

FUSE

M A G A Z I N E

double issue

FALL 1989

Vol. XIII No. 1+2

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*"My People will sleep
for one hundred years.
When they awake
it will be the artists
that give them
back their spirit."*

LOUIS RIEL

in
the
red

by Joane Cardinal-Shubert

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SEPTEMBER 6 - OCTOBER 7
**Josette Belanger
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in peace medallion (1881) by George T. Morgan.

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1989 Graceland Art Rodeo

SEPTEMBER 13 - OCTOBER 7
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letters

The Haacke Problem

RE "CORPORATE MONEY LAUNDERING THROUGH THE ARTS" (FUSE: XII NO. 6)
Standing before Hans Haacke's "Alcan" piece in the great corporate ship of the National Gallery, one reads the accusing texts, examines the images documenting corporate misdeeds and feels guilt (all those aluminium products around the house) for being a part of the whole greedy, sordid business. But this is corporate space and Alcan is known to be a major contributor to all manner of cultural programmes, and here is the proof of corporate commitment to art and culture. Even vicious attacks on the integrity of the corporation—when made by a "great artist"—are not censored, but displayed for all to see and enjoy.

I call this the "Haacke Problem" but it is really the central problem for all artists working in the Western industrial countries today. At the moment of sale, a work of art becomes a part of—even a picture of—the market economy, and all other meanings are reduced to a supporting role. All that a target of a critical art attack has to do to neutralize the attack and turn it to its own advantage is to buy the work and donate it to a museum. This would be more effective in the long run, and much cheaper than reforming the mean, nasty and very profitable policies under attack. Most corporations are still too proud or offended to follow this course—against the advice of their expensive PR consultants—but they will come around.

In this situation, where every criticism is liable to be absorbed and turned to support the "liberal" image of the offending corporation (or institution or individual or ideology), it is clear that direct political or socially critical art is doomed to appropriation and exploitation. Artists can only console themselves with the knowledge that they have declared their social/political engagement, but—except for the most obtuse—this is very small comfort indeed.

Robert Adrian, Vienna.

Canadian Literary Mafia

RE "GUT ISSUES IN BABYLON" (FUSE XII NO. 5)

I liked the article on arts organizations by Marlene N. Philip in your April/May issue, mainly because it exposes the literary mafia of Canada. I am pleased that you are fighting on behalf of writers from visible minority groups and women. I wish you all the best.

Stephen Gill, Cornwall, Ont.

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

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The Grierson Documentary Seminar and Festival is a unique gathering of film and video makers, educators, media professionals and enthusiasts, students and critics, that together enjoy the reputation of being the most informative and stimulating event of the kind in Canada. The Seminar was established to honour the memory of John Grierson, father of the documentary.

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The Literature Office of the Ontario Arts Council offers two separate granting programs for professional writers who are residents of Ontario. These programs are:

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WORKS-IN-PROGRESS

This program offers a limited number of grants to complete works-in-progress of distinguished literary merit in the following categories: fiction, poetry, literary or arts criticism; essays, commentary or analysis (belles lettres). Application deadlines are January 1, May 1, September 1. The maximum grant is \$20,000.

Application forms for each program are available from the OAC Literature Office.

Ontario Arts Council
151 Bloor Street West, Suite 500,
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NOAM CHOMSKY IS AN internationally acclaimed linguistics scholar, controversial political philosopher and prolific author in several fields. He is Professor of Linguistics and Philosophy and Institute Professor at MIT and recipient of eight honorary degrees.

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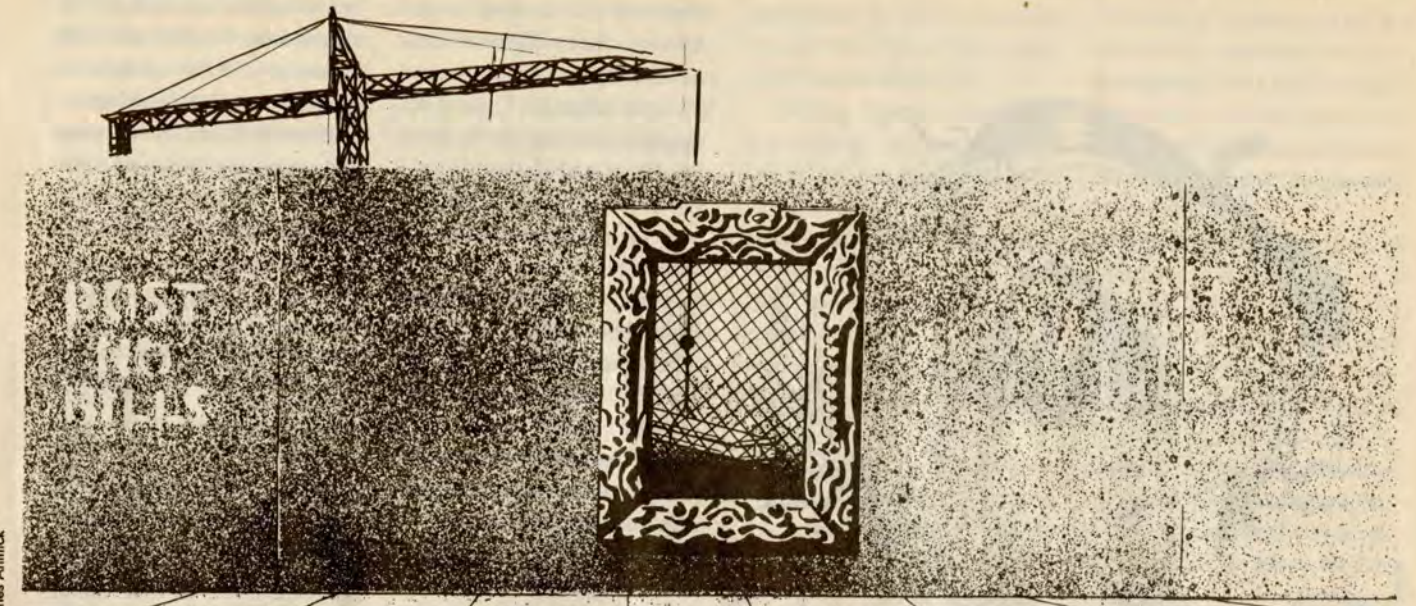


Illustration by Jones Anffick

COMMUNITIES and the Spectacle of GREED

by Mark Hesselink

It's a city within itself, oblivious to the rest of the world.

Chuck Magwood
President, Skydome Corporation

Art, in and of itself cannot change the structure of social relations, but artists, as activists, can affect changes within the institution of art and can be catalysts for changes in our larger communities.

Lillian Allen
Is Your Art Your Politics?

In the wake of the spectacle that enshrouded the completion of the Toronto Skydome, the art contained under the Skydome's roof has become a marker of a community's co-option. While popular press coverage of the Skydome art has focused on the problems surrounding the process of selection and debated the appearance of the work, the artists themselves have been subtly or not so subtly co-opted.

The works by Lutz Haufschild, Mimi Gellman and Susan Schelle may indeed be as beautiful as the newsmedia has suggested, but ultimately they can only signal a complicity with the distorted sense of priorities that are the corporate politics of the Skydome. Michael Snow's piece "The Audience," spotlighted because of the popular press's moralizing criticisms that the ugly gargoyles are an affront to the stadium's patrons, plays into the double-speak politics of corporate non-interference; conferring to the successful or famous artist the right to remain autonomous from public opinion.

Either as the "chosen" artists or as those who, outside of the corporate ballgame, feigned indifference, the Toronto art community has been divided and silent on the issue of the Skydome. By simply dismissing the Skydome

as irrelevant to a community-based cultural practice, we are left with Snow's piece as a reminder that what lurks in the absence of an active art community is the presence of what Toronto artist John Scott has called "a diabolical scenario of total greed."

