two examples, there are several others that elaborate the same issue; they raise complex issues around marketing and audience. *The Coloured Museum*, for instance, was never advertised in the black newspapers which is where many black people get their information about activities of relevance to them. Tarragon Theatre, however, did not need to advertise in the black press to fill its house. Do they, indeed, have an onus to do so when they are staging black works or works that relate specifically to a particular group in this society? *The Rez Sisters* played first at the Native Centre on Spadina, then returned for a run at a more mainstream theatre.

The Canadian-born black artist, artist of colour, or the white, lesbian artist, for example, all face dilemmas over audience similar to that of the artist who has recently — relatively speaking — arrived in this country.

These examples raise issues applicable to all disciplines of art — even music, which appears to be the discipline that most easily crosses cultural barriers. The lyrics and music of the late Bob Marley were wrought and wrested out of the unrelenting poverty and grimness of the Trenchtown ghetto; he sang of better times for black people when Babylon would be no more. How many North Americans who "grooved" on his music cared to understand this or even cared?

It is a truism that we each complete a novel, play, poem or painting differently depending on factors as diverse as age, gender, class, and culture. What concerns me is the ever present danger that a white mainstream audience in Toronto is likely to come away from a play like *The Rez Sisters* or *The Coloured Museum* with none of their stereotypes shaken or disturbed, which is not necessarily the fault of the playwright. He or she may have written the play in question with a native or black audience in mind.

Can you ever have a valid completion of a work by an audience that is a stranger to the traditions that underpin the work? This question leads us back to that dichotomy between dominant and sub-dominant cultures — the old "mainstream versus margin" argument. The significance of this dichotomy for this issue lies in the fact that those of us who belong to those sub-dominant groups — women, Africans, peoples of the formerly colonized world — have been rigorously schooled in the traditions of the dominant cultures — European and patriarchal. This experience along with the fact that we are constantly immersed in the dominant culture of the world — still patriarchal and now American, makes it much more possible for us to receive and respond to work from these cultures than it has been in the reverse. We are at times better able to understand and respond more positively to works from the dominant culture

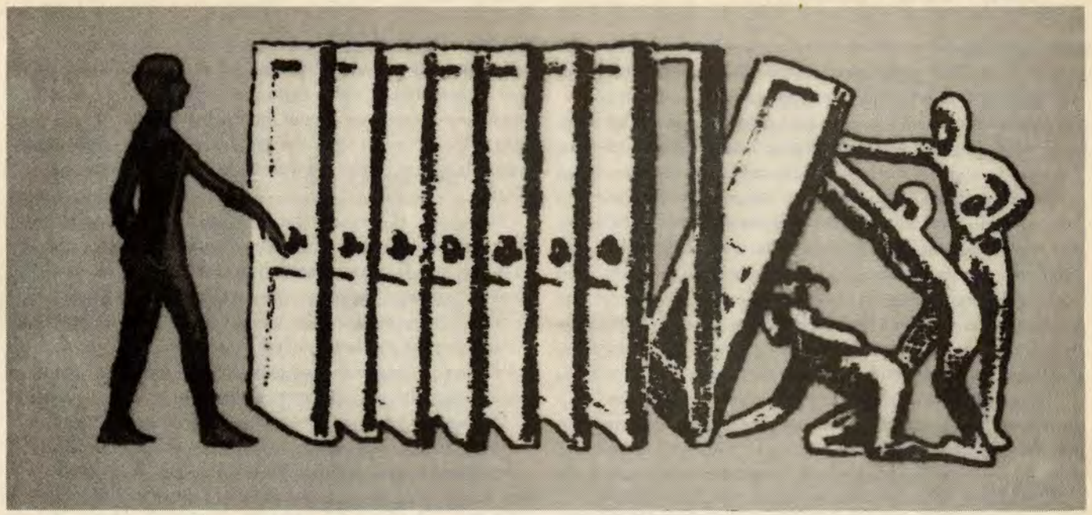


Illustration by Tony Hamilton.

than we do to work coming out of our own traditions — such is the pernicious effect of sexism and colonialism. Could we, however, argue that education offers one solution to this problem? Possibly, but we would do well to remember that the education of colonized peoples — I include women in this group — has traditionally been closer to brainwashing than to education.

Exotica/Nostalgia

Those of us from hot, moist parts of the world (sex-positive cultures as I have recently seem them described) who work in traditions originating in our countries of origin, face the ever-present danger that our work may be considered and categorised as "different" or "exotic." Not understanding the tradition and standards, the audience, including critics and reviewers, suspend the practice of criticism, replacing it with wonderfully meaningless adjectives like "great" or "wonderful."

Another kind of reception and response is best illuminated by the following excerpt from a review of an anthology, *Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada* edited by Lorris Elliott.

> European literature has benefited from black writers such as Aesop, Pushkin, and Dumas. American culture has incorporated the voices of Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alice Walker, Marge Piercy, or Imamu Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones). But Canadian blacks, like Canadian whites, still do not know if they are coming or going with their identity problems. *Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada*, edited by Lorris Elliott, is a collection of poetry, prose, and drama without any direction beyond herd instinct.
>
> The very word "other" in the title is a dim bulb in regard to visible minorities. It cues the reader (black, white or other) to expect stereotypes. That is exactly what follows. "Nigger," "fight," "pain," "passion," "cause," "rage," "tears": the language falls predictably flat — though the suffering motivating the outpourings is very real. A few entries break through the barrier of boredom to move a heart and mind willing to open this anthology, which could have been an important book.*

Apart from revealing a profound ignorance — writers like Pushkin and Dumas did not write as black men, but as Europeans, and to parallel their experiences with that of American black writers serves neither experience well — the quotation reveals the latent racism always at work in Canada. By attempting to parallel the experience of Canadian whites and blacks, the reviewer seeks to dissemble his racism: "Canadian blacks, like Canadian whites, still don't know if they are coming or going with their identity problem." He exculpates, under the guise of "objective criticism," the white Canadian audience including critics and reviewers like himself for their massive failure to understand the history and traditions of racism that would give rise to the use of words like "nigger," "fight," and "pain."

What is, however, even more instructive of the issues I raise in this section is the imagery the reviewer approved of and selected to quote as examples of the better work appearing in the anthology: from *Market in the Tropics*, "Mangoes/ Tamarinds/ . . . wild meat on hooks," and from *The Profile of Africa* which "expresses the sensuous beauty of blackness" (sic), "the beautiful, strong, exotic in profile/flowering lips/silhouette obsidian planes. . ." These poems may very well have been the better ones (not having read them I make no comment on them here), but it is, in my opinion, no accident that these are the poems and the imagery that the reviewer believes "saves the volume from being another boohoo job." The sensuous beauty of blackness — I could write volumes on this subject — is a far more

*Ray Filip, *Books in Canada*, October, 1987.

appealing image for most whites than an angry black man or woman. While I acknowledge writing about one's anger and pain without appearing to descend into rhetoric, polemic, and cant is difficult, to dismiss the work of writing attempting to bring a long tradition of struggle against racism into literature as another "boohoo job" is racist in the extreme.

Ignorance and laziness. These are the qualities at the heart of both kinds of responses described above — the over-eager response reserved for anything in the slightest bit different, or its dismissal.

The welcome change in this picture comes from the attempts now being made by feminist critics, some of whom have finally begun to assess critically the works of women from other traditions.

The nostalgia factor presents another conundrum for the artist in exile — particularly those, like immigrants, in physical exile. The "natural" audience for such an artist is the audience from "back home." So starved, however, is this audience for anything remotely reminiscent of "home" that it accepts uncritically anything that reminds them of it. This is what I mean by the nostalgia factor.

The need to maintain continuity and traditions is a powerful one with all groups; it is a need which is assuaged in the articulation of many mainstream art forms — the ballet, opera, Shakespearian drama. The more newly arrived (relatively speaking) are not the only ones who indulge in nostalgia.

There is, however, a danger for the artist — the danger of falling into complacency. In my case, for instance, coming from the Caribbean where the use of demotic variants of English (dialect) is widespread, use of dialect is an immediate entry into the hearts and minds of a Caribbean audience. In such a context the audience is less concerned with what the artist is doing with his or her discipline, provided their need to be reminded of "how it stay" back home is met. If the artist is content with this response then a sort of stasis results which is fatal to any growth on the part of the artist. But audience response in this context is powerful, seductive *and* difficult to turn one's back on for the less tangible, less certain rewards of "growth" or "practising one's art seriously." I do not suggest that the last two goals are incompatible with a strong audience response — they should not be — but they often mean the audience has to do some work as well, and nostalgia appears far more comfortable with entertainment rather than with art.

Audience and Language

The choice facing a writer from Eastern Europe or Italy or Latin America is a stark one: work in your mother tongue and — at least in Canada — be restricted to an audience sharing a similar linguistic heritage, or work in English with the potential of a much wider audience — minus your natural audience.

For the writer from the English or French Caribbean the two official languages of Canada are also their languages. English is "theoretically" as much my mother tongue as it is for a writer from London, Ontario. But we know differently, and my experience with English encompasses a very different experience from that of the English-speaking Canadian. Like the writer from Eastern Europe, we too have a nation language (dialect) which is, however, a variant of English.

The choice of language for the Caribbean writer can, therefore, be as stark as that outlined in the first paragraph in this section. If you work entirely in nation language or the demotic variant of English, you do, to a large degree, restrict your audience to those familiar enough with it; if you move to straight English you lose much of that audience and along with it an understanding of many of the traditions, the history, the culture which contextualize your work.

Language has been and remains — as the South African example shows — a significant and essential part of the colonization process; the choice between nation language and straight English becomes, therefore, more than choice of audience. It is a choice which often affects the choice of subject matter, the rhythms of thought patterns, the tension within the work. It is also a choice resonant with historical and political realities *and* possibilities. In the dotting of my 'i's, ending words with 'ing' instead of 'in,' making my verbs agree with their nouns, I am choosing a certain tradition — that of John-from-Sussex. My audience for the most part is going to be a white audience and possibly an educated black Caribbean audience. However, in order to keep faith with Abiswa, I must, within my writing self, constantly subvert the tradition of John-from-Sussex. This doesn't necessarily enlarge my audience to include the less formally educated speakers of nation language — on the contrary it probably reduces that segment of the audience since the work becomes more "difficult." It does, however, I hope, leave whatever audience there is less complacent and less comfortable with things as they appear to be.

What concerns me is the ever present danger that a white mainstream audience in Toronto is likely to come away from a play like *The Rez Sisters* or *The Coloured Museum* with none of their stereotypes shaken or disturbed, which is not necessarily the fault of the playwright.

Community, Audience, Market

Raymond Williams writes that "our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change." Toronto is a city of many communities which individually meet the above description; these communities do not, however, make up a larger community — particularly in the arts where there is undeniably a dominant culture — "a central system of practices, meaning and values."

The artist has always been sustained by community even if it was a community he or she rebelled against. Within traditional societies there was, and is, a constant dialogue between audience and artist. When, for instance, the African "commissioned" a piece of sculpture from a village sculptor (usually for spiritual reasons), he or she had a very clear idea as to what satisfied them and what was a good piece of sculpture: they exercised aesthetic judgements. So too in European cultures where the artist was in dialogue with the community in terms of its traditions, they shared or understood values, even if the understanding was but the first step to rejection.

Within the larger grouping of community then, the artist may find her audience where she could find a "hearing" and with which she might be in some form of dialogue.

"Market" on the other hand suggests a role for art as a commodity with all the trappings of that representation we have come to expect — manipulation of the market; selling the product — art — as investment and/or fashion.

There is a certain connectedness between these three apparently disparate groupings — audience, community, market — at the centre of which is the artist. Bringing them together raises certain contradictions and issues. Is, for instance, audience synonymous with market? Can you have an audience but lack a market? To answer the last question: as a black writer I may have an audience for a novel about black people — that audience being those black peoples who are eager to read of themselves as well as a growing number of whites who have begun to come to the understanding that other worlds apart from theirs exist. It is, however, clearly the opinion of publishers in Canada that there is not market for books about black people: they believe that whites are not interested and that blacks either do not or are unable to buy books. Therefore there is no market for books about black people. Despite the audience I may have, the perceived market forces, interpreted with a sizeable dollop of racist arguments, supercede.

That a popular art form — dub poetry — has been able to widen the audience for its poetry is, I believe, because of the welding of the black oral and musical traditions. The strongest African art form to survive outside Africa among its diasporic peoples has been its music; it is the most pervasive and persistent. In the case of the dub poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson, one of the first proponents of this style, the poetry was written in the nation language of Jamaica and underscored with reggae rhythms. Canadian dub poets, also using a demotic variant of English, have not restricted themselves to these rhythms, but use a variety of others. They are essentially protest poets working in the powerful oral and musical traditions of Abiswa.

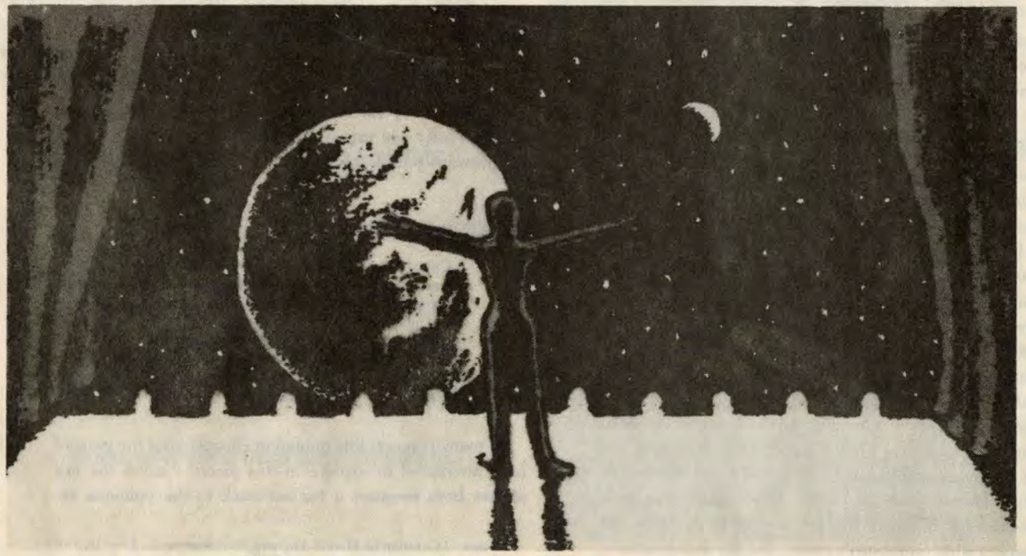


Illustration by Tony Hamilton.

The crossover mechanism between black and white audiences in dub has been the music. As the earlier example of Leonard Cohen showed, music serves the function of drawing those audiences who would rather be dead than caught at a high art gathering — the poetry reading. And whether white audiences "get" the same message blacks do from dub is not known. (In some instances the language must present a barrier to complete understanding.) That white audiences "get" something from dub is clear — one only has to look at the audiences that attend various events to know that, which may mean that the question is irrelevant. But not necessarily so since the artist's audience does provide some challenge if only in terms of expectations. And that audiences often have a tendency to want only more of what pleased them before cannot be denied. The dub poet *may*, therefore, have to make decisions as to which traditions to emphasize — the one more familiar to black audiences, or those with which white audiences are more comfortable. Not having discussed this particular issue with any dub poets, it may all be irrelevant to them — as an observer and writer, however, the issues fascinate me.

While it is not very difficult to increase the average size of a poetry audience — I have counted as many as ten bodies at some of mine — the audience for dub has increased this average substantially. It is still, however, not a mass audience — there rock music still reigns supreme.

An artist with a market has little need for community. The reverse, however, is not as assured — the artist with both community and audience but no market will undoubtedly starve, unless someone supports her. The market with its forces can be a positive factor provided it underpins the forces created by audience and community. The market becomes a negative force when it replaces or obliterates audience and community, or even more dangerously, determines "our way of seeing things" and replaces the "process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes" with the process of commodification.

The Audience on the Margin

As mentioned above, Toronto is a city of communities alongside the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. Many of these communities share very little with each other except residence in the same city. Many would describe these communities as marginal to the dominant one. I have great difficulty with the concept of marginality as it is ordinarily articulated: it suggests a relationship with the dominant culture in which the marginal is considered inferior and assumes that the marginal wishes to lose its quality of marginality and be eventually absorbed by the more dominant culture. Margin, however, has another meaning which I prefer to hold uppermost in my mind when I work as a member of two groups — blacks and women — traditionally described as marginal. That meaning is frontier. Surely this meaning is encapsulated in Williams' phrase "emergent energies and experiences which stubbornly resist" the dominant culture. Frontier changes our perception of ourselves and the so-called mainstream. All of which is not to deny that there is a dominant culture with a "central system of practices, meaning and values" (Williams). And this culture receives by far the lion's share of funding and government support. However, by exploiting the other meaning margin offers, I believe, another perspective, one which challenges the old lazy ways of thinking by which we have colluded in our own management. To twist the aphorism — marginality is in the eye of the beholder.

Many of these communities on the frontier are communities under stress. In the case of the black community, for instance, there is always the issue of racism as well as issues flowing from economic depression within the community. Artists with audiences within such communities often become spokespersons for the community — this is an activity very much in keeping with the role of the poet in African cultures where he (traditionally) was the voice of the community. In our more contemporary situation the issues are many and complex: should the artist take the audience as she finds it and reflect its views and demands, or is there an obligation on the artist's part to change the audience? Is the artist sharing with or challenging the audience or both? And what of the Canadian audience — does the artist from the community on the margin/frontier have an obligation to teach such an audience their practices may be affecting other communities? And does culture change political realities any?

In the South African situation events have rendered many of these questions irrelevant; there the African dramatist, poet, novelist, painter have all been drafted into the struggle — willingly or otherwise. Njabulo S. Ndebele, the South African writer in an issue of *Staffrider* writes: "The matter is simple: there is a difference between art that "sells" ideas to people, and that art whose whose ideas are embraced by the people, because they have been made to understand them through the evocation of lived experiences in all its complexities. In the former case, the readers are anonymous buyers; in the latter they are equals in the quest for truth." These opinions offer one way of approaching the issues raised in the previous paragraph.

Feminism and Audience

> Cut off from his natural audience, Angueta has to imagine a public for himself, and is unsure how much he can take for granted at either the linguistic or the cultural level.
>
> The 'pitfall' for the writer is that of becoming over simple or over-didactic, as the writer strives to inform a foreign audience how things are in his country rather than being able to *share with them feelings about experiences that have a common base*.* [My emphasis]

In many respects this quotation encapsulates the issues I have attempted to explore in this piece. I stress the last phrase both because it harked back to the opinions expressed by Williams and Ndebele and because it provides me with an entry into the issue of feminism and audience.