That the Skydome has effectively created the public appearance of conferring privileges to artists and "representing" a community interest while effectively co-opting that community is not something that should be shrugged off as an aberration within an otherwise cohesive arts milieu. The absence of a collective critical voice from artists to oppose the Skydome's appropriation of culture appears all the more ominous in light of future plans for this "world class city."

With the Skydome completed, developers are now pitching the

ballet/opera house, estimated to cost \$305 million. Behind the scheme is businessman Hal Jackman who wants Ottawa to provide \$70 million. Ontario is expected to contribute \$70 million, plus land valued at \$75 million; and the Metro Toronto municipal council is responsible for \$20 million. The remaining \$70 million is expected to be raised in the private sector.

Three hundred and five million dollars is nearly three times the annual \$108 million budget of the Canada Council, whose responsibility it is to fund all cultural activities throughout the country, and greater than the \$130 million spent by the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications on all aspects of cultural development.

The cultural package plays a significant role in these mega-profit projects, particularly in



Illustration by James Anflück

“public” buildings like the Skydome, the proposed ballet/ opera house, the C.N.E Trade Centre, and the so-called celebratory festivals like the World’s Fair Exposition and the Olympic Games.

The Toronto Ontario Olympic Council (T.O.O.C.), a private group headed by entrepreneur Paul Henderson, is bidding for the 1996 Summer Olympics. The estimated cost is \$1.2 billion. Expo 2000—pitched by a consortium of backers including IBM, Xerox, McDonald’s, Marathon Realty, Labatt’s, Molson’s and Carling O’Keefe—is estimated at \$1.3 billion.

Henderson approached the City of Toronto to develop two elements of the 1996 bid: an arts programme and a multicultural programme. The art and culture packages of the Olympics are expected to receive a budget of approximately \$40 million. Heather Hatch, the City’s curator and head arts administrator, has been asked to head the Cultural Advisory Committee. The committee will be divided into categories includ-

ing Architecture and Design, Arts General, Dance, Literary, Media Arts, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts.

Put together by T.O.O.C., the *Executive Summary* of Toronto’s proposal to host the 1996 Olympic Games—not the actual proposal but a document to pre-sell it—notes that an “appropriate” theme for the arts programme has yet to be decided but it will need to be: “celebratory, inspirational and look(s) ahead to the next one hundred years” (p. 17). The *Executive Committee Report No. 18* (of the City of Toronto) states that:

the objectives of the arts programme are to enhance the overall Olympic bid with a festival that will reflect the *creativity, dynamism, and vitality* found in our arts community; and to involve and gain the support of a broad spectrum of the representatives from the arts community in the formulation of ideas for the Olympic arts programme. (p.4)

Representatives at this time for the visual arts include Joan Foster, the Executive Director of the Ontario Crafts Council, Allan MacKay, Director of The Power Plant, Roald Nasgaard, Chief

Curator of the AGO and Loretta Yarlow, Director/Curator at the Art Gallery of York University. To complement the Cultural Advisory Committee and to aid in the formation of the arts programme, Hatch has developed a long list of consultants for the visual arts, including Chris Youngs, A.A Bronson, Felix Partz, Hennie Wolff, John Scott, Steve Pozel, Rosemary Donegan, Gary Hall and Peter Day.

Given the power that these consultants will have to influence the disbursement of cultural funds, it is interesting to note that the \$40 million dollar budget for a one time cultural event is more than the annual budget of \$28 million dollars the Ontario Arts Council was given last year. Yet these consultants, although they are all active and may feel responsible to that community, are ultimately responsible to no one. Regardless of personal political agendas, they get caught in a process where consultants become interchangeable. Neither elected nor chosen, or functioning within the paradigm of an arm’s length policy, these representatives are no longer empowered by the community but by the corporation. As such, the attempt to include the community in order to gain tacit approval becomes a diversion from addressing the reality that there are in fact many arts communities, and some may be less supportive of the Olympic project than others.

In respect to the broader social reality, the figures for megaproject developments are even more obscene. For despite \$134 million from provincial capital budget for housing in 1988 (still two thirds less than the ballet/opera house) there were 20,000 homeless people in Metro in 1988, and another 50,000 metro households on the brink of homelessness. Childcare funds have been frozen

or slashed at municipal, provincial and federal levels. Each month more than 78,000 people are forced to line up at food banks.

Meanwhile, the City of Toronto has produced a document called *Healthy Toronto 2000*, which links poor states of health to poor housing conditions:

The current housing crisis in Toronto reflected in homelessness, poor quality or unaffordable housing is having an adverse impact on people’s health . . . The health effects of homelessness while difficult to separate from the often associated effects of poverty, include cold injury (hypothermia and frost bite), chronic heart and lung diseases, sleep deprivation, infectious diseases, children’s mental health disorders, adult psychiatric disorders and chronic stress . . . (p.75)

Separating their apparent concern for the larger political and social conditions from the issue of culture and the funding of art for megaprojects, the City of Toronto’s Department of Housing commissioned an assessment of artists’ housing and work space needs on June 29, 1989. The study, to be done by Social Data Research Ltd. of Hamilton, is the first, and so far only step, in the city’s attempt to publicly address the inadequate housing and work space conditions facing many artists. In this context, objective number six of the same study—“To define and de-limit a subpopulation of artists who require *some form of public intervention* (emphasis added) to ensure their access to affordable work space and housing”—should cause concern. Its paternalistic tone blames the victim and suggests that artists are irresponsible and at fault for their situation; that is, we deserve to live in near-poverty conditions.

In setting the terms, the city is constructing a process that wrests economic self determination from artists and defines them as the responsibility of the city. The

myth about our lifestyles—cultural centrality—is based upon the realities we live—economic marginalisation. None of the city’s proposed objectives for the study includes a broader socio-economic analysis of why artists, in this instance—and many people in general—are facing such problems. Consequently, there is no reason to believe that these problems will be addressed, let alone corrected.

Implicitly, there is a contradiction between the need to help artists because they are important and the reasons why we are important. Value is accorded to the myths of artists’ lifestyles because they are used as a marketing device for corporate development, helping to sell luxury condominiums and large scale heroic spectacles. In order to resolve the economic and related problems we face, we must oppose the marketing of our lifestyles.

While a great deal of bureaucratic energy is being generated to construct the illusion of a “lifestyle” art community, this does not mean that the notion of community as the site(s) of political intervention, cannot serve as the basis of resistance for oppositional politics. One such example, The Bread Not Circuses Coalition, a group of anti-poverty activists, municipal politicians, cultural workers, activist women’s groups, tenant organizations and concerned people shows that it is possible to form effective coalitions in the face of total corporate greed.

Struggling for first priority needs of people—quality affordable housing, sufficient food, good childcare, jobs and a healthy city—the coalition is calling for community inclusion in government planning processes. Specifically they want a full public accounting of financial and social costs, adequate funding for con-

cerned groups—like the Bread Not Circuses Coalition—to cover organizational expenses such as the cost of hiring experts and public education, rock-solid guarantees (build the housing first as a sign of good faith), and finally, the power to say no.

These demands are not radical or new, but they are strategically aimed at the efforts of developers and bureaucrats to construct the illusion of a single seamless community. It is important to the International Olympic Committee (I.O.C.)—the governing body that grants the Olympics—that the Olympic bid be supported by the community at large. It is here that The Bread Not Circuses Coalition is prepared to intervene if their demands are not met. Their outspoken public dissent from the bid for 1996 Olympics addressed to the I.O.C. will dispel the myth of a supportive city. Thus, the notion of “community” becomes the site of both a rhetorical and a lived struggle. Here then is an

opportunity for artists, as activists, to affect changes in the structure of social relations.