*Review of Cuzatlan by Manlio Angueta, *New Statesman*, Dec. 11, 1987.

There is much that I find to criticize in the articulation of Western liberal feminism which is what feminism has come to mean in the West. The movement has been racist and classist in its practices although there have been some tiny tremors and even some cracks along these lines. This is not to suggest that the movement in monolithic — quite the contrary; but its diversity and variety may be its weakness as well as its strength. It is, however, a movement which in my opinion has the potential, often unrealized, to bridge some of those gaps — race and class for instance — isolating communities and audiences. It could, in some instances promote that "common base" through which experiences might be shared.

The common base for women is a shared history of oppression in all its varieties and forms, as well as, I hope, a shared commitment to establishing communities organized along non-partriarchal, woman-centred, non-racist principles. While wishing to avoid reductionist arguments as well as those body-centred theories which become at times tiresome, we must acknowledge the fact that the basic common denominator of female experience in all cultures and in all classes has been the fact that our bodies have achieved a universal negative significance — bodies which have become palimpsets upon which men have inscribed and reinscribed their texts.

Feminism alone, however, is not the answer: we can hardly afford to jettison theories of class analysis. With modification and development in the face of change, they continue to offer indispensable insight into the arrangements of society; we need to continue to hone our arguments and analysis of the powerful workings of racism. While it is not *the* answer, feminism could make important and significant contributions to helping to resolve some of these issues — black and white men, for instance, are certainly not talking to each other about race, class — or anything for that matter.

The welcome change in this picture comes from the attempts now being made by feminist critics, some of whom have finally begun to assess critically the works of women from other traditions.

Illustration by Tony Hamilton.

who's listening?

Feminist communities are ad hoc in many cases, but there is feminist audience and market. Thoughts of the recent Montreal Book Fair come to mind. It is a market which differs in some degree from the traditional mainstream market. It is not in the words of Ndebele a market selling ideas to the people but one trying to evoke the lived experiences of women. It is a market which is still plagued by racism and classism, but it is a market which has grown out of a need on the part of women to know about their selves, their histories and their futures; a need to communicate about feelings and experiences that have a *common* vis-a-vis the *same* base; as well as the need to find out about other women.

We are a long way from a true feminist community, and even further away from a true feminist culture — one that would not, as it has tended to do, emphasize one aspect (white, middle-class) of that culture, but a culture in which the word feminist is enlarged to include those groups which have, to date, been excluded. When that is accomplished — the establishment of a true feminist culture — we shall be a long way toward having audiences who are able to complete in a more authentic way the works of artists whatever their background.

Working in Canada as a diasporic African writer, I am very aware of the absence of a tradition of black writing as it exists in England or the U.S.A. The great Canadian void either swallows you whole or you come out the other side stronger for it. The writers here are, in fact, creating a tradition which will be different from both the English and American traditions of writing and literature. Being the trail blazers for other writers to follow has never been overwhelmingly difficult and daunting for it has often appeared that there is nothing out there. And that has been an accurate observation — for a long time there *was* nothing out there. As one dub poet described it, he felt he was responsible for everything — not only did he create the work, but he published and marketed it, as well as developing an audience for it.

All artists working in the tradition of Abiswa have felt this burden — even those Black artists working more closely within the tradition of John-from-Sussex have felt it. But there are changes — the audience for newer genres like dub and hip hop are growing not only among black people but also among whites. These are two forms in which Abiswa's heritage can be most clearly seen and strongly felt. Subversion of the old order which, in fact, was not order but chaos masquerading as order, and the new old order is alive and well in Abiswa's hands and in our art, writing and music. There is an audience for it.

In keeping faith with Abiswa we find that many of John-from-Sussex's audiences are deserting in droves to seek the wisdom and vitality of the former. If revenge is what is called for this may be the best revenge; it is also the way of reconciliation between these two traditions. It is the audience which helps to mediate this process.■

Marlene Nourbese Philip is a Toronto writer.

making art in the state of TEXAS

REGIONAL TOE TAGS

"Northern Ontario is large . . . it covers 3/4 of the province, and is bigger than the state of TEXAS. The distance from Kenora to Toronto is equal to the distance from Toronto to Florida."[1] People in Northwestern Ontario refer to Southern Ontario as THE EAST. They don't refer to other parts of Canada unless they are from AWAY.

a report from northern ontario by Lynne Sharman

Responding to the Proposal from FUSE:
Patterns of Cultural Production Outside of the Major Urban Centres (A Northwestern Ontario Perspective)

Because the phrase 'OUTSIDE' of the Major Centres was used, one can only assume that patterns described are going to be regarded as peripheral, curious, marginally equated with the elderly/Indian/disabled/female in any given community. OUTSIDE looking in on what?

Photo by Josie Wallenius.

Rebecca Belmore, non-Ojibway performance artist, hitch-hiker.

The Challenge

Trying to describe Northwestern Ontario patterns of cultural production without using Toronto as the point of corporate (read: 'cultural') contra-activity. When it becomes necessary to refer to Toronto, the phrase '*poodle power opens the door to Japan*'[2] comes to mind.

We Are Looking At The Globe

We don't have time to look in on the major centres. The global trend is to use genocide to reduce foreign aid debts, and we are dodging pieces of fallen sky.

Margaret Atwood

The North focuses our anxieties. Turning to face North, face the North, we enter our own unconscious. Always, in retrospect, the journey North has the quality of dream. The South is moving North.[3]

Does That Mean The Dream Is Dying?

No. It means the globe is dying.

Time Lag & Dented Cans In The Basement

The first artist-run gallery in Texas was formed in Thunder Bay, a year ago. It was named by Rebecca Belmore, but not without a fight from some local artists. They wanted to call it "Northern Lights." Rebecca, however, was adamant, and the vote swayed in favour of DEFINITELY SUPERIOR. She is Ojibway, but wants us to forget that.

It is difficult to forget when you listen to her stories. Like many other young Indian people, Rebecca lived in Thunder Bay as a boarding student during her high school years. She and two other non-white, non-homeowners lived in a basement room, and were given food from dented cans . . . margarine, while the "family" upstairs ate butter. The money paid to the "family" by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs for their "keep" paid the mortgage. One of those three girls in the basement went to the Ontario College of Art, and wants us to forget that she is Ojibway.

Making Up For Lost Time

There could have been an artist-run gallery here ten years ago. The Ontario Arts Council is now on a "Search & Destroy" mission (infusion of funds) because Texas is trendy and the opportunity for the creation of new, and probably foreign, trade routes are limitless.

The Ministry Declares War on Streams and Water

There is the curious sense that cultural commodities produced here in Texas are going to by-pass Canada and go directly to Tokyo, as if they had never existed. A representative of the Ministry of Culture & Communications, Linda Loving, will help us fight this "*war*" (to prevent a non-commercial Texan cultural identity from developing) — " . . . we are *fighting* an image of Canada. *Enough streams and water and send your kids to camp!* We want to create an image of a province that can handle progress and technology, and that has a cultural identity." Excuse me?

C'mon Felix . . .

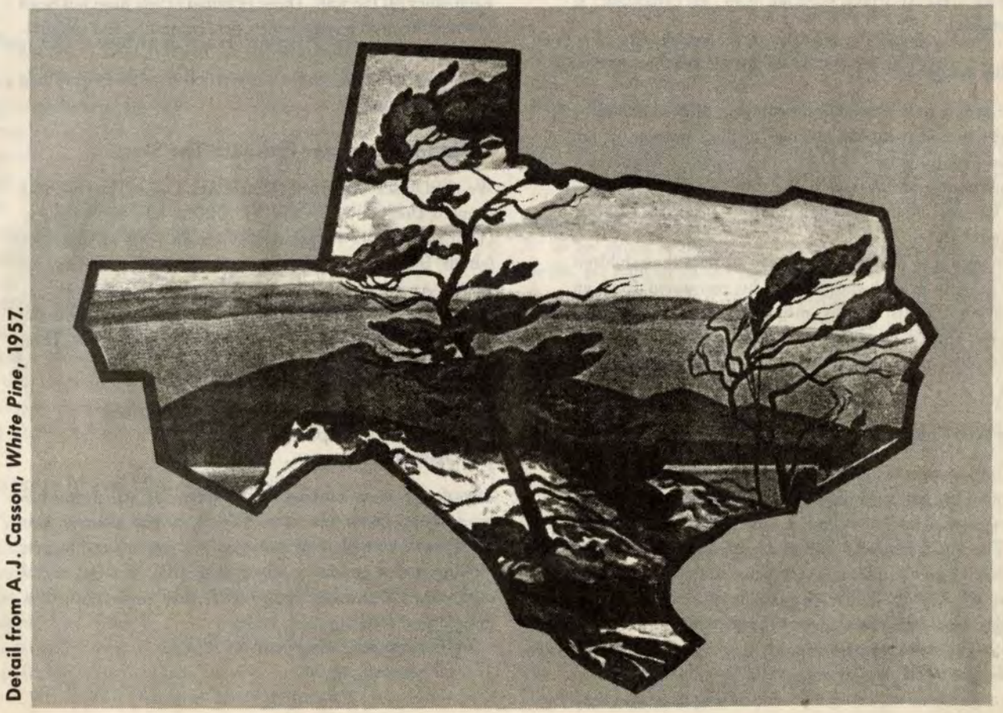
Felix Partz, a member of General Idea, shares the bureaucrats' view. "*It seems to be snowballing. It works. It's image building. What do Japanese think of Canada? Anne of Green Gables, Banff and maybe a bit of Niagara Falls. But we make satellite dishes, not just birchbark canoes.*"[5] General Idea makes satellite dishes? C'mon Felix. *Everybody* knows that birchbark canoes are MADE IN JAPAN . . . always have been. So are the keychains with chiefs and braves dangling from them . . . Rebecca used to see them for sale in the Upsala gas station, and wonder where they came from . . . who *made* the souvenirs? It wasn't Indians . . . her family wasn't a souvenir . . . they were alive, living . . .

Star Maker

Rebecca Belmore has taken to the highway . . . West . . . hitch-hiking, with a fishing rod and a miniature camera on a keychain. (Both were made in Taiwan.) She was Ontario Arts Councilled by the best of them. It took OAC nine months, from the time of Rebecca's "discovery," to drive her out of Texas . . . on foot. She was making young Indians in Thunder Bay (a great many of them boarding students from remote and reserve communities) not only proud to be Ojibway, but staring to feel SUPERIOR.

Her footsteps now leap from asphalt to strangers' cars . . . heading West. Snap. Snap. Catch up with her in another province.

What Are They Planning To Do To The Rest Of The Ojibway People? (Let's talk racism in Texas . . .)



Detail from A.J. Casson, *White Pine*, 1957.

The South African Ambassador was invited to Thunder Bay on July 5th, as the guest of the Jaycees and the Rotarians (breakfast and lunch respectively). The Jaycees' invitation stated that "Canadians are getting an unbalanced view of a very complex country . . . we do believe that the Canadian sense of fair play demands that Johannes De Klerk (South African Ambassador) be given the opportunity to speak and to respond in person to questions by *concerned Canadians*."

Who Are These Concerned Canadians?

Thunder Bay has the highest rate of single family home ownership in the country. There is a great deal of community pride (*if* you have a two-car garage, your kids wear Club Monaco clothes and Reebok shoes), English is your first language (*if* you aren't disabled, elderly, Indian, a single parent,or unemployed).

Thunder Bay is the biggest suburb north of Etobicoke. There are more shopping malls and fast-food restaurants per capita than one would believe possible in a city of just over 100,000 people . . . in the middle of nowhere.

The Safeway grocery stores have talking check-out computers. Cashiers gesticulate soundlessly, rendered as mute as the decimated boreal forests outside the city limits. Everybody and everything is stamped with a bar code — expiry date non-negotiable. The similarity of Texan (global) existence to the 21-30 day shelf life of an "art exhibition" is unmistakable.

Media Access

The morning and afternoon newspapers (differentiated by the selection of cartoons) are part of the Thomson chain. *The* television station and *the* radio station (commercial, non-unionized) are owned by the same man, Fraser Dougall. We get cable TV from Detroit, just like Gander, Newfoundland.

Although it is not true, taxpayers suspect that children carry guns to school and have to be restrained from an educational bulls-eye by militia-originated teaching methods. The kids don't carry handguns to school . . . but the 6 o'clock news says they do. This is *not* Detroit. It is Texas.

Who Are The Best Art Teachers In Texas?

The Ojibway people are the best art teachers in Texas. Effie submitted two assembled works for "Alcohol and the Non-Commercial Artist." She hadn't "exhibited" anything before. The works showed dark-haired children drinking from beer bottles with nipples . . . text included the phrase, "We are out of control." Babies and small children on reserves are given beer and other liquids to keep them quiet by their drunk and despairing parents.

Effie told us she was moving out of Thunder Bay, to help build a new reserve. I stupidly said, Effie, I hope you keep making "art." She just looked at me and said, "Oh, but I will. When I am clearing the bush and building my house on this new reserve I will be making art every day. Art is how you live."

She wants to be chief. How about Prime Minister.

Isn't There An Indian Art Centre In Thunder Bay?

The Thunder Bay Art Gallery calls itself the "Centre for Indian Art" when they send exhibitions down to Ontario Place . . . but there are no Indians on the Board of Directors.

When the Thunder Bay Art Gallery exhibits "travelling" shows from the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the generic Prairies, another name change occurs, and the institution transforms itself into the "Thunder Bay National Exhibition Centre." In the case of AGO and ROM exhibitions, the "National" exhibition centre divests itself of both the need to pay fees to living artists *and* to show contemporary works.

There is a half-hearted move toward showing recent work by regional artists. This is accomplished by giving two local artist-friends a hallway or partitioned area of the gallery and having their incompatible (but highly crafted) work blast each other off the wall. These regional artists have not been granted the professional courtesy of contracts, and scheduling commitments have been vague. In short, local artists are not shown the same respect that a left-over AGO travelling exhibition is given.

Definitely Superior Picks Up The Slack

We want to see Texan art. Ontario Arts Council has recently granted Definitely Superior $15,000 to take up the slack. (That amount pre-supposes 100 person years of volunteer labour by the handful of non-commercial producers in Texas.) And that means we won't have *time* to make art . . . just keeping the alternative to pre-packaged shows from the AGO and the ROM breathing will burn everybody out. Then the tidy boys and girls will move in.

Then We Will Hit The Road And Follow Rebecca's Example And Go West (to Upsala anyway . . .)

In order to keep making non-commercial art, producers have to eat. Income is derived from various sources: janitorial work, tree-planting, retiring, being an injured logger, nursing, social assistance, modelling, UIC, cooking, social work, detox shiftwork, being married to someone with a straight job, clerking . . .

And of course, selling your art . . .

Photo by Bill Lindsay.

Effie Zoccole, making art at the Seine River 22A Reserve.

What We Need Is A Marketing Plan!

Now that Definitely Superior has received operational funding from Ontario Arts Council, the heat is really on to meet "standards of excellence" that will produce a stable of equestrians who will ride the 5-year plan home to Queen's Park. How did OAC put it in their letter of notification? Ah yes . . . "as the criterion of excellence will be more rigorously applied in the future, Council recommends that you discuss the advisors' comments . . . " Whips, chains, studs, what???

What Texas doesn't need is to adopt ONTARIO PLACE contra-culture guidelines in order to be "competitive." Texas could too easily serve as a regional filter and repository for the marketing mania exhibited by ONTARIO PLACE. The government isn't marketing art in Tokyo — it is auctioning what is left of land, water, air and lives in this province.

Dancers Move Through The Air

A young Texan dancer got back from performing with members of the Desrosiers Dance Company. Her skin was blotchy, she said she couldn't breathe when she was down East, in Toronto. Desrosier's peers had commented on her unique style of dance . . . a regional Texan interpretation. She is environmentally sensitive to Toronto because the level of pollution is toxic to her. There is no dance company up here. Who will see her move through the air?

In My Right Hand I Carry A Mask. In My Left, A Bullhorn. From Time To Time, I Lift Both And Mouth The Words: Run Duck Hide

I have cultural binoculars trained on the East, and can't forget the symbolism of my departure from Hamilton in 1986. The James St. N. CN Station was being used as a movie set for the production of AMERIKA.

To get down to the tracks and on the train headed for Texas, my daughter and I had to walk under a huge banner that read, "WELCOME AMERICAN VOLUNTEERS." Young male extras were "at ease" in pink and grey designer jumpsuits with matching army helmets. Their shoulder badges read, "ILLINOIS." I felt like a political refugee. I knew Amerikanada would follow the train . . . that this country's borders were closing in like the old centrifuge ride at the C.N.E.

When we got off the train in Thunder Bay two years ago, our destination was little more than a dot on the provincial map. I didn't know it stank of pulp and paper; had virtually no affordable housing; that landlords gouged university students so badly; that if you don't own a car you may as well be living in Etobicoke; that street attire mimics Dallas (the sitcom). I knew *nothing* about Texas, and only a feeling that part of me was already here doing cultural work propelled the move . . . catching up with a Canada I knew nothing about before it disappeared.

report from northern ontario

There was a series of dreams prior to coming to Thunder Bay. They were all about a city on a hill, with a lake at the foot of the hill. There were concrete steps leading up to the top of the hill, and another plateau. Near the concrete steps, a 3-story brown house with a coach house at the back of the yard kept appearing, and re-appearing, in the dream.

It turned out to be the house where Rebecca Belmore was living when we started Definitely Superior. Past tenants had included (I found out later) Charlotte Childs (Producer/Host, *Indian Faces*, CBC/CBQ radio program conducted in Ojibway); Michael Cavanaugh (Terrace Bay artist — now living and working in Toronto); Bill Lindsay (photographer); William Roberts (KAM Theatre/musician/writer); Kim Erickson (musician/songwriter); Douglas Livingston (writer); Jenny Van Cram (artist/potter); Susan Heald (photographer).

Discard The Marketing Plan And . . .

Remember at all times what is unique about living and working as a non-commercial artist in Texas. The beauty (and the pain) of living in the middle of nowhere *and* being marginal (culturally and economically) is that other marginalized people will tell you how to heal the globe . . . if you listen.

Josie Wallenius was a peace worker and registered nurse, working at a seniors nursing hospital evenings (the latter subsidizing the former). She did not think of herself as an artist. Lillian Allen came to Thunder Bay for a performance and a series of workshops. Josie came to the workshop with a two-person crosscut saw and a rock and a script she had written a few days prior to the workshop, entitled "Lament to a Logger." She kept asking if she was doing all right, and Lillian said, " . . . you'd better think up a name for what you're doing, and lay claim to it fast." Josie Wallenius is now an acoustic storyteller, and her stories speak of peace, racism, sexism, poverty and struggle. She is telling global stories as a nurse, midwife, peace worker. As an artist, she meets all the Texan non-commercial "criteria of excellence." The workshop conducted by Lillian Allen was the unconditional turning point. Texans welcome artists from Toronto . . . it just depends who.