The Bread Not Circuses Coalition strategy of disrupting the façade of community support depends on broad-based social and political support and on tactical grassroots organizing. This could provide a model for arts communities to form a response both to the Olympic arts programme and to the issues raised by the Olympics in general.

On October 2, 1989 the Olympic Cultural Advisory Committee, headed by Heather Hatch, is planning to hold an information session on the cultural package. The cultural package, formed by the committee and its consultants for the 1996 Olympic bid, goes to the I.O.C. in February of 1990. With the cultural package already determined, artists might wonder how much affect their voices will have in making changes to the document. While the information session will provide the Cultural

Advisory Committee with an opportunity to present the arts community with a *fait accompli*, the session will also present an opportunity to make demands and show public dissent if the demands are not met.

Once held to be the basis of resistance and opposition to a dominant culture, the notion of community has now become contested territory. Artists’ communities defined by individual art practices may no longer be enough. Artists’ communities may need to start defining themselves organizationally as artists’ communities. As artists, we need to re-define the terms that frame the sites of the many different struggles we are engaged in. This socially and politically based interrogation of culture by artists suggests the possibility that art can be an emancipatory practice. In these terms, an art community is indispensable to the broader spectrum of community-based actions. ■

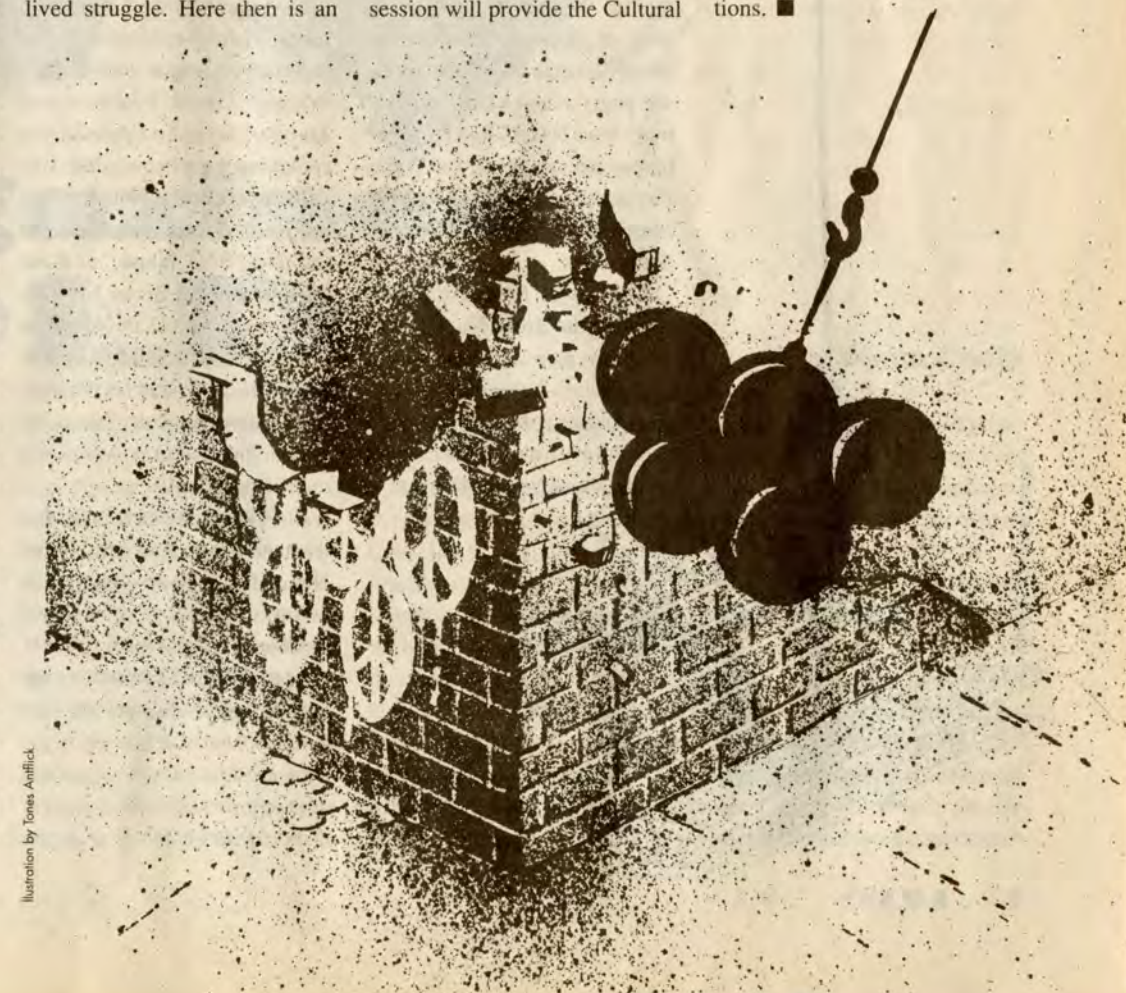


Illustration by James Anflück

Let Them Eat OPERA

TORONTO—*The Peoples' Festival of the Arts* on July 22 was a political protest without the usual heavy-handed rhetoric. One newspaper reporter assigned to cover the event looked completely perplexed when she was told, after asking when the speeches would start, that there were no speeches. No speeches at a political protest!

The politics was in the performance. Whether it was dub poet Clifton Joseph, folk singer Marie-Lynn Hammond, Second Look Community Theatre, singer George Dymny, the rock-reggae band Imagine—or others who took to the gazebo on the front lawn of Queen's Park—the political message was clear: people are angry about plans to spend more than 300 million for a ballet/opera house at Bay and Wellesley streets in downtown Toronto. More than 400 people participated in the event.

The Peoples' Festival was sponsored by the Bread Not Circuses Coalition, a group opposed to the multi-billion-dollar mega-project spending spree being planned for Toronto at a time when this city's poverty crisis is at its worst in

years. Coalition endorsers include 18 anti-poverty groups, women's organizations, labour groups and municipal politicians. The Coalition also has more than 150 individual supporters including single mothers and homeless men, religious leaders and academics, architects and other professionals, community workers and community leaders, union workers and independent artists, anti-poverty activists and tenants, and at least one former Olympic athlete.

The Peoples' Festival was planned as a celebration of popular culture and partly as a protest against plans for the ballet/opera house. Multi-millionaire Hal Jackman, in league with Ontario Premier David Peterson and Toronto Mayor Art Eggleton, has cooked up the scheme to build the ballet/opera house on land originally slated for affordable housing. The "B. O. house," as it has been tagged by Bread Not Circuses supporters, threatens to divert limited capital and operating funds from other art projects, especially community-based, independent cultural work and multi-cultural art.

B. O. house boosters insist that their critics—especially Bread Not Circuses—are opposed to culture, that they are cultural Philistines. *The Peoples' Festival* proved the Coalition's support for popular culture, while the

by Michael Shapcott

plans for the ballet/opera house epitomize that project's support from elite, corporate culture. The festival is only the first in a series of cultural initiatives to fight for popular culture and against corporate culture. Already, the Coalition is working with cultural workers to support more politically conscious and politically active arts.

More than 100 people joined in the popular planning workshop at *The Peoples' Festival*. Participants designed their own plans for the Bay/Wellesley site—one of the more original plans included "a jail for corrupt politicians." The workshop was co-sponsored by Canadian Architects, Designers and Planners for Social Responsibility, and Women Plan Toronto. There are plans to continue the popular planning process up until the public hearing on the B. O. house, slated for early fall.