James Strecker, writer/poet/editor/teacher, came to Thunder Bay to do a "reading." He showed up at the Hoito restaurant wearing a bluesman's hat, a too-small fake fur coat, and, as Rebecca pointed out later, funny boots. He was whisked off to a bar to do a reading that night, conducted a writing workshop next afternoon, was held hostage in the arts vehicle that was tracking down the movements of 100 US marines in the dark. On Saturday he was taken out to the bush to conduct journal-writing preparatory field exercises by the military hospital tents which workshop participants had been trying to track down. It was about -30C., and he kept saying, "WHAT AM I DOING HERE?"

We keep hearing from him and he wants to come back as soon as possible, in the warmer weather. He signs all his postcards, "from TOXIC SLUDGE." (He lives in Hamilton.)

You Are Invited To A Stomp

The infrastructure exists for cross-referencing information and providing mutual support for non-commercial artists in Texas. You will find the same people working with two or three organizations, and art production thankfully becomes more like community-alert as opposed to commodity "show and tell." (*This* art will never go to Tokyo, let's put it that way . . . .) We don't *market* "art is how you live" — we share the notion.

There are 420 people in Thunder Bay who will come to a fundraising "stomp" (for Oxfam, Amnesty International, Magnus Theâtre, The Peace Coalition, Definitely Superior). A "stomp" is raising money for peace and culture with beer, band and people at the Elk's Lodge. The "stompers" are all ages and come from women's groups, peace groups, unions, media, social service workers, bikers, musicians, performers, and artists. There is always a big A.A. table.

A "Free Trade" stomp is planned for late summer. That means 420 people will stomp the Elk's Lodge dance floor and imagine that it is the Free Trade Agreement.

The Stars At Night Are Big And Bright (clap clap clap clap) Deep In The Heart Of Texas

Glenna McLeod and I were in the building (Definitely Superior/A.A./United Tailor's/Kateri Centre/studios) on "Canada Day," dragging things into her new studio. My daughter pulled me off to one side and said, "Who else is here? Is there somebody here? I can hear Becky talking." The building was empty. She meant Rebecca Belmore, non-Ojibway performance artist. Hitch-hiker.

The only answer for us is to fan out, in a V-Formation, just like Canada Geese — radiating from the North down to the South for a change. The dream *is* dying (the globe). You have to listen to people in the Northern Rim — from Old Crow down to Great Slave Lake to Eskimo Point to Inoucdjouac to Nain. We are pointing you in the right direction. *Look North. Those* people are trying to tell you something, and you don't understand their language yet.

We're not the North. We're in a holding pattern. THIS IS TEXAS. We're a distant suburb of Toronto. The Greenhouse Effect and cable TV from Detroit has brought you here. The Free Trade Agreement will Make Us Yours. And we will all be dreamless. ■

1. *Facts About Northern Ontario*, Northwestern Extension Connection Conference, excerpts from "Prospects North Conference" (hand-out provided by Ministry of culture and Communications).
2. John Bentley Mays, "Poodle Power Opens the Door to Japan (Artists such as General Idea and Michael Snow are leading the way as Ontario sells its new image to the Far East)," *Globe & Mail*, March 12, 1988.
3. Margaret Atwood, "True North," (Our Home & Native Land/100th Anniversary Collectors' Issue), *Saturday Night*, 1987.
4. *Ibid.*, "Poodle Power Opens the Door . . . "
5. *Ibid.*, "Poodle Power Opens the Door . . . "

Lynne Sharman is involved with Definitely Superior and lives in Thunder Bay.

Fiddle Music

by Josie Wallenius

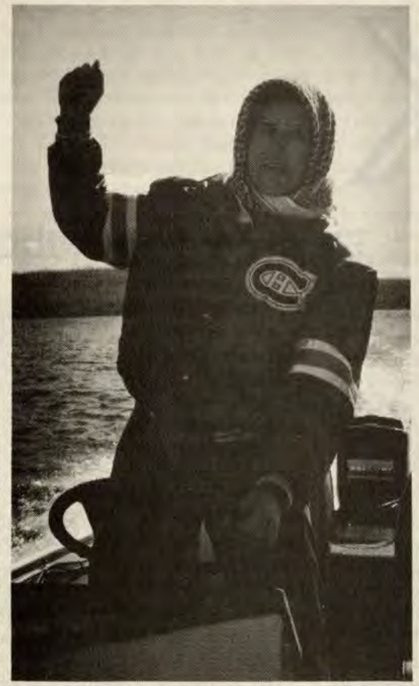


Photo of Josie Wallenius by Bruno Wallenius

Josie Wallenius is an acoustic storyteller from Thunder Bay.

I became a story teller when I realized I was fed up with statistics and rhetoric. It was really boring, all that statistics and rhetoric, and who wants to be bored in the twilight. Stories are best in the dark anyhow, and its getting darker. The story I am about to tell is about racism. I am a whiteskin by the way. I tell this story because of two memories. The first memory is when a young whiteskin woman was upset at some militant blackskin sisters from the U.S. because she thought they wanted to throw her back in the ocean from whence she came generations ago from Europe. The second memory is from some months ago when I was sitting in a circle with a redskin woman, and she suddenly got on all four limbs like a wolf or a tiger and turned to look me straight in the eye. For a flash of a moment, she did not smile, and then she did, but in that flash I felt a challenge, and that challenge felt GOOD.

The first time I told this story was last night, and after I had finished the dancing part I looked into the eyes of the whiteskins, because it was for us I told the story, and I always have to look into the eyes after a story to make sure I am not crazy, and the eyes told me I wasn't. Then I looked into the eyes of the redskin and brownskin that were there, and their eyes were smiling. I think we all know, allskin sisters, that we'd better get on understanding each other, getting strong together, or this cursed economic system that divided us and divides us still will be the end of us all before we can put an end to it.

Now here is the story called "Fiddle Music."

I have a friend called Sherry in the United States, an American Indian woman. She saw me reading a book about native spirituality and asked me if I wanted to rape their spirituality too. We are good friends and can be straight with each other. I told her I was parched for the spiritual, and there seemed nothing left in white ways to cling to. So she asked me if I remembered my childhood and I said I did. Then she asked me if I could still smell the flowers from my childhood, and I could smell the lilacs and primroses as she talked. Then she asked me to remember my grandmother, and I did, so Sherry told me to go to my roots for my strength, so this year I went back to the British Isles to trace them.

Happy I was to be in Wales again, and funny it was to have the lilt in my voice again after five minutes. I walked down the road where my mother had had her first period. I remember her telling me it was on that road on her way home from school, and how she had run home quickly to tell my Granny. I saw a picture of my great aunts, one I had never seen before. Proud it is I am of my aunts, they could pluck a chicken so fast they won all the competitions in the village.

Then I travelled down the Isles to Cornwall to see another old aunt. Learnt my Da had made a pass at her as soon as she got married to his brother. Well then I had to go for a walk by the sea. People born by the sea need the sea you know. Terrible it is to be bereft of the sea when it's in your blood, and the lake's no substitute when it's the salt you need.

Well, I came back to Canada, and told a whiteskin friend what I had learnt, and she understood, because she has the Gaelic in her, and she played some music to me she had just acquired. This whiteskin never does anything or listens to anything that isn't important and this music was important, it was Métis fiddle music. I liked it too. We are both women in labour for the next seven generations of children, and somehow the music helped the pain. Then somebody in the room made fun of us for liking native music so much, and I heard this while I was on my way to see another whiteskin woman, and as I entered her house I heard some music just like the Métis music, but it was music taped from an old scratched record of Swedish fiddle music, and I was very strangely excited, and very strongly angry, and I went home and looked up "indigenous" in the dictionary, and it said that it meant "native, close to the soil." Well then, I suddenly came over very tired, so I went to the couch and laid down and closed my eyes and straight away went into a trance. I saw a young woman walking quickly, quickly, along a cobblestone street by an ocean, and I KNEW it was the East coast of Scotland I was seeing, and I KNEW the young woman I saw was a foremother of my friend who liked fiddle music, and then I woke up and found myself in a terrible shaking anger and I knew at last why I was angry. It was because WE were indigenous women once, close to the soil, and they uprooted us, away from our land and our oceans, and those of our foremothers who resisted were burnt at the stake, or dragged to the looms, and other poor souls became sickly appendages of the machine men who were sent over the world to uproot other indigenous peoples, and because of this we have come to believe that nothing surges under our white skins, that the waves of the sea don't flood in our arteries, that we are unable to dance to the beat of the mother. Oh yes, I remember how I was taught to dance the folk dances at school, dainty-like, because the machine men wanted us to go on being sickly appendages, but I am going to dance like my great grandmothers used to dance round the heath fires in Cornwall, and like my friends' great grandmothers used to dance in the greenfields, and claim our indigenous past.

Well, the dance, to read it without dancing it. First, I have some seconds of Gaelic pipe music while I tie the bells around my thighs and calves. Then comes the old-European fiddle music, music so sweet it's enough to take you flying over the mountains like a kite, and then to stamp and dance with my drum around a rock and a seashell, the shell I have carried with me from my own lands so I can listen to the roar of the waves when the mood is on me, and the rock from one of the Great Lake daughters-of-the-seas, where I know I am fortunate to live, as dead I would be already without the sight of water. ■

COMMENTARY

A FAIR DAY'S WORK

BY KARL BEVERIDGE

This past May, three exhibitions were organized that included art by union members in an artworld context. *Artworks* was organized by the London and District Council at the Forest City Gallery, London, and included art works by members of trade union locals from Southwestern Ontario. The other two were organized as part of the Mayworks festival in Toronto. *Shift Change* featured the work of members from Canadian Auto Workers, Local 303 (GM, Scarborough). The second was titled *Festival at Fifty*. The "Fifty" refers to Communication and Electrical Workers of Canada, Local 50 where the exhibition was installed. It included photographs taken by two union members and union archival material.

The work in the exhibitions ranged across the full spectrum of what might be termed recreational or amateur art — from intricately carved animals to relatively sophisticated paintings; from the traditionally realist to the abstract. Only three of the works had explicit political/social or work-related content. A painting by Jan Sheperd (Retail Workers' Department Store Union) in the London exhibition referred to chemical pollution in a London neighbourhood. A series of photographs by Gail Hurmuses (CAW) at Local 303 depicted working people at various bars and clubs. And photographs of CBC production rooms taken in the 1950 s by Roy Martin (Canadian Union of Public Employees) were at CWC Local 50. Some of the work could be described as "folk" or "naive", notable examples of which were two "realistic" paintings by David Koyle (International Association of Machinists) in London, that were painstakingly made with parts of postage stamps. Interestingly, the artist listed the number of hours it took to complete each work on the back. The price list justifiably reflected the time spent, based on his wage. The larger of the two was listed at $10,000.

Three questions are raised by these exhibitions. First, does the work itself differ from other similar exhibitions of recreational art, or, to put it another way, why single out union members from other recreational artists? Secondly, how do such exhibitions relate to a trade union audience as opposed to a general audience? And thirdly, what relation, if any, does all this have to the "professional" arts? In this short review I can only hope to touch on some of the issues these questions raise. I should also caution that my comments will make certain generalizations that, of necessity, blur the complexities of the issues.

An initial response to the work in the exhibitions was that it differed little from other exhibitions of competent recreational art. However, it soon became apparent that a sizable portion of the work aspired to more than the purely recreational. In part, this relates to the question of craft. Many traditions of working class culture are based on pride in craft and skill (which has been systematically eroded by the managerial appropriation and de-skilling of the processes of production). With little power in terms of determining the content of products of labour in the workplace, craft and skill remain central to working class identity. This also helps to explain the lack of political/social and work-related content. Craft, then, is not simply recreational ability, but an issue of content. (There is a curious parallel here to the artistic rationalization of quality or what is now called "excellence". Quality is defined, essentially, as craft ability. And yet it is on the basis of "quality" that recreational art is rejected. Class mystification at its highest level, no doubt — but that's another article.)

The aspirations underlying much of the work are not, with a few exceptions, towards a career in the professional arts, particularly its modernist component. Such exhibitions are not seen as a stepping stone to Queen St., even though that possibility exists. The aspirations for the work are that it be perceived as a legitimate statement in itself. In this sense the term *recreational* art shifts to that of *community* art. Such exhibitions could begin to provide an alternative context for the development of work based on a community of interest and its cultural identity.

Although much of the work in these exhibitions lack a political edge, they do aspire to certain ideals of nature, community life and craft. Tentative as this definition might be, it should be remembered that 20 years ago the majority of women artists were considered hobbyists. The few exceptions had somehow "transcended" their gender and, even then, were not taken that seriously. Early feminist art looked to traditional women's crafts. In a similar vein, native and artists of colour are seeking recognition beyond the "crafts" promoted by tourism and multiculturalism.

Related to this is the issue of class discrimination in the arts. The majority of professional artists come out of the middle class. Their work, for the most part, reflects that experience. (The few artists that come from a working class background often adopt middle class values.) The reasons there are few artists from a working class background are many. Lack of educational opportunities, limited exposure, and the dominance of mass media are often cited, but, for the most part, miss the point. A major barrier is the simple fact that you can't make a living producing art. The risk of taking up a career in the arts is bad enough for a middle class person, who has, at least, a perceived social and economic mobility not evident to a working class person, and who often has something to fall back on — other income or career possibilities or, in some cases, family money. Tied to this is the question of the recognition of the value of work: the dignity of "a fair days pay for a fair days work." This recognition is at the root of the trade union movement and working class politics, and accounts, in part, for what is visible in these exhibitions.

Attendance at these events by union members was not overwhelming. It should be noted, however, that they were the events that attracted the largest labour audiences to Mayworks events. The exhibition in London was somewhat different in that it cast a wider net (Southwestern Ontario) and was a self-contained event.

At Local 303 a number of arts types were driven out in two vans and taken on a tour of the plant before the exhibition opened. There were posters and announcements around the plant, as well as in the union office. However, few of the members came out to the reception. The two drivers sat in the basement bar of the union hall while a play (by Ground Zero) was performed upstairs for the opening. In talking to the few members who did appear, it was apparent that either they or their friends had art works in the exhibition. Initially, this kind of response was discouraging. But to be discouraged is only to experience, once removed, the historical alienation of the working class from the arts. The point here is not to find a Picasso on the engine line, or to expose workers to the finer points of upper-class taste. Nor are such exhibitions necessarily the ground on which a political art, as such, will develop. The importance of these exhibitions lies in opening up the issues of class politics in culture. Overcoming the historical alienation of the working class from the arts will be a gradual process. It has to be a process in which working people see their own interests at stake. The creation and exhibition of members' work is crucial to that process.

On another level, such exhibitions are essential to the formation of a cultural alliance between working people, union member (community) artists and professional artists. In this sense, members' exhibitions are the flip side of artists-in-residence with trade unions or the commissioning of art works by unions. They are not only necessary for establishing mutual respect and understanding, but for the development of a cultural politic within the trade union movement and beyond.

Professional artists have suffered economically because of their isolation within society. The few allies artists have are usually poor allies, at best. Collectors, dealers, and administrators often mouth sympathy for the conditions artists live under, but it is not in their interests to change them. Quite bluntly, they would lose their power to control the arts. The reality of the cultural sector is that it is already "privatized". Grants are little more than industry "subsidies". Little will change if artists remain isolated. Given current political reality, it will only get worse. The question, then, is who are the artists' allies and what is the basis of that alliance.

The trade union movement seems obvious, as it is the movement that addresses itself to issues of working conditions and economic and social rights. To make a long story short, the recognition of mutual cultural integrity and common interests, of which the exhibition of members' work plays a part, is essential to an alliance in which working people, artists, and communities would have a greater say in the use of cultural resources and the democratization of the arts.

In the mythology of the classless Canadian melting pot, cultural discrimination based on class still has to be recognized. A working class culture (of which union culture is a major component) has to transcend the "crafts" of recreation and help to create the conditions of a socialized culture. ■

Karl Beveridge is a photographer and artist living in Toronto.

Photo by Rosemary Donnegan.

***Collage of postage stamps (210 hrs.)*, approx. 12" x 16", by David L. Koyle, International Association of Machinists (IAM), St. Thomas.**

REVIEWS

Photo courtesy of Creative Exposure

Maryse Holder Liked to Fuck

A WINTER TAN
CO-DIRECTED BY JACKIE BURROUGHS, LOUISE CLARK, JOHN FRIZZEL, JOHN WALKER, AERLYN WEISSMAN
Distributed by Creative Exposures, Toronto

by Shonagh Adelman

"As Andrea Dworkin's litany against the penis rang out that afternoon, I saw my mother's small figure . . . 'so nu, Joan, is this the world you wanted for me to have, where I should feel shame and guilt for what I like . . . Don't scream at me but help to change the world so no woman feels shame or fear because she likes to fuck."

My Mother Liked to Fuck, Joan Nestle, 1983

The film *A Winter Tan* tackles the loaded subject of a woman's desire to fuck. However, it is fraught with contradictory and ambiguous messages which are compounded by the script's adaptation from autobiographical material. Maryse Holder, an older woman with an insatiable appetite for sex, is not portrayed as an exemplary role model; she is no heroine. Rather she is a tragicomedienne whose rebellion blazes a transgressive trail through both traditional sexual mores and essentialist and politically correct feminist sexual mores. While these two positions are normally seen to be in opposition, for Maryse Holder they are both oppressive.

The numerous contradictions embodied by the character, her sweeping generalizations of feminists, lesbians and Mexican men, and the way in which the film functions as a blackboard for her diatribes precariously treads on a number of explosive themes. While for some the humour may be offensive, the comical undercurrent of the film, in my view, suggests a satirical representation of the character's dilemma and of her stereotypes. Without refuting the difficulty that others may have with this film, my analysis will explicate a view of the film as parody – a parody, however, which is not without inconsistencies.

In *A Winter Tan* Jackie Burroughs, who adapted the script as well as co-directed the film, plays the part of Maryse Holder, a college English professor from New York who sojourns in Mexico for the sole purpose of getting laid. In the roles of both desirer and object of desire, Holder, sporting the persona of a literary romantic, desperately seeks love through sex as a means of physical rejuvenation. Bulemia and sex are her methods of retarding the inevitable — aging and death. For Holder, the capacity to attract men is her fountain of youth, her defense against her own mortality. Although her insecurity about losing physical allure is a typical socialized predicament for an older woman, she transgresses her feminine role by actively seeking out sex and by parading a utilitarian attitude — she is looking for "love" in Mexico because "Mexican men have big cocks."