The Coalition wants a first priority on the real needs of people: affordable housing, adequate childcare, well-paying and socially useful jobs, clean and safe communities, and a vibrant and active cultural life. After completing the \$530 million-plus domed stadium, Toronto's corporate community, and their political allies, are plotting a string of mega-projects including the B. O. house, a \$1.7 billion (and counting) bid for the '96 summer Olympics, and a \$1.3 billion (and counting) bid for the World's Fair in the year 2000. ■



Magazines FOLD

by Glenn Cooly

TORONTO—The summer of 1989 will be remembered as a dismal one for the Canadian cultural press, after three highly regarded, long-standing publications—*FILE* Magazine, *Broadside*, and *Vanguard*—folded within six weeks of each other.

FILE, an anagram of *Life Magazine* both in title and format, was a critically acclaimed magazine published by General Idea (GI) as a forum for the multi-disciplinary art trio's high art hijinks. Its pages

contained artists' projects and irreverent yet astute commentary about the art world. Felix Partz, a member of GI, said *FILE* "was about being an art magazine without actually being an art magazine."

Partz said GI shelved *FILE* after 17 years because they felt it had run its course. He said GI began the magazine as a means of reaching an international audience, but "now that we are in that arena, it is not necessary to be

making that connection anymore."

Broadside, a news and cultural review featuring analysis and criticism by Canada's leading feminist writers, fell victim to funding difficulties. The well-designed tabloid, published 10 times yearly since 1979, saw its Ontario Arts Council (OAC) grant cut in half last year. At the same time, anticipated funding from the Secretary of State Women's Programme did not materialize be-

cause the programme's administrators bowed to pressure from right wing lobbyists, according to editorial collective member Susan G. Cole.

Cole said *Broadside* had difficulties with funding agencies because it was "pro-lesbian and it took a pro-choice stand on the abortion issue." Scarce funding had a fatally "demoralizing" effect on the periodical's editorial collective, she added, despite strong support from contributors



and readers.

Philinda Masters, *Broadside's* editor, said theoretical reasons also contributed to the periodical's demise. In her final editorial in the August-September issue, Masters said the *Broadside* collective "was formed in an environment of white feminist perspectives." Since "the most crucial aspect of feminism in the past few years has been the efforts to incorporate anti-racist perspectives into practise and analysis . . . I think perhaps it's time for us to let go of our hold, and to pass on the responsibility for reflecting and shaping our political struggle to others." Cole expressed a hope that the periodical might be revived: "*Broadside* is not dead; it is sleeping, and if a group of women want to wake it up, it is there."

Broadside is the sixth feminist publication to close down during the past two years. The next most recent is *Cayenne*, a small-circulation spin-off of the International Women's Day Committee newsletter. *Cayenne* succumbed to editorial work overload and inadequate financial support in February.

In many quarters, *Vanguard's* demise in early August elicited the most surprise. It came on the heels of a decision by Montreal-based *Parachute* magazine to operate without a Toronto regional editor, a move that might further alter Canadian critical arts coverage. Publisher Chantal Pontbriand said that *Parachute* decided to cover Toronto from Montreal after Carol Laing, its last Toronto editor, resigned for personal reasons.

Vanguard began in 1978 as the newsletter of the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG), with Russell Keziere as editor. It went independent in 1984 amidst changes at VAG, and became one of Canada's most well received art

magazines. *Vanguard* was renowned for its network of regional correspondents, which Keziere established in order "to let various communities represent themselves," a practice that other art magazines came to adopt for their own.

When *Vanguard* announced its demise, it claimed a large subscriber base and annual revenues of about \$500,000, including maximum levels of funding from provincial and federal arts councils. *Vanguard* was also subsidized by the activities of its publisher, the Society of Critical Arts Publications, which ran a typesetting service and produced arts calendars and gallery guides.

Nevertheless, the magazine was in deep financial trouble. An operating deficit of about \$60,000 compounded by a cash flow crisis meant the magazine could not continue, business manager Larry Cohen said. Cohen, along with Keziere, said there is no truth to rumours that *Vanguard* supporters plan to restart the publication.

Members of the arts community were unanimous in expressing shock and dismay at the news. Vancouver-based writer Claudia Beck said "it's a great blow for the West, especially for Vancouver." OAC spokesperson Margaret Dryden added "it was one art magazine that went out of its way to really serve the nation. It published viewpoints from people across the country."

The rapid loss of three magazines amplifies persistent questions about the stability of Canadian cultural publications, and the role of funding agencies in keeping financially troubled ones afloat. While arts councils say they are doing all they can, critics contend that they should be more aggressive in seeking government funding increases. ■

Women Raise Their Pens

by Sheelagh Conway & Aruna Papp

TORONTO—A number of women writers concerned with sexism and racism in publishing are holding a conference in Toronto in November. The Canadian Women Multicultural Writers charge that existing writers organizations, such as the Writers Union and The Canadian Authors Association, are doing little or nothing to address these issues.

The group paints a bleak picture for Canadian women writers. Only 30 per cent of the books published in Canada every year are women-authored, and the majority of these are by white and middle-class women. For women of colour, Native women, immigrant women and working class women the picture is particularly bleak.

Canadian women authors, especially if they are visible minor-

ity or working-class women, are less likely to have their works reviewed or chosen as texts for universities and highschools. Similarly, their work is less often bought for public libraries or included in archives. Women authors are less likely to be chosen to sit on writers' juries and less likely to receive Canada Council grants. Women are also underrepresented in university literature courses and writers in residence programmes. Clearly, in the writing world, sexism and racism prevail.

Canadian Multicultural Women Writers are inviting interested women writers to discuss approaches to deal with the plight of women writers in Canada. For further information call Sheelagh Conway (416) 535-7173 or Aruna Papp (613) 281-5469. ■

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FREE PARKING



by Dan Lander

Recorded sound, as a form of cultural representation and expression, is an ill-considered medium. Although the technology required to record sound is abundant, tape recorders, in general, are utilized in a passive fashion to record previously recorded music, and not, like the camera, as a creative tool. In the visual arts—film, video, installation, sculpture and performance—sound, more often than not, is relegated to the subordinate role of simply describing what is already there. Furthermore, recorded sound has been limited by its role of reproducing already existing

sonic forms such as literature, theatre and music. In the hierarchy of the senses, seeing comes before hearing, creating an artificial restriction in regards to aural production and reception.

There is no real theory regarding recorded sound, nor is it an easy task to articulate a body of work that concerns itself with investigating either the properties of the medium, our reception of the medium or the ramifications of the lack of popular engagement with recording technologies. In fact, recorded sound, as a form of cultural representation and hence as an art form, is un-

mapped terrain.

The stuff of an art of sound, if in fact there is such an art, is thought to lie in the realm of experimental music. This art-form developed via the introduction of noise as part and parcel of the musical palette. The definition of noise that is most commonly used is "any unwanted sound." These unwanted sounds—every known sound in the world other than those produced by musical instruments—were "liberated" from their usual context and elevated to the lofty state of music. The theory is that all sound (noise) is music and that by "hearing" all sound as music, one is opening up one's mind and accepting the world without the prior associations that, previously, led to the conclusion that noise is unwanted. In actual fact, the "open mind" is engaged in an act of predetermination, restricting the interpretation of sound and hence the multiplicity of its meanings by relegating the function of sound to a purely musical one.

If all sound is music then what are we left with? What is there to discuss? What is the process we would have to engage in so that we might hear all sounds as musical ones? First we would have to impose the same structures and confinements on sounds that are used in a creative way to compose and orchestrate music. With musical instruments this comes easy, as they were designed and constructed to emit music and not noise. Implicit in this imposition is the stripping away of both the original context of the sound and also the cultural meanings of sound conveyed in a specific context. We would have to forget, for instance, that the fire alarm, sounding in the dark of night, signalled danger.