Women have been much maligned for their active sexual pursuits in mainstream films, while "scoring" for men has been a sign of potency, and often heroism (James Bond). Although Holder naively blames women for conventions of female sexual puritanism ("the female respectability competition"), she subverts the social condemnation of sluttishness by pursuing sex with a vengeance. She is not, however, entirely immune to the double standard. At one point she turns the tables by standing someone up but then only becomes more infatuated when she is scorned. Expressing envy of her friend Pam's success at "pulling in the big fish," she perceives her friend's absence of need (inaccessibility) as an empowerment, a drawing card for men, and a denial of sexual pleasure. She gives up power for sexual pleasure, but then reclaims power by suggesting that her lover Navaro's importance rests on "the will on my part to have him represent something significant."

Holder's masochistic proclivities are a complex, circular interplay between her participation in the double standard and her internalization of blame. While acknowledging the down side of this double standard ("sex with men lacks the personal . . . women do not dig machismo"), she has consciously adopted this sexual dynamic by claiming responsibility for her own rejection. Though this situation is continually inverted by her objectification of men and by her utilitarian approach, these "banal sexual encounters" are no more than "research on passion."

Being willfully masochistic, "feeding the body on its own specific craving . . . rejection," is not a state in which she loses her identity, but one which feeds her ego, provides sustenance for self-definition. In this sense her desire combines both masculine (ego definition through fucking) and feminine (masochism and self-objectification) sexual stereotypes. Her denial of old age through sexual exploits is more characteristic of representations of middle-aged men who need to reaffirm their masculinity by having affairs with younger women, such as the '40's film *The Women* and the more contemporary film *10*. Although Holder transgresses by adopting a characteristically masculine approach to love and sex, the difficulty of role reversal is made explicit since the character continually faces both the external and internalized problem of the double standard.

Holder's words, "if only winning weren't so boring and being bored so terrifying," express a masculine, *femme fatale* notion of desire as perpetually evasive (though she is the object rather than the subject of its evasion). This conception of desire echoes the French literary genre to which she aspires and the current French philosophic and psychoanalytic paradigm characterized by Barthes' *A Lovers Discourse*. Her pragmatic goal to churn out a literary masterpiece based on her sexual exploits (Henry Miller et al) is also an appropriation of male privilege, particularly that articulated by Lacan: the capacity to represent stems from the possession of a penis. Although this philosophy is not made reference to, it follows in the historical lineage of French romanticism, and has contributed to the new vogue of essentialist feminism. Holder's usurpation of the so-called phallic privilege ridicules this paradigmatic relationship between representation and desire, i.e. the naive revisionism of "writing the body." Her facetious aspirations to literary genius mock the inflated romanticism of the creative impulse sown from the wild oats of libertine adventure.

As well as subverting male privilege, Holder's desires are expressed as a defiant rebellion against feminism, presumably the essentialist position held by Andrea Dworkin

Photo courtesy of Creative Exposure.

which claims that the thrust of the penis is inherently aggressive . . . heterosexual sex is by nature oppressive, and, by implication, women who desire men are politically out of line. Though Holder's view is never clearly spelled out, her desire for a "whole new feminism which is heterosexual and sluttish" could be read as a response to essentialism of the Dworkin variety. Although her brazen agenda makes a valid critique of this position, the unqualified allegations that marxist and lesbian feminists are incapable of "having a good time" reinforce negative stereotypes of feminists and lesbians as sexual puritans.

Her predicament as a feminist with "politically incorrect" desires is presented by the film as the paradoxical plight of the character. Ironically, her unrelenting malaise does not exactly lead to a good time — as she proclaims, "I'm being punished for desiring men." Her embodiment of masochistic and narcissistic characteristics paradoxically props up the essentialist view that all women are victims and all men are aggressive.

Holder's actions and self analysis deliberately flaunt the absurdity of her desires. She lampoons the prototype of female narcissism, as in the scene in which she is grovelling in a pigsty equipped with a mirror. Similarly, she parodies masochism when drawing an analogy between her predicament and that of the bull being violently impaled by the taunting matador. "I hear them objectifying me," she muses to the accompaniment of an ethereal operatic sound track while the Mexican boys ransack her belongings, ripping pages out of her notebook. This sets up an antithetical discrepancy between the reality of her situation and her fantasies. Similarly, she mocks herself by alluding to the Spanish translation of her name when she describes her sexually frustrated state as that of a "fish still living, three days out of water . . . " and, when satiated, she treads water inside a rubber inner tube describing Lucio's appraisal of her cunt. These visual images and the music track complement the text by highlighting Holder's burlesque. Her mimicry approaches that of the drag queen. However, unlike the drag queen, her appropriation of male pornographic humour is not simply socially transgressive but politically subversive. Searching for love in the vicinity of large cocks has generally been a male fantasy and fear of female desire. By appropriating this fantasy and by usurping the privilege of objectification (perceiving and rating men according to the size of their cocks), Holder pokes fun at a macho fixation on penis size, and by extension, the phallocentric attitude towards love and sex. Her parody of oppressive stereotypes is comparable to the mimicry of gay male stereotypes in *La Cage Aux Folles*.

The use of porn humour goes beyond transgression in its racist stereotyping of Mexican men. As in her view of feminists and lesbians, her satire is double-edged. As a sexual outlaw in a 'third world' country, the issues are compounded by the fact that though she is oppressed as a woman, she is privileged as an American. These issues are not obscured or condoned by the film, but deliberately exposed.

The Mexico we see is a tourist/colonial caricature augmented by horniness. Indifferent to Mexican culture, her tunnel vision of the country is defined by her alternating appreciation and despair over the plethora of desirable male bodies. When the camera pans over an assortment of men, they all become potential fodder for Holder's cannon. The power dynamics are multi-layered and mutually exploitive. Her racist and mystifying infatuations are complemented by the blatant sexism of the men — "Your only attractive feature is your legs and what's in between them."

When Holder struts across the beach in front of a backdrop of roaring whitecaps, she muses, "Oh mystical country . . . where my will not to understand triumphs . . . so I am mystical." Her mystification of Mexico is both romantic and cerebral and is set within the frame of her literary aspirations. Dramatic irony intervenes when a vendor interrupts one of her monologues, illuminating the gap between her imaginings and the reality of Mexico. This apparently incidental disruption, casually dismissed, is emblematic of Holder's self-absorbed "will not to understand." It also contextualizes the point of view of the camera which is deliberately circumscribed by Holder's vantage.

The camera empathetically records her perceptions or alternatively takes the position of an intimate friend. As an adaptation of the actual letters of Maryse Holder written to her friend, the film incorporates the first person letter format through direct address, placing the viewer in the position of her confidant, and effectively draws the audience into an intimate position within the film's narrative. Rather than providing an objective or realistic reading of events, the film self-consciously functions as a vehicle for mapping her subjectivity. Overtly reversing the standard gender positions, Maryse Holder is the subject into whose interior monologue we enter and through whose eyes we see the men in the film. This subverts the standard cinematic convention of objectifying women for a male gaze both within the narrative and for the audience. Burroughs' hand in the production of the film through writing and co-directing indicates the extent to which she controlled the representation of the character.

In its absence of moral judgement, the representation of Holder as a sexual libertine differs from other representations of sexually active women. The film takes the character's point of view rather than objectifying her as the subject/victim of a moral lesson. In other films such as *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* and *Dressed to Kill* the pleasure seeking of 'loose' women ends in death, ultimately reaffirming the patriarchal logic of a social contract in which female fidelity is exchanged for male protection. Holder's adventures also end in the tragedy of her murder, though not within the visual narrative. The film, however, does not implicate her behaviour as the cause of her death. Her death seems incongruous with the comic satire of her flirtation with masochism. In the context of a film which seems to skirt moral judgement, the realization of the character's death is a jarring antithesis to the burlesque.

This ambiguity leaves the film open to interpretation. It can be taken alternatively or simultaneously as either a refinement of stereotypes (female masochism, the 'dirty old woman', lesbians and feminists as sexual puritans, aspirations of literary genius, colonialist/racist perceptions of Mexico and Mexican men), or it can be taken as a satire of these stereotypes. The ambiguity is, in part, an effect of the film's strict adherence to the autobiographical text. Where conventional mainstream films are characteristically structured as coherent linear fantasies in which the ending is a logical resolution of the narrative, *A Winter Tan*'s tragic end seems inconsistent with the humour. However, the unexpectedness of Holder's death is superseded by her parody which continues unabated in the last scene and ends on the tragicomic note of her incorrigible desires. *A Winter Tan* offers a transgressive female fantasy of living out "sluttish" desires without the usual moral condemnation. ■

Shonagh Adelman is an artist and writer living in Toronto.

"If only winning weren't so boring and being bored so terrifying. . ."
Maryse Holder

In the Realm of the Senses

QUARTET FOR DEAFBLIND

NORMAN COHN
Distributed by V/tape

by Gwen McGregor

QUARTET FOR DEAFBLIND focuses on a handful of children living in an institution for the blind, who are either completely or partially deaf and blind. Individuals living in an institution and their relationship to the environment is not a new subject for Cohn's work, but unlike previous tapes, *Quartet* does not function as a documentary about the deafblind children. It offers a moment depicting how they relate to the world, how they remain in a constant 'present' because of the lack of sight, sound or language that would give them a past and future. This is conveyed to the viewer by challenging the boundaries of the subject and the video image and is a development in Cohn's work that can be traced to specific elements of the post-modern movement.

The word post-modern is used with trepidation because it has become a catch phrase that is used in reference to everything from critical discourse to frozen food. It is used here to refer to a recent development in art making and criticism that allows for the blurring of lines between subject and object, a skepticism about the autonomy of the spokesperson, the author.

"If postmodernism means anything at all, it means an end to a belief in coherence and continuity as givens, an end to the metaphysics of narrative closure."[1]

The arrival of Cohn's work to this point is not a sudden shift in emphasis or interest but a gelling of ideas and a visual style evident in earlier work. His interest in the marginalized and disenfranchized individual is present in a comprehensive earlier series, *In My End is My Beginning*, a series of tapes about individuals living in old age homes. *Quartet*'s similarity to this work lies in what Peggy Gale described as "a search for the roots of the human, the means of seeing oneself and the world."[2]

Unlike previous work, *Quartet* is not a documentary with a defined subject. It is about the time and space in which the children exist, something that does not have a coherence that is really understood. Cohn achieves this by allowing the children to become actively involved in the process of image making. They directly engage the camera by putting their faces and hands on it. Their direct gaze, their teasing and play with the camera one moment and then complete ambivalence to it the next, leads the viewer to feel the children are controlling what is being taped as much as, and sometimes more than, Cohn. This feeling is confirmed at the end of the tape when it becomes apparent that the last several minutes are recorded by one of the children and not Cohn. For an instant he becomes the subject and speaks to the camera and the children, "Good work, chief." To do this, Cohn has rejected the rational subject as a given and offers instead, process over product, experience over text.

Quartet's visual style is similar to Cohn's earlier work, using camera shots that are framed very tightly around the subject, providing only hints of the environment and other people as they come into close contact. This brings the viewer into the personal space of the children. Moreover, it leaves 'space' for the viewer to be involved as an active participant, filling in the gaps that are missing with information from the viewer's own mind. Also consistent with earlier work is *Quartet*'s use of the passage of time. There are long running camera shots with minimal editing that allow the subject to act and react without being manipulated. Cohn feels this is important for there to be any sense or seriousness or validity in the material. It assures the viewer that the producer's interference or manipulation of the subject is minimal. One scene in *Quartet* of a boy taking a bath is taped in one shot and allows the viewer time to empathize with the child's joy and physical pleasure of being in the water.

What stands out visually from previous work, however, is that the visuals are pushed far beyond what are considered to be minimum standards or conventions in shooting techniques. In one scene of *Quartet* we see the floor and Cohn's shoes as he turns on the camera, adjusts it and then lifts the camera to begin taping. There are long camera shots that are deliberately out of focus or overexposed. Several times the children reach for the camera and change the aperture. Cohn leaves it, or sometimes changes it back, but never stops shooting. It is no coincidence that this tape does not have the slick look of television — much of the tape is shot in black and white on VHS equipment. Cohn conveys clearly to the audience his deliberate refusal to adhere to technical mastery for its own sake. The result is that the viewer sees only bits and pieces of the children and their surroundings. The viewer sees the children's activities in fragments of light and shape, an experience comparable to the way the children relate to Cohn and the camera.

This reciprocal relationship between the children, the video camera and the viewer is reinforced by a camera shot at the beginning of the tape that is repeated near the end. One of the children presses his face up against a television screen and fights to 'see' what is on screen. This action is parallel to the process in which the viewer must become actively involved to understand *Quartet*. Because of Cohn's denial of the rational subject and the authority of the video image, viewing the tape becomes an engaging and moving process that allows the audience entrance into the deafblind children's time and space. ■

Still by Norman Cohn.

1. Dick Hebdige, "A Report on the Western Front: Postmodernism and the Politics of Style," *Block* 12, Winter 1986/87, p.8.
2. Peggy Gale, "Norman Cohn — Portraits," Art Gallery of Ontario Catalogue, 1984, p. 12.

Gwen McGregor is an installation artist and administrative director of Trinity Square Video in Toronto.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Resistance in the New Age of Everyday Life

ANARCHIST SURVIVAL GATHERING

Toronto
July 1-4, 1988

by Dot Tuer

The implements are deliberately large in size, therefore accomodating themselves to a North American market accustomed to handling large portions of meat. This large scale is typical of North American domestic products and symbolically reflects a feeling of surplus and plenty characteristic of the society for which they are produced, and whose values they are intended to reinforce.

Curator's statement accompanying a Four-Piece Barbeque Set (1985); designed by Michael Dallaine and manufactured by Danesco Inc. Exhibited in *Art in Everyday Life: Aspects of Canadian Design 1967-1987*, Powerplant, Harbourfront, Toronto, June 24 - Sept. 11, 1988.

Things become clearer when we acknowledge that we are moving from a hardware to a software economy in our urban centres. Rather than producing artifacts like textiles or other manufactured goods, we now produce and market 'Experiences' and 'Lifestyle' and the endless array of peripheral objects essential to the achievement of both.

John Scott, "The Trojan Horse" in *Vanguard*, April/May 1988.

TORONTO is not L.A., at least, not yet. With the exception of a few Queen Street bars/DJs gone New Age and the ominous escalation of concrete around Harbourfront and the Dome, the landscape still resembles Toronto the Good of the '50's and not the simulated distopia of Bladerunner. But the prophesies are not optimistic, the signs do not bode well. Toronto the Good struggling to become Toronto the Bad is in the process of becoming UGLY. It began, long ago, with the forced relocation of the indigenous peoples from Lake Ontario's shores. In the second act, development was built on the back of racist immigration policies and labour banished from history books; retold in classrooms as the benign liberalism of multiculturalism. The climax of this capitalism as cooperation begins in June, 1984 + 4, when the Summit Seven dine at the Art Gallery of Ontario and Canadian citizens begin to think of landscape painting in terms of a week long set staged in a parking lot a stone's throw from Metro's glasshouse convention centre. The end of the script has not yet been completed, but the first draft has been approved at City Hall, featuring Toronto's triumphant hosting of the 1992 Olympics. By then, Harbourfront will have become a milelong wall protecting a view of the waterfront for the rich, and the Group of Seven will not only be confused with the Summit Seven, but redundant: Free Trade creating a Hollywood of the North and the production of art relegated to vast warehouses where artists manufacture piecework for sculptures adorning Fifth Avenue in New York.

No longer will CSIS have to search in Bloor Street pubs for suspected terrorists in an effort to prove that Toronto, as a world-class city, has its problems too. The developing nations, fed up with an information blockade and Canadian Bank starvation policies, will arrive incognito to make sure their side of the story gets told. The Olympics, offering the perfect opportunity, will clean out Parkdale, the last stronghold preventing the downtown core from resembling a gigantic Yorkville. Helicopters, making their first chorus appearance at the Summit, will have become an everyday opera, patrolling the city to clear the streets of undesirables. Police on foot patrol will insure that all suspicious characters have their passes which allow them access past the barbwire demarcation of rich and poor that protects the city from the likes of Hamilton, Finch Avenue, and Oshawa. Passes, of-course, will not only be issued for day labour in the technology ghettos of wordprocessing and telecommunications, but offered on Sundays so that the "general public" can roam the downtown area, consuming processed culture at the strategic castles of air built or expanded to house ART in the late 1980's.

And you thought only L.A. could be featured as a set for Bladerunner?

These paranoic delusions, of course, unless properly disguised as fiction or paraded as the constitutionally-enshrined right of individuals to artistic nihilism, will land you in the labyrinth of the "mental health" system, thorazine promising your dolpine nerves a foggy relief from inappropriate thought patterns. So best not to dwell in the netherland of prophesy, best to consider alternative visions.

The Anarchist Unconvention, timed to follow the Summit extravaganza by two weeks, offered Toronto just such a chance to reconsider its Bladerunner future; offered citizens of this fine city the opportunity to attend a three-day wingding replete with workshops, affinity groups, co-operative feasts, music, performances, a Sunday park picnic, demos, and as rumours will have it, an orgy with separate rooms for men, women and those of mixed (read heterosexual) persuasions. Not unlike the Summit, the media had a specially assigned location. Locked in at the Convention parking lot, they were locked out of 519 Church St. Community Centre where visions of a New Age without Yuppies were unfolding.

Anarchism, should some of you have forgotten, or have misplaced your secondary high school textbooks, emerges as a critique of state-engineered revolutions, dispensing with the authoritarianism of the vanguard and the brokerage politics of trade unionism in favour of a spontaneous withering away of capitalism through a worker's mass uprising and fight against oppression. From Emma Goldman to Murray Bookchin, many have claimed its title. Many more have been claimed, including indigenous struggles and Lizzie Borden's film *Born In Flames*.[1] Contrary to mass-media representation, anarchism is not just libertarianism or bomb-throwing men waving black flags, but a serious philosophy coming to grips with a world where Bladerunner is beginning to look like a fairytale in comparison to the threats of capitalist greed breeding genetic mutation, apartheid, genocide, counter-insurgency slaughter, nuclear annihilation and environmental extinction.

Anarchism is also, in the everyday of the present, contained within and contaminated with historical contingencies. The nature of work and class are shifting as technology moves North America from the Industrial Age to the Information Age. Critiques of sexism and racism have redefined the terms of the struggle and located within the external conditions of labour internalized and institutionalized sites of oppression. Even the most local of resistance must peripherally account for the global implications of our everyday lives. Everytime we go to the bank, eat an irradiated tomato, drink beer, use a computer, watch television, drive to work, we are participating in a lifestyle economy that is exploiting human labour across the world, gobbling the earth's resources, and polluting its surface. In North America, resistance and revolution is no longer simply the clear and clarion denunciation of visible oppressions but also a struggle against a diffuse system of power in which we are both inside and outside of its shadowy confines.

University Avenue, Toronto, 1988. Expressing outrage at the U.S. downing of an Iranian airbus, and celebrating the success of the 4-day Anarchist Survival Gathering, demonstrators engaged in running street battles with Metro Police. Three officers and an undetermined number of demonstrators were injured. Thirty-one were arrested.

In this very complicated scenario, in this our land of plenty accustomed to eating lots of meat, the Anarchist Unconvention workshops reflected the shifting sites of resistance, more an eclectic free-for-all towards empowerment than a serious re-evaluation of an already initiated revolution. Despite the off-the-wall or right-on titles of the sixty-three workshops, (ranging from Radical Ecology to Pagan Spirituality to Dumpster Living), the discussions offered the possibility of linking experience with issues, fantasies with reality, and fictions with action. As a counter-culture fashion show swirled around and about 519 Church St., groups involved with indigenous issues, prisoner's rights, the psychiatrized, ecology, gay liberation, anti-racism, subversive arts and feminism charted strategies to re-envision a world without capitalism.

While discussion proved the fertile ground of social inter-changes, the activists among the talkers were restless. In pre-planning meetings, they mused over specifically "anarchist" notions of demo-strations. Tentatively listing their "actions" as a Lunch-In at Yorkville and a Bare-In (of wimmin's breasts, that is) at Nathan Phillips Square, a meeting was called during the Sunday picnic to discuss further notions of public resistance. Sunday, glorious and sunny, created the perfect atmosphere for a country fair. Behind Scadding Court Community Centre, three or four hundred people showed up to hang-out, to network, and to listen to a variety of readings and bands. Meetings scattered throughout the park wrapped up the weekend's discussions and planned for ongoing solidarity. Under a tree a group of people practised self-defence against invisible riot police while behind the mainstage the Direct Action discussion was planning Monday's spontaneous happenings. Drifting in and out of the discussion, which took a

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dramatic turn in focus with the US downing of an Iranian Airbus, it seemed that the group of people battling out collective process had organized everything except why they were to be arrested.

As cops strolled through the gathering two by two, and a singer on the stage wih pink shredded hair screamed "I've wasted my life," the Direct Action assembly thought long and hard about whether to demonstrate at eleven or at noon. Someone suggested that noon was a "traditional" time for a demonstration. Someone else wanted to know what would be the specifically "anarchist" nature of the demonstration. A woman suggested spraypainting, provoking a retort about the danger of being arrested on conspiracy to harm public property. Finally, a group of people, impatient and fed up with "wasting their lives" suggested that the whole picnic march spontaneously to the American Embassy. The retort came quickly: no one was dressed properly for a demonstration. Protest had become a "lifestyle" issue.

The violence which ensued the following day illustrated, of course, that regardless of form and uniform, free-wheeling demonstrations and cop-and-robber games with police are not the state's notion of an appropriate "lifestyle." Within the combat zone of Monday's skirmishes, which ranged from the United States' consulate to City Hall to uptown Bloor Street, the police finally got their chance to crack a few skulls . Revved up and restless, like souped-up Fords idling too long after the last rumble at the Summit demo where 3,000 people marched illegally down University Avenue on June 19, the police strutted their billyclubs like lethal dildos, brutally informing anarchists of their limited rights of dissent in a city renowned for its clean streets and clean living. The prediction of one anarchist, frustrated by the inaction of the Sunday picnic, that the police would return to the copshop saying "Next time, ask for the anarchist unconvention, it's the easiest beat," was proved wrong in Monday's full-scale assault.

But what does this all add up to: this potpourri of resistance to the state ?

By appearance only, it seemed to be a cross between a Marx Brother's film and Gidget Goes Yippie with hundreds of discontented youths, primarily of white and middle-class extraction, gathered to express a disenfranchisement from the oppressor class more imagined than real in its construction. As a group, the anarchists seemed to owe more to the hippie and punk movements, to the notion of "dropping out and tuning in," than the historical continuum of their anarchist heros. Their perception of the enemy seemed to be identified with those who were STRAIGHT, REPRESSED or PIGS. But perhaps in a society where packaging creates the product, and lifestyle creates the market, anarchists are caught in a consumer vortex where style is perceived as an essential component of dissent. If the art of everyday living is reflected in over-sized barbeque instruments created as an offering to a surplus-commodity economy, the need to differentiate oneself from the assumed values of plenty may inevitably draw people into the paradox of the countercultural stance.

This notion of inevitability, of course, does more to create predictable reaction than viable resistance to state oppression. I, for one, favour more subversive and less flamboyant means of fighting the rise of Yuppiedom and the swing to a self-congratulatory right-wing. Parading one's political colours like stripes on a sleeve seems to leave one particularly vulnerable to state oppression while the very term anarchist allows for a plethora of misunderstandings to be hurled one's way, particularly in a North American context. Yet the Anarchist Unconvention, for all its contradictions and lack of obvious focus in its generalized discontent at all and everything wrong with the world (and that's plenty), cannot be easily dismissed. For despite the frustration I personally felt with the

Illustration by Culver Pictures.

The Haymarket Square Incident, Chicago, 1884. The police advanced, unprovoked, during an anarchist/labour gathering which was in the process of disassembling. A bomb exploded, killing one person. The police opened fire, killing 6 or 7 workers, as well as 6 of their own men. Six others, none of whom were present at the time of the bombing, were hanged for conspiracy.

white middle-class angst emanating from the pores of many of the participants, better a chaotic resistance to a land of plenty than the skinhead fashions and braindead fascism of those aspiring to claim a stake in the new society.

This does not mean to imply, however, that the anarchists' strategies are necessarily successful. Politically, their notion of disrupting a passive status quo through extravagant gestures of style ends up alienating rather than constructing potential alliances while their fire-fighting strategies seem to feed into the media hype and police brutality they so vehemently decry. For those involved with armed struggle against US intervention in underdeveloped nations, the anarchists' laissez-faire attitude towards self-determination must seem frivolous at the best and certainly naive in its estimation of the opposition. And one can be sure that the anarchists' notion of difference does not jive with the determined and focused resistance of political struggle demonstrated at the ANC People's Picnic for Mandela's 70th birthday, nor does it speak to the many Torontonians involved in solidarity struggles.

Culturally, the anarchists' sprawling embrace of creativity-for-all veers dangerously close to a liberal notion of expressionist angst. Left out in the cold in this riotous abandon of spraypainting and grandstanding are those who are struggling to make quieter, more focused cultural and political interventions. Grace Channer's installation at A Space on the African diaspora, Janice Bowley and Oliver Kellhammer's ecological critique at Mercer Union and Jim Anderson's Home Improvement installation around issues of renovation, displacement and homelessness at 9 Wascana Street are just a few of the visual events about town which do not make the flamboyant headlines of the anarchists' free-for-all experience as the art of everyday life.

Yet in a New Age where hegemony is ideal corporate culture, the happening of the Anarchist Survival Gathering is an important if seemingly misdirected celebration of resistance to an ever encroaching system of state control. Wandering about the picnic on Sunday, frustrated by what I perceived as a gathering of self-styled "revolutionaries" who could not figure out the enemy, a woman told me how important this weekend had been, how for the first time she had been included in a process of decision making. She had attended the same workshop of the psychiatrized I had on the Saturday, a workshop where a number of people silenced by this society were able to speak. And it is for these people that the Anarchist Unconvention served as a valuable framing of alternative sites of struggle, serving to empower the disconnected of our society who are often unaccounted for by groups which tightly define the parameters of social, cultural, and political change. For in an information age where people are not encouraged to think, in a land of plenty where the average rent of a basement apartment is $600 and the average monthly salary of an artist with a grant is $1,000 (more than double that of welfare), and in a market of lifestyles where culture has become the postmodernist apology for doctrine without conviction, the Anarchist Unconvention offered a weekend where the notion of the "margin" was not a trendy word to fling about in art magazines, but a healthy opposition to Powerplant's vision of art in the everyday life of Canadian citizens. ■

1. "Anarcha-Filmmaker: An Interview with Lizzie Borden" in *Kick It Over*, No.18, Spring 1987; probably the best anarchist magazine around, featuring articles and commentary on cultural, political, and social issues. Available on newsstands and by writing KICK IT OVER, P.O. Box 5811, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5W 1P2.

How the West Was Wonderful

BUCK

LEILA SUJIR AND VERNE HUME

Distributed by Video Pool and V/tape

by Gary Kibbins

This is the West, sir; when the legend becomes fact, print the legend.
Newspaper reporter in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*,1962.

WHEN WESTERNS started to peter out in the late 1960s, they had already relinquished their ability to allegorize the making of a nation and the hope and opportunity of a wide open, unpopulated West. In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*, Jimmy Stewart hastened its decline when he drove up in a stagecoach with "a lawbook in his hands," later suffering the grave indignity of having to do the dishes and serve meals to cowboys, only to emerge later as a hero, a Senator, and wedded to the girl sought after by John Wayne. A particular inevitability had been structured into that variant of the American Dream: on the one hand, a nation could only be given birth to so many times before one was obliged to declare it born and active; secondly, the circumstantial utopia of the West (that however bad things got in the East one could always better oneself by heading west to better the frontier) had its limits, even in rhetoric. That limit had in a practical sense been reached long before the classic Hollywood Western's demise. The West was filled up, the country was now a world power aggressively willing to inflict itself on the rest of the world. Meanwhile the "historical" aspect of the Western was clearly not convincing enough, in and of itself, to be marketed successfully.

The neo-Western — its cynicism (Peckinpah), its anti-epic qualities (Leone) and the breakdown of its character and plot paradigms into an increasingly heterogeneous, almost genre-less array of external non-Western references (everybody) — bore little relation to its alleged predecessor, the classic Hollywood Western. The mythic aspects of the individual's capacity to invoke a nationalist ethos and transform an unacceptable environment through decisive action had itself become questionable, and in any case, that theme as well as its variants were being slowly diffused into other genres.

Gilles Deleuze plotted out the relationship between the action and the environment on which that action is undertaken through two general formulas, S-A-S', and A-S-A'.* The S-A-S' ("from the situation to the transformed situation via the intermediary of the action") is also called the "large form," and is typified by *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*. The act of shooting Liberty Valence (A) has served to change the West (from S to S') forever — if not the Western — despite the ambiguities in sympathy between John Wayne the old and Jimmy Stewart the new. The second model, A-S-A' ("the action . . . discloses the situation . . . which triggers off a new action"), also called the "small form," is typified by the neo-Western. The landscape has already lost its sublimity and its innocence — if it ever had any — and has given itself over to action. As in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, the situation flows from the action; bridges are blown up, armies march across vast deserts, the dead (not even "victims") are buried, with the landscape providing only a weary backdrop for the machinations of men.

Buck is a 25 minute videotape about a cowboy of the same name living in Alberta, comprised largely of Buck's anecdotes. In *Buck*, the machinations of men, the epic of action (however devalued), and the world of the lonesome, anonymous Cowboy are all subsumed to another force, not clearly named, but identifiable enough as "progress." Buck speaks about his life and his work in a specific historical space — unlike earlier classic Hollywood Westerns which were content to be simply "the West." Despite his specificity as an historical person, Buck the successful cowboy more accurately typifies S-A-S; that is, he becomes equal to the milieu, but does not modify it. Instead, he accommodates himself to its new reality. If Jimmy Stewart had a law book, Buck has a business, and a truck. The land, no longer the irreducible backdrop of human action, is only one factor among many — "The real, down-to-earth cowboy is disappearing . . ."

In the context of this change, decisive action now yields a different result than it did in *Liberty Valence*. If Buck has a parallel in fictional Westerns, it is with the anti-hero, Clint Eastwood, whose actions are not undertaken on the level of principle, but for economic advantage. The cowboy is no longer the acting agent who transforms the milieu, but instead becomes part of, is subsumed by the milieu. The cynicism of the "Man with No Name," as well as his perceptiveness, has taught him where to direct his actions. He knows that action has itself changed its character according to a new system being developed in the civilized East as well as the West. The old West, where the individual could expect to modify the milieu, has been replaced by contemporary Western culture, where one is obliged to look to the milieu for directives before acting. And if one does this without clinging to outmoded concepts of individual, value-laden, independently conceived action (which in any case are bound to fail), one can become very rich. Let's call this a free trade insight, a Brian Mulroney cynicism: accommodate and prosper.

Jimmy Stewart up to his elbows in suds, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*.

Action, then, can be undertaken by systemic forces, anonymously — in a sense, by the milieu itself. Rather than act on the milieu, in order to change it, one is given to react to it, thereby leaving it unchanged. The hero, who previously either transformed the milieu or died trying, distinguished himself from the milieu through action, a type of action made possible by historical circumstances on the one hand, and by virtue of a stubborn, traditional mythology on the other. The milieu is not simply becoming "more difficult" to modify, more inert, more "enculturated." It is becoming more flexible, more anthropomorphic, increasingly more capable of giving itself over to personified but anonymous action.

This internationalist, anonymous form of accommodation, ironically portrayed in "Spaghetti Westerns" and fearfully mythologized in the model of Japanese industrial production, blurs the once clear separation of "situation" and "action" nostalgically represented in classic Westerns. S-A-S' (action alters the situation), is, at best, replaced by S-A-S (action leaves the situation unchanged); it is at worst replaced by S-S (action loses its capacity to effect, and is dropped out of the schema altogether).

The lot of the contemporary cowboy is perhaps more vulnerable than most to this seeming paralysis to act and alter one's milieu. Should they unionize? Strike? Against who? Buck who owns the ranch, is himself a legitimate part of the cowboy world, and although he may react to the milieu like The Man With No Name, he is not cynical. There is no simple management/worker separation wherein one might locate conflict. And there is no appeal that might be made on the level of culture. If the native population has not been able to do it, cowboys have no case to make.

Buck is infused with a kind of dead action; there is no sentimental call to arms either on the part of Buck or the video producers. The (sometimes humourously, sometimes painfully) slow delivery of Buck's first person anecdotes are matched by the pacing of the work. Even the points about cowboy pride (cowboys refuse to sleep in the same bunkhouse as hired hands) are made without a silent appeal for respect. Not even the tale of "Moose", Buck's mentor, who had "been — oh — kind of an outlaw before the turn of the century. He'd shot and killed a man and was wanted in the States," could expect entry to the cowboy pantheon of heroes. Moose was described as a quiet man who kept almost entirely to himself, yet the viewer was not asked to interpret romanticism for feats accomplished or sympathy for this odd, relentlessly unglamourous, seemingly lonely world of men. "Cowboys," says Buck, "are hard to get to know, hard to understand, and you don't necessarily have to like 'em. The simple pragmatics of this lifestyle are corroborated by the inevitability of Hollywood to resurrect the Western strictly from the point of view of genre-referencing, stylization and nice bodies (*Silverado*; *The Young Guns*).

"It was a rough life," Buck said, "and there was no place in it for a woman. The only cowboys that got married were cowboys that managed to get ranches of their own, and a lot of them would be in their late 30s or early 40s before they every got married. We might count this a relatively small insight into the sexuality of cowboys; but it does indicate how you go about getting the girl (assuming, as Buck does, that you want one): first you get the ranch. In turn Buck was seen with a woman only briefly in the tape. The same can be said of the almost total absence of references to The Land. The sublime of the landscape is as absent in Buck's telling as the myth of the cowboy character. The only horse we see is in the rodeo, in slow motion. Later as they walk and talk in a particularly unromantic cow pasture, Buck turns around and tells the cameraperson to "watch where you walk." Whether or not this is Buck's peculiarity as a cowboy is hard to say, but it is in any case corroborated by the tape's producers, whose primary representation of the landscape is through the truck windshield, in slow motion, with the bucking bronco hood ornament riding out front, for as long as 40 seconds at a stretch.

Buck remembers the Henderson ranch.

Photo by Katie Thomas.

This slow pacing strategy matched Buck's delivery. Buck, would say in his slow drawl " . . . I told the cowboy boss I'd like to do a bit of rodeo-ing" which is followed by 3 ½ minutes of slow motion rodeo followed by more landscape-through-the-windshield footage. Buck then stands in front of his landscape and recounts in excruciatingly slow detail where he worked in Alberta before getting his own ranch. The effect of this pacing on one level served to give Buck his own space to talk. On the other hand, the many slow-motion sequences, in some cases accompanied by out of sync location sound faded in and out in "real" time, seemed at odds with those temporary moments of realism. In this way the sheer eccentricity of the subject (who really wants to know about "cowboys" anyway) remained. The impatience felt with the pacing (this is a local problem of video reception in general) and the unsentimental approach, offered up a realism not of representation properly speaking, but of historical reception. This can be counted as the tape's primary strength. While perhaps not "learning" a great deal about the mysterious world of men which is the contemporary cowboy, the viewer instead is given to reflect on the circumstances of the cowboy's lot, its inpenetrability due to myth and distance, and how it has come to be culturally visible on the one hand, while remaining almost totally invisible on the other.

Buck does not worry the viewer unduly about the fate of the cowboy in post-industrial times. It reflects instead the disturbing gap between action (change) and reaction (accomodation). This is a specifically historical problem, and is hardly specific to cowboys. Despite their moments of glory, no one is looking to them for cues. *Buck* draws out just one more instance of marginalization, and makes one wonder how many unconsidered pockets of social groupings under seige really exist. ■

*Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986, pp. 141-177.

Gary Kibbins is a video artist and writer living in Toronto.

Art in an Army Tent

NORTHERN IMAGES
The Funnel, Toronto
May 3-22, 1988

by Randi Spires

MOST CANADIANS live within 200 miles of the American border, occupying a long sinuous often culturally indefensible strip at the nation's southern extreme. Nonetheless we do think of ourselves as a northern people. For Canadians, it's not the wild and wooly west, but the terrain north of Superior and beyond to the Arctic that is our own fecund breeding ground of myth and psychic liberty. We feel this even as we (or at least the government) allow the despoliation of that same country in the name of civil defence and industrial development.

Those who do live in the North have had the sad privilege of seeing this devastation first hand. A good portion of the Northern Images exhibition turned out to be both a battle cry and a warning meant to prick the consciences of complacent southerners.

Souvenir from the Northern Front, a major installation work within the larger *Northern Images* exhibition, was put together by 10 artists from the Definitely Superior Gallery in Thunder Bay. The focus of this installation was a large 10′ x 15′ army tent.
Glenna MacLeod, Jennifer Walton, Rebecca Belmore, Bill Lindsay and Michael Belmore were involved in the planning and construction of the tent, and the environment around the tent installation. The tent itself is both a reference to the traditional dwellings of the North's native inhabitants, who have for centuries lived in balance with the earth, and to the camping gear favoured by careless tourists, hunters and commercial predators. To one side of the tent is Glenna MacLeod's the *Headless Goddess*, a 3/4 body cast in clay, surrounded by barbed-wire, spent shot-gun shells, empty ammunition boxes, and other found garbage of the local woods outside Thunder Bay.