This tendency to strip away the cultural significance of sounds, by assigning them to musical equivalents, makes all sounds equal within the confines of a uniform theory, that until 100 years ago, applied only to music. The "open mind" becomes engaged in an act of censorship: a kind of self-imposed withdrawal into the realm of avoidance. What is avoided becomes discarded and what remains is confined to the four walls of a music box.

This is not to suggest that noise has no place in musical composition. Some of the more interesting music that does incorporate noise is radical precisely because of the incorporation of cultural and political meanings that inject it with a vitality that goes beyond that of instrumentation. However, the music bias that stipulates a theory prescribing homogenization of all uttered sound is a dead end street. If indeed noise is "any unwanted sound" then why do we make that noise in the first place?

"Sound Reader" is a column in which I will attempt to explore the artistic utilization of sound that is not limited because of its parasitic attachment to music. Discussion will centre on artists' works that use sound as a point of reference in audio work, film, radio, installations, sculpture, video and other popular forms that address and confront the implications of aural representation: a reading of recorded sound in search of meaning. Send comments and sound works to Sound Reader c/o FUSE Magazine. ■

The Toronto Stampede!

ROUNDUP '89

by Susan Kealey



TORONTO—Those of us who choose to make art soon become aware of the incongruities. Rent, materials and equipment costs continue to escalate and the financial returns (real and potential) are few. While the perverse economic conditions affecting artists have traditionally been seen to be offset by opportunities for exposure and recognition through existing venues, increasingly such opportunities are few and far between.

In Toronto, often characterized as the Canadian arts mecca, the situation has become particularly acute. The resident population of artists has continued to grow (the Ontario Arts Council pegs the figure at roughly 4,608 for Region 3, which includes Toronto, Halton, Peel and Durham) to just under 50 per cent of all the artists residing in Ontario. However, the number of commercial galleries and artist-run centres that an artist might gain access to is proportionately small.

For many, artist-run centres—the so-called parallel system that emerged in the '70s—have become as institutionalized as the commercial galleries they purport to subvert. As older, more established artists continue to exhibit in artist-run centres, the level of professionalism desired and expected by the centres increases. Younger emerging artists often find themselves in a Catch 22

situation: they are denied shows because they lack experience and they can't get experience when they are denied shows. Funding is tied to the same strings—to obtain a grant, an artist must have had at least one exhibition.

For their part, the parallels cite chronic underfunding and the limited number of exhibitions, screenings or performances possible in a given year. In Toronto, they are unable to accommodate the deluge of requests that come not only from the local community, but also from artists across the country.

The crisis has spawned a variety of responses. Co-op galleries offer member artists a venue for a yearly fee plus the costs incurred for the opening. The Purple Institution, an artist-run space nestled in the heart of Parkdale (in western Toronto), has become a presence in the local arts community, hosting exhibitions, film screenings, performances, theatre, and album launches—all without funding from the arts councils. A growing number of artists are choosing not to use the established channels, exhibiting in their studios or in rented spaces.

Others have formed collectives for on-going public projects. While groups such as Public Access and Republic have been established for some time, other collectives have recently initiated a series of public art projects

ranging from car installations in a parking lot (The Medium Arts Centre) to textworks on an abandoned theatre marquee (The Sunlight Mission). Exhibition venues tied together by a theme (see "Art to Spin Dry By" this issue *FUSE*) are yet another facet of the changing dynamics of exhibitions in Toronto. In terms of scale, the most prominent of the latter type of initiative is *ROUNDUP*, an open studio event that was first held in 1988. Now in its second year, *ROUNDUP* has provided an annual exhibition opportunity for emerging and more established artists.

Capitalizing on the fact that many artists besides herself had studio space that could be used for a temporary exhibition, Teresa Dobrowolska contacted other artists, sent out flyers and put together the organizing committee for the first *ROUNDUP*. Seventy-eight artists participated, opening up their studios to the public for five days (May 10-15, 1988). As one participant said, "ROUNDUP gave me the opportunity to get my work together and show in an informal setting." By pooling each artists' participation fee of \$25, the organizers were able to have a comprehensive map designed for the public, and to advertise the event in local newspapers and various art publications. Organizers held a fundraising party and solicited dona-

tions from local merchants and companies in return for a mention on the map. Funding from the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council was eventually secured and participating artists were refunded most of their fees.

While the first *ROUNDUP* was a success (many artists located in the downtown core reported upwards of 100 visitors), the event did not receive much critical attention, leaving some organizers and participants disillusioned. After the first organizing committee dissolved, a second headed by artists Diane Gagne and Mario Scattoloni took its place bringing new energy and ideas. While the first *ROUNDUP* had concentrated on traditional studio practices (painting, sculpture and installation), *ROUNDUP 89* organizers sought to also represent the time-based arts by encouraging video and performance artists to participate. In addition, alternatives such as sharing spaces or doing public art projects were proposed for interested artists who did not have studios. These changes, coupled with the fact that *ROUNDUP* now had a history in the community more than doubled the number of participants to over 200. *ROUNDUP 89* organizers thus faced not only the usual duties of fundraising, responding to artists' requests and publicizing the event, but also many unexpected ones that inevi-

tably cropped up in attempting to put together 200 artists and 179 public venues for only eight days.

As it entered its second year, *ROUNDUP* had gained more credibility and funding came from unexpected quarters such as the S.L. Simpson Gallery. Two large-scale fundraisers were held. The second, an opening night bash with live music held at the Great Hall (1087 Queen St. West) attracted a large, supportive crowd mostly from the arts community and raised several thousand dollars to be put towards the printing of a catalogue.

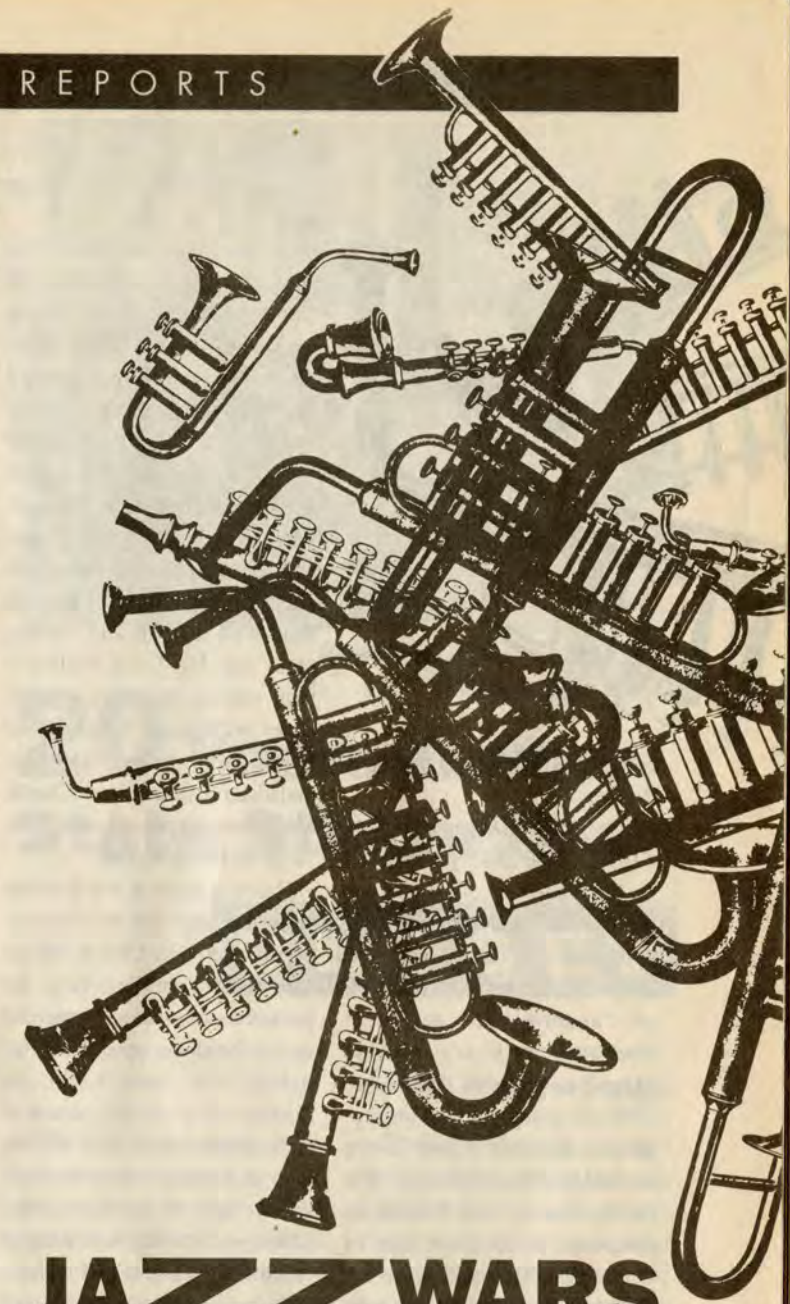
In order to provide more access to the public, open studio times were extended to encompass two weekends for a total of eight days. Studios were open from 12 am to 6 pm on weekends, and from 7 pm to 10 pm on weekdays. Free maps showing studio locations were distributed to the artists, local bookstores, restaurants and artist-run centres. This year, besides artists' studios, other spaces were listed: commercial dealers (Andrew Davies and Ruby Fiorno Galleries), artist-run centres (A Space and Art Metropole, which screened artists' videos on request), co-ops (Arcadia, Beaver Hall) and alternative spaces such as the Purple Institution, which had films among its offerings.