The floor of the tent was covered with photographs by Bill Lindsay, as well as maps that traced highway, water and air routes that stretch north from Kenora to Weegamou Lake, from the Atawapiscat River to James Bay and on into the Northern Rim.

This precise mapping of distances indicated the vastness of the North and its great physical separation from the crowded South. From these spidery lines one also senses the fragility of the lives — human, plant, and animal — which are rooted in that vast and delicate environment.

From the back wall two sets of branched forms, twigs and antlered skulls emerge ghost-like from the charred and burning wilderness behind them. The left wall of the tent depicts, along with other images, a map of Hiroshima before and after the dropping of the atomic bomb. Prominent on the opposite wall are images of verdant forests, B-52s and other war insignia. On the ceiling is a cruise missile hovering over the map of northern Ontario. These images spoke passionately of the dangers of increased militarization in Canada's north. The installation was also enveloped by an audio work designed by Michael Beynon, which was a discordant mix of highway, construction, factory and forest sounds. The conflicts between the sounds restated the intent of the visual installation.

In front of the tent were the remains of a campfire. Arising from the rubble was a form — part bird, part mammal, part insect and part "droid" — constructed from charred wood and metallic debris (some from a U.S. satelite).

To the left of the tent was another work by the same young artist, Michael Belmore, featuring a plastic quilt created in homage to the fabrications of Joyce Weiland. In the centre of Belmore's quilt, a transparent green-edged figure (an android or a rock glyph come to life?) is caught in mid-stride. Within the body and in the surrounding environment are plastic toys and processed food wrappers. The message is clear: you are what you eat both literally and imaginatively.

The northeastern Ontario component of the show included works by Michael de Morée, Ken Stang, Mary Green and Michael Mancuso. A large oil painting and accompanying photographic study by Mary Green of Sudbury are part of her recent series of body portraits. Developed with direct subject participation, this series evoked a chuckle at the frailty of human dignity.

Michael de Morée contributed a series of photographs on the strike at Cannadore College in 1984 when the faculty (O.P.S.E.U.) went for a first contract. De Morée has selected images that are both poignant reminders of the isolation of the picket line and images which express comradeship and solidarity.

Other works included Ken Stang's technically impressive computer graphics and a massive painting by Michael Mancuso entitled *Return to the Land of the Mothers*. The painting is autobiographical and refers to the phenomenon of the "Holy Tree" which represents the traditions of Sault Ste. Marie and the Italian Catholic roots of the artist.

The 4′ x 10′ oil on canvas is a totemic and powerful piece that expresses — through tree, water and industrial smokestack imagery — the home environment of the artist.

The opening of the show *Northern Images* included two performances, one by Josie Wallenius and one by Rebecca Belmore. Josie Wallenius is an acoustic storyteller. Her constant changing of costumes on stage and her variation of stories drove the performance at a reckless pace as she raced through dozens of vignettes that reflected her astute understanding and passionate interpretations of issues of peace, racism, sexism, and poverty. She particularly touched the audience with *The Nurse's Tale*, a story of a child who dies without the doctor ever coming, in spite of numerous calls from the nurse. The impotence and anguish that the nurse felt watching the child die (no one believed that she was seriously ill) is a Wallenius parable for the problems the peace movement has in conveying its desperation when trying to solicit labour's involvement in the peace movement.

Rebecca Belmore, an Upsala artist, performed as her native persona. Barefoot with long black hair, dressed in a cotton frock, she moved around the tent and campfire, ritualistically encircling the fire with maple leaves from the north woods, pouring water into four glasses that marked the four winds, the four nations of people, while continually talking with her (absent) grandmother about "going down to the river for pure cool water as a child." But now that has "all changed, Grandmother." Talking about the white man's polluting ways, the loss of native languages, the struggle to maintain bridges of communication between generations and cultures, the need to protect all people from poisoned waters, poisoned air, and finally, the imperative: to remember our past, and do all we can to protect the earth so that we will have a future. ■

Randi Spires is a Toronto freelance writer and broadcaster whose work appears in several Canadian magazines.

It Works
Labour and Video

MAYWORKS — VIDEO
Vancouver
May 1-8, 1988

by Karen Knights

MAYWORKS, subtitled "A festival of culture and working life," ran from May 1st to 8th, with events happening throughout Vancouver in various art and labour venues. It was the first festival of its kind for B.C.

Julius Fisher, one of the organizers of the "On to Ottawa" trek show, inspired by the Toronto Mayworks festival, instituted a committee to realize a similar project locally. He called together artist and labour historian Sara Diamond and Gary Cristall, organizer of the Vancouver Folk Music Festival. Some May Day activities were already in the planning stages including a series of concerts and a song writing contest. Further meetings with Tom Wayman and Kate Braid of the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union, Cliff Andstein of the B.C. Federation of Labour, Steve Waddell from the Health Sciences' Association, and artist Craig Condy-Berggold quickly evolved into open meetings at the Federation, the formation of the Vancouver Mayworks Society and a commitment to a major festival in May of 1988.

Chris Creighton-Kelly, who created the "Solidarity Forever" multi-media performance (see FUSE #49) was hired as festival co-ordinator. Curator/critic Elspeth Sage and artist Margot Butler were brought in to co-curate the visual art portion of Mayworks. Sara Diamond and Elspeth Sage programmed the video component.

MAYWORKS was the first major collaboration between the cultural community and the labour sector in B.C. since the collapse of the Solidarity movement in 1984. Smaller cooperative projects have occurred, in particular, a Centennial labour art poster series and calendar, created by local artists on labour themes, but none on the scale of Cultural Workers Against the Budget (Solidarity). The Maywork's thirty-three event program included visual art, dance, poetry, performance art, theatre, cabarets, storytelling and music of all sorts including folk, rock, jazz and country.

Sara Diamond and Elspeth Sage's positions as Visual Art curators ensured that video would be a strong component of the cultural program. There were two evenings of video screenings, one at Video In, the other at the I.W.A. Hall, as well as the inclusion of video shorts in a Cabaret format: the premier screening of the Women's Labour History Project's *Keeping the Home Fires Burning* for the "Women and Work" closing event at Women In Focus; and three videotapes on the working and living conditions of artists in A Space's touring "Working Artist" exhibition at Video In throughout May.

The inclusion of video in the visual art program provided a forum for a medium which is an important part of both the labour and cultural communities. Video is a familiar medium of mass culture, as well as an educational tool used in union work. It could potentially be an easily integrated art form, similar to the traditional labour forms of storytelling and folk singing, with strong narrative and testimonial qualities.

Work, in the context of this selection, is defined inclusively. That is, it refers to both the results of a post-capitalist definition of productivity which is economically driven, and a pre-capitalist sensibility which recognizes the inherent value of productive effort.

The narrative and experimental videos in the selection focus on the topology of the workplace as a means of explaining the individual's relationship to work and society. They make use of storytelling, parables and allegory. The worker, while situated primarily in the workplace, is inevitably confronted by the dynamic of the domestic and political frontiers.

In *La Bonne* (Barbara Steinman), *Points of View* (Michael Banger), and *A Woman's Work Is Always Done* (Jennifer Babcock/Tamithy Basaraba), the domestic situation serves as a microcosm for the larger social reality, where the implicit sexism and classism of the culture is personified. Work is done here, but it is an uncontrolled locus — its inherent isolation precludes collective bargaining.

The workplace outside this domestic realm is often a site of ideological battle, a situation often supportive of personal and social reconstruction. The workplace mediates the domestic and political arenas, serving as a pivotal point for moral departure, a situation idealistically and comprehensively explored in *Points of View*.

In this narrative, a husband and wife's domestic tensions culminate in a cathartic awakening for the woman. Here the workplace offers the woman both a refuge and, through collective action, a chance for growth, while her domestic life only reinforces her personal and political inequality. Her husband's apparent indifference to the domestic site in fact only underscores his control of it. His work (aggressively "entrepreneurial") only reinforces his sense of control over others. In spite of her attempts to educate him, the man cannot accept the implications of her arguments, which ultimately threaten his position. The woman finally rejects the relationship after he crosses her picket line. ■

Photo courtesy of ViTape

***Chinese Cafes in Rural Saskatchewan* by Anthony Chan, 1985.**

Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak's musings on the privatization of a public gallery, *Private Eyes*, also uses the workplace as a site of personal and political revelation, the two inescapably entwined.

In the educational narratives produced by the Canadian Labour Congress, *Tony's Problem* and *The New Employee*, the worksite is the stage for complex mini-dramas in which the worker, the union, and management struggle with notions of autonomy and power, each negotiating their position within the overlapping structures of work and union.

The parallel gallery system is represented in Cathy Busby and Melodie Calvert's *Girls Just Want to Have Funds* (from the Working Artist Exhibition). While created to be an alternative to the traditional gallery system, the parallel system fails to address the needs of either the administrator or the artists. Here the workplace functions as a black hole, absorbing energy, money and idealism. The Director's only hope is a chance at the Lottery.

Labour documentaries punctuated the Video Works programs — including *Wrath of Grapes* (Cesar Chavez/United Farm Workers); *Holding the Line On the Postal Strike* (C.U.P.W.); *Watch Over Liberty* (B.C. Federation of Labour); *AIDS: The Workplace Facts* (Health and Welfare Canada/C.L.C.); *Working Side By Side* (Labour Film Project); *Technological Change* (Will Fearn/Carpenters Union). In these videotapes, the working environment, and its effect on the worker, is analyzed through the socio-economic conditions which determine it. The tapes witness the inevitable extension of the interests of labour from the workplace into the political arena, and act as rallying calls for collective action.

The structures and foci of the documentaries by artists are quite different. The artists emphasize the individual lives and lifestyles of their subjects, while making more subtle reference to the larger social context which determines their working conditions. Anthony Chang's *Chinese Cafes* outlines the effect of racism in the decision of many Chinese immigrants to begin their own small businesses. *Proof of Delivery* (Nakashima/Barker), a portrait of San Francisco's bicycle messengers, refers to the difficulties these people face in having to work in dangerous conditions for low wages because they are, due to race or lifestyle, otherwise unemployable.

Keeping the Homefires Burning (directed by Sara Diamond), a documentary on B.C. women in non-traditional jobs during World War II, was the most successful bridge between arts and labour concerns. Producing independently within an art milieu, (but with ties to labour through past personal experience as a worker and through academic research), Diamond provides an historical overview from a 1988 perspective. The video integrates newsreel footage, government propaganda, interviews, and agit-prop, giving the necessary context for a comprehensive understanding of the role this work played in the women's personal lifes, as well as its importance to the government and the war effort.

MAY WORKS was not meant simply to be a "celebration of working life," but also an impetus for initiating a working relationship between the art community and the labour movement, suggesting that such a relationship will be beneficial to both. This does not mean defining artists' work in strictly economic terms, but recognizing a commonality in the socio-political environment shared by, and influencing, the living and working conditions of both groups.

Significantly, in a program curated and screened in a province with an anti-union, anti-culture government, no artist's video work directly addressed the present provincial context. This irony points, not to curatorial inadequacy, but to an only peripheral interest by B.C. artists in political matters, and to a separation between organized labour and individual artists.

The perception of the labour movement as concerned only with the material conditions of labour may contribute to any hesitation on the part of the cultural community in acknowledging shared objectives. Obviously, artists understand the need for the material support of artistic production, and have addressed the problem primarily through the institution of their own support structures via the parallel gallery system.

Yet in spite of attempts by the curators to broaden the notion of "work" through their video selection (an idea aggressively pursued by Judy Radul in her performance *Here and There*), perhaps it is precisely the economic definition of work which alienates artists. On the other hand, it may be the concept of the "auteur," or a creative elite, which makes establishing commonality in the situation of "the artist" and the working class more difficult.

This dualism manifest in the art community — which promotes an artist-determined, material base for artistic production within a tradition of creative individualism — results in a curious form of detachment from the political realities that directly affect artists. West coast artists, until very recently, have continued to wait it out in isolation. Working conditions and wages within artist-run centres, which receive (if any) only token support from the province, are continually being degraded. (Figures published recently in the *Vancouver Sun* showed that in 1987 B.C. art galleries received $800,000 from the provincial government. In Ontario, art galleries received approximately $9 million.)

The difficulty in uniting labour and art in collective action demands more than a recognition of shared purpose. Even amongst those critics and artists who align themselves in some way with other working people, the attempt to integrate the two is highly debated. The recent differences voiced over the (in)appropriateness of the site specific installation in Winnipeg's Nutty Club Factory illustrated that it is common to define the position of art as removed from the labour context, and view any such attempts at integration as "intervention" into foreign territory. Some viewed this exhibition as imposition and appropriation *of* the 'other', while others perceived it as an exploration of the site *with* those who regularly inhabited it.

Sara Diamond, in discussing collaboration between labour and the arts, stressed the need for the cultural community to approach labour on artists' own terms, and to be realistic as to the nature of the exchange. She went on to say that "people falsely assume that the cultural community are these middle-class kids and when they work with the labour movement they should be subordinating what they do to the project of labour and the proletarian vision, when in fact there should be a much more dialectical situation where we're feeding back, and playing with, and being much more critical about that relationship, about representing working class experience."

In entering such a process, it is important that both the art community and labour are committed to such a project. The labour movement, and progressive political parties in B.C., are still unconvinced as to what role culture, particularly that which falls outside of folk traditions, plays in their overall objectives. Elspeth Sage, speaking on the status of the visual arts program in this year's festival, stressed that the future Mayworks organizing committee must recognize the unique needs of the visual arts in such a festival, and include a strong representation of visual artists on that committee.

Exhibitions like the Nutty Club will fuel the debate on how and when art should enter the working environment. In B.C. an ad hoc Committee has been formed to lobby for the institution of provincial funding to individual artists; and the N.D.P. is considering forming a committee of working artists to advise on future party cultural policy.

A second MAY WORKS festival is in the planning stages for next year, and undoubtedly the 1988 festival can be judged a success. The eclectic range of venues, in spite of minimal audience crossover, shows potential for the future. ■

Karen Knights is a video curator and critic. She is also director of Video In.

Hotline Hysteria

HERSTERIA
SHAWNA DEMPSEY & JANINE FULLER
Theatre Centre, Toronto
May 17-22, 1988

by Naomi Riches

IN THIS PRODUCTION, Shawna Dempsey and Janine Fuller have created a collage of dance, monologues and scenes from the "AIDS Hysteria Hotline" to expose myths about AIDS and to encourage respect for the choices made by people with the HIV virus. In choosing to present stories of women affected by the virus, the production sheds light on the female perspective on AIDS — a perspective which has been largely ignored. *Hersteria* juxtaposes humour and storytelling against a literal backdrop of sensational media headlines and coverage of the 'Gay Plague.'

Rita McKeough's set featured two pairs of large hand-shaped rear projection screens on either side of the stage on which the media coverage was displayed. In contrast, two other large hands were suspended (palms out) up stage in a gesture of compassion, while yet a third pair sat on stage backlit.

Hersteria is not a conventional drawing-room drama. Scenes from the "AIDS Hysteria Hotline," performed at a feverish pace, contributed to the show's implicit premise that media-spurred panic is an infection that must be resisted. The portrayal of beleagured hotline volunteers, fielding incessant requests for fumigation and quarantine, provided moments of levity, while clearly illustrating the widespread fear and ignorance that clouds the public perception of the disease. The curt responses of the frustrated volunteers garnered laughs from the informed audience at the expense of the ill-informed callers to the hotline.

However, in view of *Hersteria's* clear intent to inform and educate as well as entertain, it must be wondered whether a less-well-informed audience might take offence at having its ignorance characterized as necessarily hostile. Nevertheless, the monologues — personal and poignant — entreat a powerful response of caring and compassion for women living with AIDS.

In one monologue, a pregnant woman with AIDS decides to have her baby in spite of warnings that the child could contract the virus. The father, she says, would make a great single parent and if she only has two years to live she would like to spend them with her child. Her musings are set against contemplations regarding the health and success of a woman doing aerobics. In unison they conclude: "I feel great."

The instinct for compassion and solidarity is highlighted in another monologue when a lesbian is persuaded to buy a ticket to a benefit for what she considers to be the problem of gay men.

The final monologue, constituting a series of pleas from a hospitalized patient to her visitors, starts with a rave against the patronizing attitudes she must endure. "Don't tell me I look great — I have a mirror." "Don't tell me you saw my friends and they all promised to drop by." She pleads: "Bring me bubblegum and licorice, tell me jokes and spy stories."

Marilyn McCallum's lyrical solo (or interpretive movement) dance interlude depicting a woman finding out she has AIDS — accompanied by projections of original drawings — displaced for a while the grim data on the screens. It served to encourage hope while providing an example of the role art can play in encouraging humane and creative responses to the needs of those in distress and isolation. ■

Naomi Riches is a writer living in Toronto.

Janine Fuller and Shawna Dempsy field back-to-back calls as hotline volunteers in their performance, *Hersteria*.

Feminist Voice Falters on the World Stage

THE DUMAURIER WORLD STAGE
Harbourfront Theatre, Toronto
June 3-18, 1988

by Susan Feldman

BEFORE ATTENDING a series of four plays which presented women or women's issues as the thematic centrepieces of their productions at Harbourfront's duMaurier World Stage Theatre Festival, I imagined that the position of women in these works would reflect the context of late Twentieth Century feminism: women's voices emerging as strong and vocal. But upon viewing the four plays, each from a different culture and each formally distinct, these expectations failed to materialize. For while each play attempted to make a strong statement about the position of women in society, there was no clearly perceptible "feminist" thread to link the ambitions and results of the work together. In the Leningrad Maly Theatre of the Soviet Union, the multi-racial Junction Avenue and Market Theatre companies of Johannesburg, South Africa, Carbonne 14 of Quebec, and Banuta Rubess, Nic Gotham and Company of Toronto, Ontario, the effect of the productions was widely divergent. In some cases subtext subverted text, and in others, texts subverted themselves. And upon examining the strategies utilized in framing the presence and voices of women, it became evident that the potential for a feminist theatre is less about formal innovation than about the authenticity of voice, authorship, and historical specificity.