ROUNDUP 89 also included a number of site-specific works at locations ranging from Philosopher's Walk (University of Toronto) to a construction hoarding around a community centre (1900 Davenport Rd.). Because the 1989 map listed the artists' media, it was much easier for the public to choose where they wanted to go from among the 179 venues. While the increased size of *ROUNDUP 89* meant plenty of choice, some people complained that, given the distance between studios and the time allocated for the event, the

number of venues was overwhelming. Indeed, participants in outlying areas reported that they had fewer people this year than last because of the number of exhibition spaces in the downtown core. Said one participant, "It was hardly worth it."

Interestingly, the "public" *ROUNDUP* attracts is more varied than the traditional "art" audience. Some of this can be attributed to its promotion, which included full-page advertisements in *NOW* magazine and guide maps available in high traffic areas. Beyond the work, however, the chief attraction seems to be its alternative nature. *ROUNDUP* promises the public a more intimate and immediate experience than public and parallel galleries: that of meeting the artist and seeing the site of production. For the exhibiting artists, *ROUNDUP* is both an opportunity to interact with the public and other artists, and a chance to view the work of one's peers.

The sheer variety and range of this year's offerings (which included film, video and performance) was commendable. With the advent of *ROUNDUP 90*, however, many issues will have to be dealt with. For instance, if participation continues to increase, how can the public be expected to visit so many spaces? And if participation remains open to all, what about "quality"? Those who want to see the event more tightly controlled—as in curated—face the danger of turning *ROUNDUP* into yet another juried exhibition, albeit on a different scale. With a number of the artists in *ROUNDUP 89* supplementing their mention on the communal map with glossy invitations and private openings, the event is definitely evolving. Whether this means diversity or exclusion remains to be seen. ■



JAZZ WARS

by Rob Bowman

TORONTO—Despite being designated recently by the United Nations as the world's most cosmopolitan city, Toronto suffers from a paucity of live "cutting edge jazz." The once mighty Bourbon and Basin Street clubs are long gone. A Space gallery's jazz presentations tied in with Bill Smith's Sackville label are ancient history, as is the Colonial tavern, and promoters the Garys are no longer booking avant-garde jazz on a regular basis

So what does Toronto get to hear in the jazz vein? Well, we have the drab middle of the road presentations at Ontario Place, which are fewer each year. George's Spaghetti House regularly features talented locals as well as straight ahead players from out of town, and a few other clubs similarly dabble in the straight ahead stuff.

So where are the people who are making brand new music, the people who are pushing the

scape, but the only newcomer to the city was the Cyrille/Harris duet.

In contrast to the general flavour of the *DuMaurier Festival* was the inauguration this year of the *Toronto Jazz and Blues Street Festival* (June 26-July 1). Booked by Sloimovits into a number of Queen street clubs, the *Jazz and Blues Street Festival* ran the same week as the *DuMaurier Festival*. *The Street Festival* was a stunning coup. Presented were such artists as songwriting legend Otis Blackwell and up and coming blues star Joe Louis Walker—both making their first appearances in Toronto. James Blood Ulmer was paired with Jamaladeen Tacuma, and Charlie Haden was featured with Gerri Allen and Paul Motian.

Haden's show at the Bamboo spoke volumes for the Festival. Co-sponsored by CKLN-FM (as was the whole Festival), the packed concert was a commercial and critical success. Unfortunately, that same night the *DuMaurier Festival* presented Craig Harris and Andrew Cyrille who performed before an audience of only 70 people. Clearly, Sloimovits is much more adept at reaching an interested public. Pitted against the city-sanctioned *DuMaurier Festival* (a David and Goliath scenario), he produced an aesthetically superior and perhaps commercially more successful festival with less funding.

Sloimovits intends for his festival to be an annual event. Perhaps eventually the two festivals will evolve into distinct events with different identities: Sloimovits presenting new music, and DuMaurier/Galloway booking the tried and true. My prediction is that if there is to be only one survivor in five years time, it will be the *Toronto Jazz and Blues Street Festival*. I, for one, like the possibilities. ■

boundaries and challenging their listeners?

The annual *DuMaurier Jazz Festival* (June 23-July 3), booked by Jim Galloway, is the obvious context for such presentations. Two years ago the festival hired Serge Sloimovits to programme an "avant-garde" series at Harbourfront's Ice House. Sloimovits came to Toronto in 1985 and made quite an impression booking the Pinetree Tavern and independent showcases. For the *DuMaurier Jazz Festival* he proceeded to book the likes of Cecil Taylor, Dewey Redman and Charlie Haden. As well, each night he featured one of Toronto's own cutting edge ensembles.

Unfortunately, after the 1987 festival, Sloimovits and Galloway ended their collaboration. Consequently the 1988 festival lacked new jazz and was criticized for its overly conservative booking policy (although Archie Shepp and Horace Parlan were a treat). Galloway made attempts to broaden the line-up this year. He booked concerts featuring Anthony Braxton with Marilyn Crispell, Andrew Cryrille and Craig Harris, and Sun Ra. Indeed all these players were welcome additions to Toronto's audio land-

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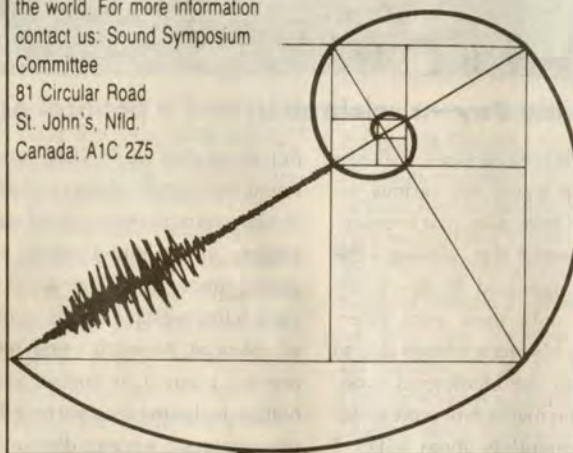
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Reving up for Lesbian & Gay Pride Day.