Stars In The Morning Sky, by the Leningrad Maly Theatre, is a traditional narrative, melodramatic in tone, which focuses on a group of prostitutes rounded up in a police sweep on the eve of the 1980 Moscow Olympics. While written and directed by men, the central characters are women: three prostitutes who find themselves not quite forcibly detained in a deserted section of an asylum, their Stalin-like supervisor and a teenage mother thrown out onto the streets by her family. The core of the play focuses on the stories of these women, stories filled with disappointments, abuse, hard luck, and regrets. The women's involvment with men provides the dramatic break in the structure: enter the son of the supervisor, in love with the teenage mother, and a patient at the asylum who has a brief but intense encounter with one of the prostitutes. Two johns, waiting in their cars, remain offstage. As the characters play out their personal dramas, escalating in sexual tension and emotional frenzy, the Olympic flame is spotted, and the "inmates" break loose to get onto the roof to watch it pass by.

Because of the content exposed in this play, the Toronto dailies were eager to review the production, all emphasizing the risks that this company has taken with the material presented and heralding the company's international tour as a concrete sign of the new order in the Soviet Union. The irony is, of course, that the material is risky by Canadian mainstream standards. Soviet authorities were criticized in the play for "cleaning" the streets on the eve of international events, for not taking responsibility for the society they created, and for attempting to peddle the Olympic Flame as a symbol of hope to the disenfranchised — criticisms which translate very directly in a Canadian context. The roundup and harrassment of Toronto prostitutes in advance of the June Economic Summit is one example; PetroCanada's "Share The Flame" campaign during the Winter Olympics while ignoring the Lubicon Indian land claims provides another. These parallels clearly challenge the smug Canadian attitude which imagines that dissent is openly tolerated here while only recently allowed in the Soviet Union under glasnost. The other irony presented by the play, unacknowledged by the Toronto press, is that the women became the vehicles of the production's desire to criticize the state. Rather than allowing their voices to offer an alternative vision, they are presented in this highly poetic and emotionally charged theatre as victims of love in circumstances outside of their control. Treated with sympathy and compassion according to a male vision of the world's injustices, they are nevertheless left in positions of desperation, disempowered and beaten by angry customers, and left defending the Virgin Mary. Thus glasnost offers the potential for theatre to expose the state's hypocrisy and the lives of Soviets banished from a politically correct image of historical realism, but it does so at the expense of the women characters it presents.

In comparison to the mainstream acclaim received by the Soviet play for its "political" content, such theatre in English Canada exists primarily in the margin. Thus it was encouraging to be able to view *Boom, Baby, Boom!*, a play created by writer/director Banuta Rubess (an artist long associated with Toronto's feminist Nightwood Theatre) in the context of this international festival. However, in Rubess' attempt to fuse

Photo courtesy of the duMaurier World Stage Theatre Festival.

***Stars in the Morning Sky* by the Leningrad Maly Theatre (Soviet Union).**

jazz, text, and performance to create the ambiance of the "beat" era in Toronto, her choice of historical setting and context makes the articulation of feminist concerns obtuse. The 1950s was not a great decade for women's issues, and the "beat" generation of male bravado was particularly oblivious to women's concerns. And while Rubess gently deconstructs the era, raising women's issues through subtext, she does not directly tackle the sexism of the 1950s.

Collaborating with Toronto composer/musician Nic Gotham, Rubess explores the mood of the "beat" era in Toronto by recreating an after-hours jazz and poetry club with a four-piece band on stage as the setting for short, non-linear bursts of narrative which allow a number of voices and subtexts to emerge. Clement Hambourg, a man credited with being the father of Yorkville, becomes the character of a failed classical musician, running the House of Hambourg as a club where the "beat" intelligentsia can meet to share their art and despair. Into this setting, dropping literally from a window, enters Austra Mednis, a Latvian war refugee, who is running away from her engagement party. Clem and Austra explore their dreams and mythologies, their pasts and their futures, their memories and regrets. Intertwined with their lives is the evocation of a specific era and a specific Toronto milieu.

The club is continually forced to relocate as development encroaches (a continuing theme for Toronto's artists) and there is never enough money to pay the bills. Clem's wife Ruthie helps make ends meet by sewing G-strings for strippers at the Victory Burlesque. Recognizable names like Don Francks and Hagood Hardy are intoned in the same breath as Ginsberg, Coltrane and Kesey. The beat poet in the club declares, "I live a life Jack Kerouac imagines he did." Immigrant experiences of Toronto are evoked. Descriptions of Spadina sweatshops, peculiar North American food ("white bread, cheese whiz and plastic sausages on a table without a cloth"), are interspersed with "Yellowknife is not everybody's cup of tea" English lessons. These often powerful moments, humourous and poignant, create a structure like a jazz composition where one player takes off on a variation, to return later to the central theme. The central theme of despair which weaves together these moments, in which the first post-war, post-holocaust, post-bomb generation intones a Johnny Rotten anthem of "no future." While this may be true to the spirit of the period, the potential for a political theatre of change gets lost in the improvisation. The women's voices which emerge in this play are central and strong, authentic rather than vehicles of a writer's agenda. But in Austra's return to her former life and the club's closing at the end of the play, Rubess has created a mood piece which traps her characters into rebellions that reflect rather than oppose the underlying mythologies and false dreams of the beat era.

Photo courtesy of the duMaurier World Stage Theatre Festival.

***Sophiatown* by Junction Avenue Theatre (South Africa).**

In director Gilles Mahue's deconstruction of German author Heinrich Mueller's six-page thesis that the immobilized Hamlet is emblematic of man's response to the horrors and atrocities of the Twentieth Century, Carbonne 14 of Quebec also presents theatre which is experimental rather than traditional in form. While Rubess' *Boom, Baby, Boom!* is interested in re-creating the mood of an era in which women were historically deprived of a direct voice of opposition, Mahue's *Hamlet-Machine* seeks to demonstrate that it is women who will lead man out of his dilemma and create a new order. Unfortunately, Mahue's theatre of images overwhelms: three Hamlets, four Ophelias and three languages are mixed into a structure that incorporates words spoken by actors, words projected on a film screen and scenes played out with dance, song, puppets and mime.

Although the Hamlets are presented as stereotype — macho-man, dithering intellectual, and wimpy mama's boy — the Ophelias in the play do not fare much better. While the Hamlet scenes are played out, the Ophelias languish on the sides of the stage, either sleeping, crying, or in sexually-spent repose. The play's climactic sequence, in which the Ophelias take sledgehammers to a brick wall, does not have the same dramatic power as three Hamlets playing a physical game of one-upmanship as a hilarious clown

Photo courtesy of the duMaurier World Stage Theatre Festival.

Anne-Marie MacDonald in *Boom, Baby, Boom!* by Banuta Rubess and Nic Gotham

performance that transforms into a blood-thirsty sword fight, or as the dance of a German Hamlet and Marilyn Monroe Orphelia performed with a blowing floor-fan that is dangerous, violent, and frightening. In one of the final scenes of the play, gender stereotypes from advertising images appear on the screens while a Hamlet decries "Look what we're constantly subjected to." But in the midst of the densely layered structure and highly constructed performances, it is difficult to believe that Maheu has empowered his Ophelias to represent the way out. In Carbonne 14's *Hamlet-Machine*, the women continue to languish on the sidelines and the power of the image wins out over the contrapuntal text. If the women he gives us seem barely capable of making their hairdresser appointments, how then could they possibly lead the revolution?

In contrast to Quebec's *Hamlet-Machine*, in which the director's vision used an experimental form to attempt an explicitly feminist statement while failing to present women's voices, or Toronto's *Boom, Baby, Boom!*, in which experimental form allowed women's voices to emerge while the historical specificity determined the lack of a direct feminist statement, the collaboratively produced *Sophiatown* by South Africa's multi-racial Junction Avenue Theatre Company chose an historical incident and era where women's voices are central to both the mood and the political struggle of the time. *Sophiatown* does not have any links to a formal avant-garde, nor is it specifically feminist in its approach. Nonetheless, its ability to bring to the stage the life of a 1950's "freehold" suburb of Johannesburg, and to examine the implications of its existence as a symbol of resistance to the Apartheid state makes it a powerful piece of political theatre. And in so doing, it suggests that theatre, no matter how experimental or innovative, is ultimately the most effective when its voices are the authentic voices of struggle.

Sophiatown began in the 1950s as a "freehold" area where people of any race could own or rent property. By the early 1950s it was a thriving community with a vigorous political and cultural life. Predominantly black, but including other peoples of colour, Asians, Chinese and "even some Italians," Sophiatown often had whites visiting its shebeens (drinking establishments), jazz clubs, and late-night parties. It was during this time that the Bantu Education Act (segregating schools) and the Group Areas Act (restricting areas where blacks could live) were passed. In 1953, the government decided to remove Sophiatown to the new, black-only township of Meadowlands. The decision was followed by 18 months of protest by the African National Congress (ANC), but the removals began without armed resistance and within two years all the families had been relocated and the township bulldozed. During this period when the "removals" began, *Drum Magazine*, a publication started by whites by emerging as a voice for blacks had become a focus of defiance and a meeting ground for black and white intellectuals. An ad seeking a "Jewish" girl as a boarder becomes the starting point for Junction Avenue Theatre's production.

Using the arrival of Ruth, the Jewish girl, and rumours of the "removals" as the central events of the play, Junction Avenue Theatre gives us a striking portrait of life in a South African township before the increase in repression that would create the conditions of civil and racial war that exist today. The Sophiatown residents are an urbanized community, greatly influenced by the American culture of jazz and gangster movies. A cappella music of the time and place (a wonderful blend of African songs and western jazz) punctuates the drama that unfolds within the community as it struggles to understand the wide-eyed liberal who has landed in their midst. By juxtaposing the acceptance of Ruth with the shattering effect of the "removals" on the household, *Sophiatown* is able to explore both the experience of an attempt at racial integration and the humiliation and terror of the absolute segregation which ensues. The interaction of the women in the play develops a narrative which reveals their acute understanding of the problem and of the kind of struggle necessary to defeat the racist policies of the state. By the final scene of the play, in which Mamariti, the old woman who runs the shebeen, is sitting on a cart filled with her worldly possessions, crying her refusal to move, the audience is on its feet, crying with the displaced grandmother and singing the ANC anthem. Perhaps this audience's reaction was the strongest commentary of all on the relation of women. feminism, and political theatre. For despite all the formal innovations, sophisticated narratives, and deconstructive techniques which can be utilized, theatre works best when there is a compelling vision presented with a clear and authentic voice. ■

Susan Feldman is a Toronto cultural worker and feminist. She is also a board member at Theatre Passe Muraille.

Giselle from Hell

GISELLE
THE NATURAL BALLET OF CANADA
The Purple Institution, Toronto
July 8-10, 1988

by Glenn Cooly

A PRODUCTION of *Giselle* last July by the multidisciplinary collective *The Natural Ballet of Canada* shows what leverage can be gained when artists working in contemporary media to address present day concerns rework historical modes of expression.

The endeavor is a risky one at a time when much art is given over to simple nostalgia. During the political age of Reagan and Thatcher it has become all too popular to invoke the mythical past as a reactionary response to the complexities of the present. And the danger is particularly great with *Giselle*, a text of High Romanticism that went against the populist tide from which the work of Buchner, Flaubert and Marx emerged.

But the *Natural Ballet* aggressively engaged the piece, reshaping its deep narrative resonance with modern dance, theatre and sound sculpture to produce a version that challenged the misogynist thinking upon which the original was predicated.

The idea for the production originated with artistic director/musician Colin Doroschuk, who wanted to explore the resurgence of traditional art forms during the 1980s, and examine the status of women in ballet. His collaborator, dancer Jacqueline Sloan, left *The National Ballet of Canada* a year ago because she was dissatisfied with it. The two undertook a collaboration with Churla Mitchell and Paisley, curators of Toronto's *Purple Institution*, where the production was staged.

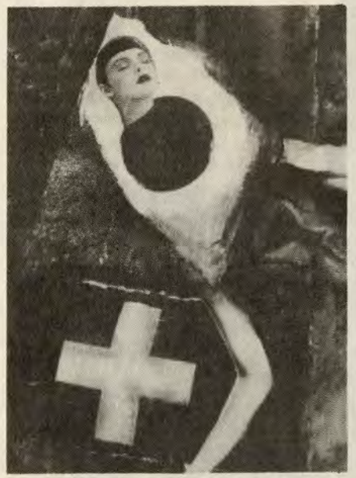
The *Purple Institution* is an artspace which has become a popular forum for visual art, performance and music mostly by young artists. It includes a gallery for rotating exhibitions, a semi-permanent installation of paintings and sculptures, a performance space, and living and working quarters for nine people.

Giselle, a densely-packed text which unites the melancholy of the German Enlightenment with the atavism of Romanticism, was derived from Germanic legend and transformed by French poet Theophile Gautier into a two-act ballet which debuted in Paris in 1841.

Giselle is a peasant girl with a passion for dancing, which her repressive mother forbids. She falls in love with Albrecht, and dies when he betrays her. Giselle's spirit joins the *wilis*, malicious ghosts of maidens that died before their wedding day, but when the *wilis* condemn Albrecht to die, she saves him.

Both as text and as institutional art form, *Giselle* raises questions about the traditional enculturation of women, which John Berger has discussed in terms of fragmentation. According to Berger, socialization teaches a woman to view herself primarily through the eyes of others, and measure self-worth accordingly, which fragments her sense of identity. In ballet, young girls trade their desire for spontaneous dance for the lure of the stage, and undergo a self-effacing regimen of binding, sequestration and physically destructive training.

Gautier's *Giselle* personifies the fragmented woman of which Berger speaks. She is discouraged from self-expressing dance by a socializing norm, her mother, and finds self-completion only in Albrecht. This, Gautier sets within the Romantic moment of climax, death and subsequent rebirth into the realm of the spirit.



Promotional Image from *Giselle*, The Natural Ballet.

The *Natural Ballet* set itself a task of resurrecting *Giselle*, and "reassembling the disassembled woman floating out in the ether" as Doroschuk put it. Only Giselle was used from the original cast of characters. She danced the sequence of original scenes solo, thus rendering dance as a metaphor for the exploration and expression of identity, and the production her struggle to locate it.

Dance sequences referred often to a mirrored pool, an image of the act of viewing oneself through the eyes of others. The climax came as Giselle discarded her ballet apparatus around the pool — binding slippers, sexually mystifying tutu and narcissistic crown — and began a wildly uninhibited dance.

On another level of meaning, a soundtrack conversation about *Giselle* between two critics, and the addition of a character called the Curator turned the production around to reflect on itself as ballet. As the Curator alternately soothed and cajoled Giselle, she came to depict a distraught ballerina unable to reconcile her love of dance with the institutional constraints inhibiting it. Her resolution of the conflict mirrored Sloan's own reaction to the *National Ballet*; as the soundtrack conversation described *Giselle* as a masterpiece every dancer wishes to perform, she picked up a bouquet of flowers and walked offstage to end the performance.

In directorial terms, the production showed some weakness. It assumed a foreknowledge of the original, without which dramatic resonance suffered. Sloan's dancing was strong, but she couldn't overcome the blurry narrative progression on her own. Also, the character of the Curator was greatly underdeveloped.

Structurally, however, the production played simultaneous meanings off each other with assurance, which ultimately converged in an illuminating and unpedantic Everywoman parable. Perhaps more importantly, it freed a powerful story from the confines of the ballet hall and reconstructed it into a compelling populist narrative.

Postcript. At presstime Doroschuk cancelled the final six scheduled performances of *Giselle* because he was dissatisfied with it. The move was unfortunate because it went against the collective principles underlying the production, and hard to understand in view of the enthusiastic reception with which the first performances were received. ■

Glen Cooly is a writer, aspiring performance artist, and expiring musician.

Volume **11**

Compiled by Katie Thomas and Mark Rogers

I N D E X

BY SUBJECT *Numbers in brackets refer to ISSUE NUMBER*

Kathleen Myers and Buster Keaton in *Go West*, 1925.

Asian Politics and Culture

Against the Grain: *The 1987 Third Cinema Festival*, Cameron Bailey (4/48) 42-44.

Asian New World Video, Elspeth Sage (1&2/46) 17-19.

Scenes of History: *Bachelor-Man*, play by Winston Kam, review by Beverly Yhap (4/48) 45.

Alternative Press/ Publishing

Black Ink: An Historical Critique of Ontario's Black Press, Leila Heath (1&2/46) 20-27.

Delinquents with a Difference: *J.D.s* magazine, Chris Martin (4/48) 41.

Art Exhibitions/Reviews

A Culture of Eviction: *From Sea to Shining Sea* and *The Cameron Culture*, review by Clive Robertson (3/47) 42-45.

Artropolis: *Artropolis*, review by Sara Diamond (4/48) 37-40.

B.C. Mayworks, Sara Diamond (5/49) 12.

High Tech Soft Touch: Sponsorship at What Cost?, Bruce Barber (4/48) 8-9.

Industrial Images: News and Views from the West, Sara Diamond (4/48) 13-16.

Mayworks — Toronto, Pat Wilson (6/50) 7.

Mayworks — Vancouver, Sara Diamond (6/50) 6.

None Unturned: Hard Work on the Rock, Joan Sullivan (5/49) 13.

No Support: Nfld. Artists Send Work to France, Joan Sullivan (4/48) 10.

Official Vandalism: The Artist meets the Enforcer, Barbara Daniel (5/49) 11.

Out of Site: *Women on Site*, review by Georgia Waterson (3/47) 8.

Time for a Gift: *Time for a Gift*, by Bob Bean and David Craig, review by Bruce Barber (1&2/46) 56-59.

Artists' Organizations and Self-Determination

Artists and Taxes: It's the same old song with a different meaning each time it's sung, Bruce Barber (6/50) 10-11.

B.C. Artists Organize the Bread Lines, Sara Diamond (6/50) 9.

Hot Line, Clive Robertson (1&2/46) 11-15.

Newfoundland Report, Gerry Porter, Joan Sullivan (1&2/46) 6-7.

Northern War Games: Artists Encounter the Military, Bill Lindsay (6/50) 11.

Oh Give Me A Home: News and Views from the West, Sara Diamond (3/47) 11-12.

Willing to Fight, Laureen Marchand (1&2/46) 7.

Black Politics and Culture

A 'Livity' of Resistance: *First and Last*, dub poetry, EP and cassette by Ahdri Zhina Mandiela, review by Marva Jackson (5/49) 40.

Black Ink: An Historical Critique of Ontario's Black Press, Leila Heath (1&2/46) 20-27.

Caribbean Theatre Beats Out a New Rhythm, Klive Walker (1&2/46) 39-42.

Eyes on Black Britain: an interview with Isaac Julien, Richard Fung (4/48) 25-28.

Hand It Over: The 1987 Juno Awards, Clifton Joseph (4/48) 34.

Interviews from the 6th International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books Bradford April 1987, Clifton Joseph talks with Ali Hussein, Uusi Mchunu, Jean Giddons, Linton Kwesi Johnson and Mervyn Morris (1&2/46) 28-34.