20 Years Later: State Still in the

CLOSET

by Martha Judge

TORONTO—I wake up trying to remember last night's events. Oh yeah, I took the night off work to attend the women's dance at the Party Centre. It was sold out, so instead I ended up at an all too familiar bar, got drunk and bored and headed to another all too familiar bar. There is a good reason that the dance was sold out: with an estimated 100,000 lesbians in Toronto, we still have only two women's bars to hang out at. Enough complaining, it's Lesbian and Gay Pride Day today and the city is ours, or at least two blocks of the predominantly gay male ghetto is ours. I'll take what I can get. I hop on my bike and join the throng to Church street—at least the weather is nice.

Wandering through the crowds I am convinced that at least half of Toronto is attending this year's

celebrations. Maybe I'm being a little hopeful, but Mayor Art Eggleton's attempts to dismiss us only seemed to force us out of our closets by reinforcing the need for such a day. Who needs his official recognition anyway? Taking their cue from a 1954 British report, the 1969 criminal code reform recommended that private sexual acts between two consenting adult males (sexual acts between two or more women have never been acknowledged) be regulated through a non-judicial agency such as the psychopathic profession. Paternalism is not what I want.

I don't think I'm alone if the booths are any indication of the number of people actively participating in promoting their own interests and culture. I was glad to see that Cawthra Square was

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Photo by Martha Judge

Twenty-five thousand came out for Lesbian and Gay Pride Day—a celebration and a political act.

packed with people, not only to see the AIDS Memorial, but also to volunteer for AIDS Action Now, or to collect information on Chutzpa (the Jewish lesbian and gay organization), and the various Christian organizations. People gathered to pledge funds to the Lesbian and Gay Appeal, to volunteer for the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, or to pick up a copy of *Dyke and Garden*, or *Rites* or any of a number of the journals and books available.

Some of our city's most interesting and diverse entertainers participated in the festivities emceed by comedian Sheila Gostick. With two stages to accommodate the many performers and the large crowd, the street was alive with dance and rock music provided by the Heretics, Love Among Savages, Bratty, Mustang Sally, Micah Barnes, and the campy Nancy Sinatras.

With the historical theme of this year's Lesbian and Gay Pride Day, I was reminded of events. First and foremost, 20 years ago the Stonewall riot in New York marked the beginnings of the contemporary Gay Liberation Movement, which corresponded nicely to the effective legalization of homosexuality at home; 1969 was a great year. Secondly, I was reminded of the first Gay

Pride day in Toronto that took place in 1981 at Grange park where 1,000 people attended. The need for such an event was evident. Over 400 men had been arrested that year alone in the bath house raids and the *Body Politic* was under fire for publishing the article "Men Loving Boys Loving Men." Gay male culture had become prominent enough to be perceived as a threat to the "community" values of Toronto. The demonstrations in the late '70s and early '80s leading up to the first pride day seem to hold a local significance similar to the Stonewall riot. The phrase "Gay Liberation," however, is appropriate because it came from events that focused on the interests of men and the struggle for power between men. Lesbians continue to be written out of "our" history.

Police estimate (conservatively, I'm sure) 25,000 attended the Lesbian and Gay Pride Day celebrations this year, making it the largest ever. The following day, *The Toronto Star* story read: "Lack of official recognition didn't stop 25,000 people from joining hands to sing and dance and celebrate Toronto's Lesbian and Gay Pride Day." The two photos accompanying the article displayed the AIDS Memorial and the Aids Action Now banner. Only men were

present in both pictures. I asked a friend to watch the various reports on television that evening. She reported that, although the crowds appeared to be evenly mixed, only men were interviewed. My male friends talk to me about the ideological problems with media mis-representation, particularly about AIDS. I have nothing to say.

This year's theme, 20/20 Vision, is congratulatory. It celebrates our recent triumphs and suggests that we now are looking ahead to our next 20 years.

The only talk of the future I heard this year was of the one that our government is preventing with their policy of AIDS in-action. AIDS, rightly, is a priority issue and it is no accident that the government is so slow to act. It indicates just how little change has occurred in the last 20 years. In 1969 the "Right to Privacy" campaign was fought and won with Trudeau's statement that "The state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation." Implicitly, this concession asked us to get off the streets and shut up. The problem is that one's sexuality does not begin and end in the bedroom. How can it as long as the state continues to exercise power over our bodies.

Maybe 1969 wasn't such a

milestone after all. As some soon found out, public displays of affection and representations of our culture are misinterpreted as public obscenity. What we did learn is that we have a right (as do all silenced minorities and oppressed groups) to control our bodies, including the right to self-representation without discrimination, recrimination or exploitation. This is where the issues of AIDS, abortion rights and censorship collide. The state's intervention in these issues functions as a method of social control. This in turn effectively reinforces heterosexuality as do the economic privileges conferred to heterosexual couples. It is the condoned violence against us (particularly sexual violence against women) that leads to our continued silence. If we take the ACT UP (a New York-based AIDS activists group) slogan "Silence=Death" seriously, then it must be realized that participation in Lesbian and Gay Pride Day is not just a celebration of our sexuality, but also a political act. Given the importance of these issues, this year's Lesbian and Gay Pride Day seemed short-sighted; a T-shirt reads:

"Stonewall was a riot, now we need a revolution." ■

video news

by Kim Tomczak

While it's true that independent video and filmmakers' access to the theatres and airwaves remains dismally low, the number of festivals and special events featuring independent work is helping to overcome this situation. Visual artists created artist-run centres to support and exhibit their artworks. There is no reason to believe that video and film artists can't do exactly the same thing. The Euclid Theatre is such a centre. The Euclid has a continuous programme of independent video and film and features a high quality video projection and sound system in a 200-seat theatre. This is exactly the kind of facility we have all been waiting for. The Euclid is looking for programming proposals. Contact Gillian Morton, Euclid Theatre, 394 Euclid Ave, Toronto, Ontario, M6G 2S9 (416) 925-9338.

In Visible Colours, Women of Colour and Third World Women's Film and Video Festival Vancouver will showcase up to 50 films and videos with an accompanying symposium on the practical, theoretical and aesthetic concerns of time-based media by women of colour and third world women. Dates for *In Visible Colours* are November 15 - 19, 1989 in a variety of locations around Vancouver. For more information call (604) 685-1137 or fax (604) 666-1569.

The Grierson Documentary Seminar and Festival is scheduled to run from November 19 through November 26 at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Euclid Theatre. The 14th Grierson will feature a tribute to Donald Brittain hosted by radio personality Peter Gzowski along with contributions from many of Brittain's colleagues and clips from his films. The six curators, Judith Doyle, Fumiko Kiyooka, Claude Ouellet, Betty Julian, Martin Delisle and Chris Worsnop are

hard at work selecting and programming works to round out the seminar. A catalogue will be available soon. For more info contact Margaret Nix, (416) 925-5931, extension 1513.

Images 90, the Toronto-based festival of independent film and video, is looking for suggestions for programmers for their 1990 festival. Send your suggestions to *Images 90*, 67A Portland street, Suite 3, Toronto, Ontario, M5V 2M9 (416) 971-8405.

The Toronto Lesbian and Gay Video and Film Festival is in the organizing stage. The organizing committee, the Inside Out Collective, includes Rowley Mossop, Richard Fung,

James Quandt, Marusia Bociurkiw, Michelle Mohabeer and many others. To get more information contact Brent Cehan, Inside Out Collective, c/o DEC Films, 394 Euclid Ave, Toronto, Ontario, M6G 2S9 or call (416) 920-4570.