No Laughing Matter, Marlene Nourbese Philip (6/50) 30-31.

The "Multicultural" Whitewash: Racism in Ontario's Arts Funding System, Marlene Nourbese Philip (3/47) 13-22.

The Language of Big Yard: *Big Yard, Parts One and Two*, play by Devon Haughton, review by Isobel Harry (1&2/46) 43-44.

The Sick Butterfly: South Africa's War Against Children, Marlene Nourbese Philip (1&2/46) 45-49.

Three Women Speak: Feminism and Art, Gail Bourgeois, Beatrice Bailey, Lesley Turner (4/48) 31-33.

Whose History?: Caribbean Studies Under Fire, Erica Simmons (4/48) 11.

Book Reviews

An Emergent Voice: *Slash* by Jeannette Armstrong, review by Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (5/49) 39.

Fork in the Road: *Slash* by Jeannette Armstrong, review by Lee Maracle (6/50) 42.

How Canada Says No: *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada*by Gary Kinsman, review by Thelma McCormack (3/47) 40-41.

Facing Contradictions: *Heroine* by Gail Scott, review by Karen Herland (6/50) 45.

Censorship

On Signs and Sex: *Visual Evidence: A Series of Video Screenings, Workshops, and Multimedia Events about Sexuality and Sexual Images*, Kathy McLeod and Nancy Shaw (3/47) 34-36.

Territories of the Forbidden: Lesbian Sex and Censorship, Marusia Bociurkiw (5/49) 27-32.

Central America

Art After the Coup: Interventions By Chilean Women, interview by Sara Diamond (5/49) 15-24.

Cultural Politics/ Policy Analysis

Artists and Taxes: It's the same old song with a different meaning each time it's sung, Bruce Barber (6/50) 10.

Dreaming Trade: Lessons From the Free Trade Agreement, Rowley Mossop (5/49) 25-26.

Fear, Greed and Dependency: Lessons From the Free Trade Agreement, Leo Panitch (4/48) 46-48.

Hard, Harder, Hardest: B.C. Writhes Again, Sara Diamond (1&2/46) 35-36.

Hot Line, Clive Robertson (1&2/46) 11-15.

In Memoriam: Robert Filliou: Couvre-Chef(s) D'Oeuvres, An Artist Who (with his friends) Overhauled the Functions of Creativity but Refused to Take Art Seriously, Clive Robertson (5/49) 42-46.

Newfoundland Report, Gerry Porter, Joan Sullivan (1&2/46) 6-7.

The New TACTics, Pat Wilson (5/49) 12.

The Political Economy of Artistic Production in Canada, Gary Kibbins (editorial) (3/47) 2.

Tightly Strapped, John Gillis (4/48) 9-10.

Vagabonds, Sara Diamond (1&2/46) 9.

Whose History?: Caribbean Studies Under Fire, Erica Simmons (4/48) 11.

Willing to Fight, Laureen Marchand (1&2/46) 7.

Education

Tightly Strapped, John Gillis (4/48) 9-10.

Whose History?: Caribbean Studies Under Fire, Erica Simmons (4/48) 11.

Feminism

Art After the Coup: Interventions by Chilean Women, interview by Sara Diamond (5/49) 15-24.

Choice Epic: *Struggle for Choice* video by Nancy Nicol and Janis Lundman, review by Sheila Goldgrab and Joel Kumove (1&2/46) 8-9.

Comedy Can Kill: Sheila Gostick in Performance, Pat Jefferies (3/47) 39.

From The Father's House: Women's Video and Feminism's Struggle with Difference, Dot Tuer (4/48) 17-24.

On Signs and Sex: Visual Evidence: *A Series of Screenings, Workshops and Multimedia Events about Sexuality and Sexual Images*, Kathy McLeod and Nancy Shaw (3/47) 34-36.

Territories of the Forbidden: Lesbian Culture, Sex and Censorship, Marusia Bociurkiw (5/49) 27-32.

Three Women Speak: Feminism and Art, Gail Bourgeois, Beatrice Bailey, Leslie Turner (4/48) 31-33.

Film

Against the Grain: The 1987 Third Cinema Festival, Cameron Bailey (4/48) 42-44.

Bacon and Eggs: The New B.C. Film Fund, Craig Condy-Berggold (4/48) 12.

Crossing the Great Divide: A report on the Flaherty Seminar, Abigail Norman (3/47)6-7.

Depth of Field: Super 8: Moving Images as Art, Randi Spires (6/50) 44.

Doing the Documentary: Art, Politics and the New Documentary, Gary Kibbins (1&2/46) 50-55.

Eyes on Black Britain: An interview with Isaac Julien, Richard Fung (4/48) 25-28.

Fragmentation Device: *Elephant Dreams* by Martha Davis, review by Peter Laurie (5/49) 41.

Straight Shots at Gay Targets: *Un Zoo La Nuit* by Jean-Claude Lauzon, review by Steven Maynard (6/50) 36.

Translating the Lip Side: *Fire Words*, review by Margaret Christakos (3/47) 30.

We Are Amused: Lesbian Laughter and Transgression: *Reform School Girls* by Tom DeSimone, review by Jane Farrow (6/50) 43.

Gay and Lesbian Politics and Culture

Another World: Five Video Premieres by Gay Men, Colin Campbell (3/47) 23-25.

Delinquents with a Difference: *J.D.s* magazine, Chris Martin (4/48) 41.

Gay Barriers Games, Sara Diamond (5/49) 47-48.

Straight Shots At Gay Targets: *Un Zoo La Nuit*, film by Jean-Claude Lauzon, review by Steven Maynard (6/50) 36.

Sex in Venice: *The Ads Epidemic*, video by John Greyson, review by Rowley Mossop (4/48) 30.

Territories of the Forbidden: Lesbian Culture, Sex and Censorship, Marusia Bociurkiw (5/49) 27-32.

We Are Amused: Lesbian Laughter and Transgression: *Reform School Girls* by Tom DeSimone, review by Jane Farrow (6/50) 43.

Housing

A Loft of One's Own, Ric Amis (3/47) 9.

Tenants Act Up: *Up Against the Wallpaper*, performance by the Clichettes, David Maclean (5/49) 35.

Labour/Unemployment

B.C. Mayworks, Sara Diamond (5/49) 12.

Fear, Greed and Dependency: Lessons From the Free Trade Agreement, Leo Panitch (4/48) 46-48.

Going Down the Road: Privatization, Sara Diamond (5/49) 8.

Hot Line, Clive Robertson (1&2/46) 11-15.

Mayworks — Toronto, Pat Wilson (6/50) 7.

Mayworks — Vancouver, Sara Diamond (6/50) 6.

Not Legally Bound, Karl Beveridge (5/49) 9.

Music

A 'Livity' of Resistance: *First & Last*, EP and cassette by Ahdri Zhina Mandiela, review by Marva Jackson (5/49) 40.

Hand It Over: The 1987 Juno Awards, Clifton Joseph (4/48) 34.

In Memoriam: Peter Tosh 1944-1987, Isobel Harry (3/47) 46-47.

Shoot From the Lipp: *Shoot From the Lipp*, LP by David Lippman, review by Marva Jackson (4/48) 29.

Women Centre Stage, Susan Sturman (6/50) 38-41.

Media

Delinquents with a Difference: *J.D.s* magazine, Chris Martin (4/48) 41.

Native Politics and Culture

Anti-Olympic Agit-Prop: Peace Movement Drags its Feet, Josie Wallenius (5/49) 10-11.

Fork in the Road: *Slash*, novel by Jeannette Armstrong, review by Lee Maracle (6/50) 42.

Rights on Paper: Jeannette Armstrong, interviewed by Victoria Freeman (5/49) 36-38.

Token and Taboo, Alfred Young Man (6/50) 46-48.

Performance Art

Remote Control: *Solidarity Forever . . . ?* Chris Creighton-Kelly, review by Craig Condy-Berggold (5/49) 34.

Tenants Act Up: *Up Against the Wallpaper*, by the Clichettes, review by David MacLean (5/49) 35.

Pornography

Delinquents with a Difference: *J.D.s* magazine, Chris Martin (4/48) 41.

Racism

Anti-Olympic Agit-Prop: Peace Movement Drags its Feet, Josie Wallenius (5/49) 10-11.

No Laughing Matter: Notes From the Margin, Marlene Nourbese Philip (6/50) 30-31.

The "Multicultural" Whitewash: Racism in Ontario's Arts Funding System, Marlene Nourbese Philip (3/47) 13-22.

The Sick Butterfly: South Africa's War Against Children, Marlene Noubese Philip (1&2/46) 45-49.

Sexuality

Delinquents with a Difference: *J.D.s* magazine, Chris Martin (4/48) 41.

Going All the Way: A Panel on Recent Work and Approaches, Zainub Verjee (3/47) 37-38.

How Canada Says No: *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* by Gary Kinsman, review by Thelma McCormack (3/47) 40-41.

On Signs and Sex: *Visual Evidence: A Series of Video Screenings, Workshops and Multimedia Events about Sexuality and Sexual Images*, Kathy McLeod and Nancy Shaw (3/47) 34-36.

Sex in Venice: *The Ads Epidemic*, video by John Greyson, review by Rowley Mossop (4/48) 30.

Territories of the Forbidden: Lesbian Culture, Sex and Censorship, Marusia Bociurkiw (5/49) 27-32.

Theatre

The Language of Big Yard: *Big Yard, Parts One and Two* by Devon Haughton, review by Isobel Harry (1&2/46) 43-44.

Caribbean Theatre Beats Out a New Rhythm, Klive Walker, (1&2/46) 39-42.

On the Edge of the Rock, Joan Sullivan (3/47) 7.

Retro Retch: *Tragedy of Manners* by Donna Lypchuk, review by Su Rynard (4/48) 36.

Scenes of History: *Bachelor-Man* by Winston Kam, review by Beverly Yhap (4/48) 45.

Standin' the Gaff: Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance Festival, Bruce Barber (3/47) 26-29.

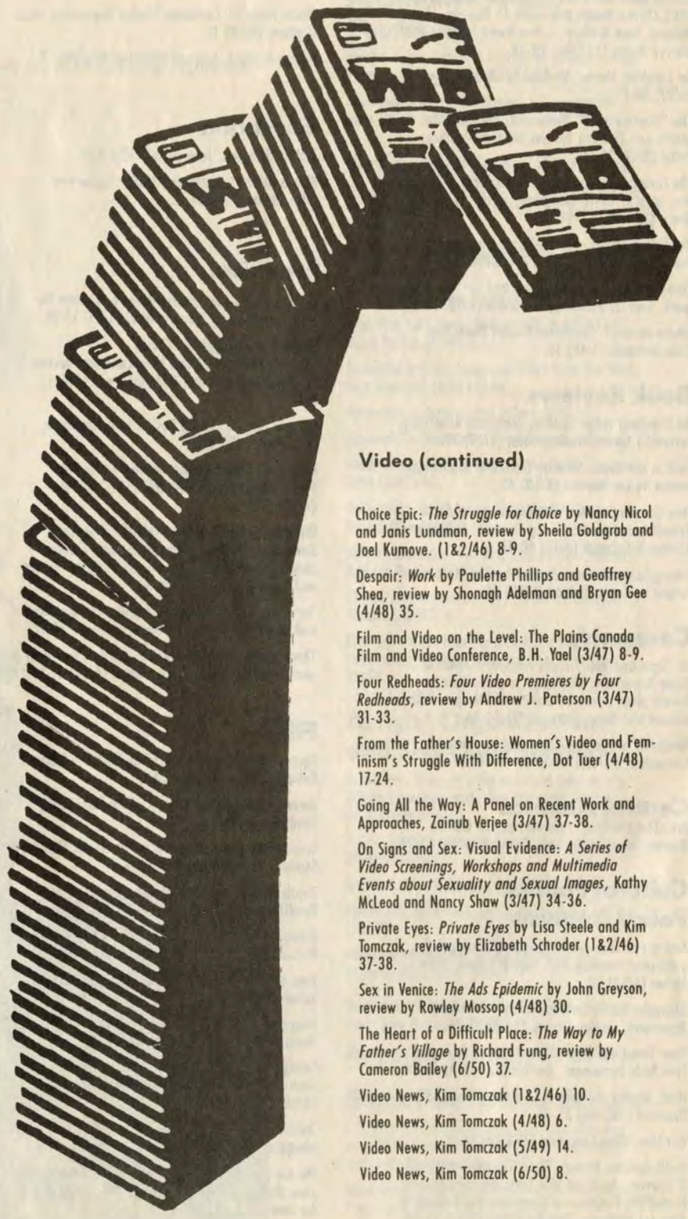
Video

Against the Grain: The 1987 Third Cinema Festival, Cameron Bailey (4/48) 42-44.

Another World: Five Video Premieres by Gay Men, review by Colin Campbell (3/47) 23-25.

Art After the Coup: Interventions by Chilean Women, interview by Sara Diamond (5/49) 15-24.

Asian New World Video, Elspeth Sage (1&2/46) 17-19.



Video (continued)

Choice Epic: *The Struggle for Choice* by Nancy Nicol and Janis Lundman, review by Sheila Goldgrab and Joel Kumove. (1&2/46) 8-9.

Despair: *Work* by Paulette Phillips and Geoffrey Shea, review by Shonagh Adelman and Bryan Gee (4/48) 35.

Film and Video on the Level: The Plains Canada Film and Video Conference, B.H. Yael (3/47) 8-9.

Four Redheads: *Four Video Premieres by Four Redheads*, review by Andrew J. Paterson (3/47) 31-33.

From the Father's House: Women's Video and Feminism's Struggle With Difference, Dot Tuer (4/48) 17-24.

Going All the Way: A Panel on Recent Work and Approaches, Zainub Verjee (3/47) 37-38.

On Signs and Sex: Visual Evidence: *A Series of Video Screenings, Workshops and Multimedia Events about Sexuality and Sexual Images*, Kathy McLeod and Nancy Shaw (3/47) 34-36.

Private Eyes: *Private Eyes* by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, review by Elizabeth Schroder (1&2/46) 37-38.

Sex in Venice: *The Ads Epidemic* by John Greyson, review by Rowley Mossop (4/48) 30.

The Heart of a Difficult Place: *The Way to My Father's Village* by Richard Fung, review by Cameron Bailey (6/50) 37.

Video News, Kim Tomczak (1&2/46) 10.

Video News, Kim Tomczak (4/48) 6.

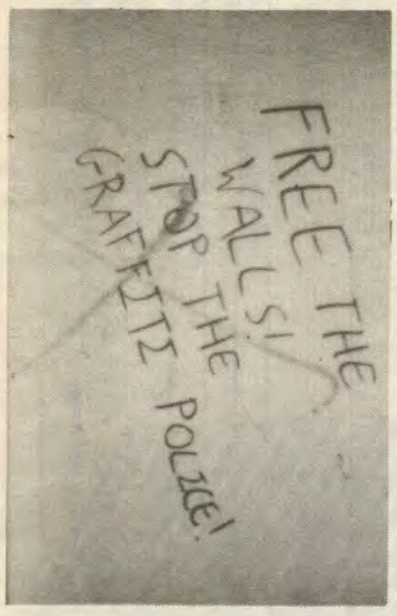
Video News, Kim Tomczak (5/49) 14.

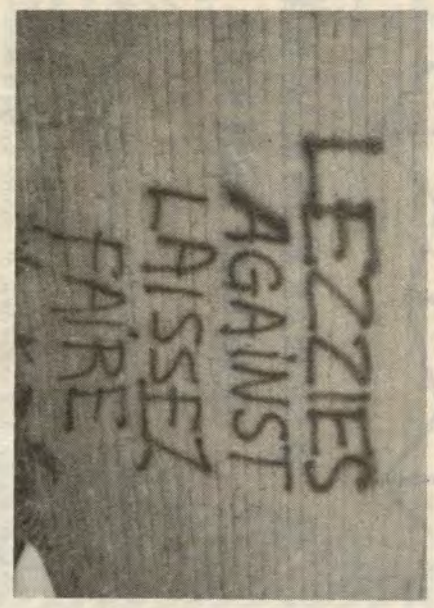
Video News, Kim Tomczak (6/50) 8.

URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT

SPRAY PLAY

FOUND ART NOT LOST ON SUMMIT





A *belles lettres* sampling of wall works dedicated to the Leaders of the Free World. Gathered in and around Toronto during the Economic Summit of June, 1988.

Photo by Alice deGood.

WHAT IS VIDEO ART?

Since the late 1960's, video makers have produced a remarkable body of work which covers the widest possible range of subjects; from the most technically advanced computer-interfaced video to community-based productions, from highly personalized works of art to dramatic and new narrative tapes.

"Video artists have used a wide variety of approaches including performance, narrative and documentary, often appropriating the forms used by television to analyse and critique the medium. They have scrutinized the conventions of soap operas, mocked commercials, deconstructed newscasts, questions definitions of gender and sexuality, and provided a space for those traditionally pushed to the fringes — women, gays, lesbians and visible minorities."
Susan Ditta, Video Curator, National Gallery of Canada

Canadian video art has and continues to earn international recognition and respect for its innovative form and sophisticated content.

WHO USES VIDEO AND WHY?

From the art gallery or museum to the classroom and lecture hall, from community education centres to international festivals and symposiums, videotapes by artists and independent producers present a rich and diverse resource, exploring the artistic, social and political issues of contemporary culture. Who uses video? Anyone and everyone who is interested in contemporary forms of cultural expression.

"Artists' video in Canada is a richly inventive and infinitely challenging complex of crossroads drawing together ideas and individuals from many different disciplines."
Robert McFadden, Curator, 'Identifying Tracks'

"We should acknowledge the political activist artists' use of video since the 1960's in single channel and installation formats have provided the most radical and searching models of what television can be."
John G. Hanhardt, Curator, Whitney Museum, 'Watching Television'

"Removed from the context of television, video images become reference material through which an artist can introduce a different outlook on a particular subject. The content of television creates myths, modifies perception, and changes an individual's orientation to his or her community. Artists who choose to use video as an art form comment on the strength of the media."
Bob Riley, Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

"Independently-produced video (to distinguish it from broadcast television and other commercial uses of the medium) became a possibility in the late Sixties with the introduction of inexpensive, portable recording equipment. So as an art form, video has been in existence for less than two decades. Not much time for 'official' histories yet — a very attractive idea, especially for a woman."
Lisa Steele, Video Artist

WHAT IS V TAPE?

V Tape is Canada's largest and most comprehensive information and distribution service for videotapes by artists and independent producers. Our range of services include video rentals and sales to institutions and individuals, an in-house library of over 600 video titles, extensive files on video producers, and a print library including magazines, catalogues, reviews, and posters. We also provide consultation services for curators, educators, audio-visual librarians, and video programmers.

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