Join the *Media Alliance* to get lots of information. They publish a 12-page newsletter which is full of useful info on festivals, internships, residencies, broadcasting trends, grants and more. This is by far the best newsletter around for film and video artists. To receive a one-year subscription to the newsletter, send \$20 (US) to the Media Alliance, c/o WYNET, 356 West 58th Street, New York, N.Y., 10019, (212) 560-2919. ■



Video still from *Kababaihan: Filipina Portraits* by Marie Boti and Malcolm Guy at the *Grierson Documentary Seminar and Festival*.

square circling tiananmen

by Richard Fung



Understanding China has always been something of a problem for Westerners. Confronted with a society, developed but non-European, early Western accounts of China say as much about Europe as about the country supposedly being described. To peruse the accounts of Marco Polo and those of 19th century colonial administrators is to follow the history of Western designs on China. Marco Polo the trader depicted China as a vast marketplace. Missionaries with soul-saving on their minds were obsessed with what they saw as rampant sin and immorality. From the point of view of the colonial administrators, attempting to open the country to opium and other trade, the Chinese were inward looking, intransigent and inscrutable.

Today, with China apparently holding the balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union, the need for the Western powers to interpret China has resulted in the professionalization of China experts. Here again, what these writers choose to report on, and how they frame it is very much a reflection of their own agendas, or those of their employers.

With the cataclysmic events in China over the last few months, there has been a quiet struggle for the appropriation of

the Chinese democracy movement. Ironically, the presently dominant faction in the Chinese government and the dominant voices of the Western press and their governments have opportunistically associated student and worker demands with anti-communism. For the Chinese government this supposedly justified the vicious massacre in Tiananmen Square last June and the many arrests and executions since then. For the capitalist West it represents a public relations coup. This is after all what socialism is supposed to lead to.

In an American television report I saw at the height of the Beijing protests, the journalist called up images of a Chinese people disillusioned with communism and ready to follow Western political models. There was no doubt or hesitation in his interpretation of the events. But then the item ended with a shot of a demonstration. The students were singing the "Internationale." As it is unlikely that many Americans are familiar with the international communist anthem, I imagine few of them would have noticed the contradiction in the story.

On May 27, a week before the students were massacred in Beijing, *The Globe & Mail* printed two China stories in its Focus

supplement. Staff correspondent Jan Wong sums up what is the standard interpretation of Western journalists reporting on student activities: "For years they were told that communism was superior to capitalism. Now after seeing the wealth and technology of the West, they no longer believe their leaders." However, next to Jan Wong's piece, York University China specialist B. Michael Frolic describes the students as "the shock troops of Chinese socialism" and "the bearers of what is left of Marxist revolutionary values." This latter position is echoed by many of the professional China watchers on the Left like William Hinton. The ghost of the Cultural Revolution haunts current analyses. Have the capitalist roaders that Mao so often warned against resorted to a fascist coup to maintain control of the party and the state? Did the demands for democracy represent a working class challenge to the "reforms" of the capitalist road and a rejection of the results of those reforms: inflation, unemployment, lack of job security, increased disparities between rich and poor, corruption, profiteering by party officials, etc.?

So are these students the vanguard of the left or of a new right? Are those who sing the "Internationale" and those who

construct a symbol that looks like the half sister of the Statue of Liberty different factions or are the politics eclectic and confused? The on-going debate is due in part to the fact that the students themselves did not articulate an ideological position beyond rather neutral demands for reform. It must also be kept in mind that the significance of any symbol changes with the context. The "Internationale" and the Statue of Liberty could hold very different meanings to the Chinese students, and to the government.

Whatever their political analysis, there is no question about the validity of the basic student demands: freedom of the press; freedom of speech; anti-corruption. Anyone who has been to China, outside the protected world of tourism, knows the rampant corruption that permeates every level of society. The blatant distortion in China's own press coverage of the massacre in Tiananmen Square displays the cynicism the government bears towards its own people.

Whatever the motivation, the specifics of the crackdown are indisputable. Apart from the massacre, there have been 33 known executions to June 21. According to Amnesty International, 5,000 people have been arrested in Beijing alone,

with 15,000 prisoners taken from all parts of China. Rather than easing up, the government appears to be refining its strategies for stamping out dissent by defining categories of "crimes" with attendant punishments as well as orchestrating campaigns to rout out dissidents. With the construction of the goddess of democracy statue, art students played a significant and visible role in the movement. On the wanted list are students from the Beijing Academy of Fine Arts, the Film Academy and the School of Architecture. Among the most famous cultural figures targeted by the government is the director of the Xian Film Studio.

All over Canada there have been rallies and demonstrations in support of the Chinese democracy movement. On June 4, while the massacre was happening, the largest pro-reform rally on the continent took place in Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square. Thirty-five thousand people listened to speeches by labour, religious and community leaders, politicians, academics and Chinese students studying abroad. This meeting, and most similar events in Toronto, have been organized by the Committee of Concerned Chinese Canadians Supporting the Movement for Democracy in China. Many of the members of this 15-person committee are seasoned activists who have gained their skills through participation in the many political issues that have galvanized Chinese Canadians in the past: the fight for admittance of South East Asian refugees to Canada; the Campaign against CTV's *W/5* programme "Campus Give-away" in which Chinese Canadians were presented as "foreigners" stealing university places from "Canadians"; the anti-racist struggle of provincial security guard Wei Fu; redress for the Head Tax paid by Chinese immigrants in order to enter this country.

In order to foster unity from the political diversity within the Chinese communities, the committee has steered a moderate course. Eugene Yao, a committee spokesperson, warns that the political

direction that China takes is something only the people in China should decide. "But that has to be by democratic means, and we people from abroad can help by applying pressure on the Chinese government to let them have that process." Aware of the dangers of being misread, the committee is exceedingly careful with its words. Following the spirit of the students, Yao states, "we talk about democracy in its most generic form, which, directly translated from the Chinese (*minzhu*), means 'the people decide' or 'popular rule.'"

The Committee's official objectives include: to focus increased international pressure on China to adhere to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights; to provide assistance to Chinese nationals—including students and visiting scholars—presently in Canada who were active in the pro-democracy movement; to urge the Chinese government to recognize the actions of the students as patriotic, and to call for compensation for the wounded and for the families of those killed.

Since the huge rallies in the early summer, the Committee has continued to organize smaller information events, such as the eye witness account by a Hong Kong student in Beijing at the time of the massacre. They plan further demonstrations in front of the Chinese consulate this fall. However, much of the energy of the committee is going into monitoring the Canadian government's response to the situation in China. According to co-chair Dora Nipp, the major demand at this point is for "no business as usual!" People to people contact should be encouraged, but "all government to government interaction, including trade, loans and tourism, should be suspended until the Chinese government ceases the persecution and recognizes that the pro-democracy movement does not represent counter-revolutionaries but rather patriotic participation." ■

Richard Fung is a Toronto-based video producer.

in the red

by Joane Cardinal-Shubert

Understanding is a consumer product in your society; you can buy some for the price of a magazine. Like the TV ad says 'Time puts it all right in your hands.' Once you've bought some understanding, its only natural to you to turn it around and make a profit from it—psychological, economic or both. Then you'd get even fatter, more powerful. And where would I be?

Native American artist Jimmie Durham

THE OPPOSITE CONDITION TO POVERTY IS TO HAVE MONEY.

Money, that is what appropriating is about. Whether the issue is land or art or iconography or ceremonial reliquia, the focus of the deprivation is money. Something to be gained by imitation, copying, stealing. Where do ethics enter this issue, where does the law intervene? The rights to cultural practices and creativity among Native people are tribal or are passed on to one individual in each generation through matrilineal inheritance.¹ "Even craft skills are often passed generation to generation. The alleged pirating and \$250 million sale in the Asia Pacific Rim of a traditional design used in hand-knitted Kwakiutl sweaters by the Japanese demonstrates the unprotected nature of Native and tribal copyright in the international marketplace."² Beaded key rings, earrings, comb cases, are all being produced in the international marketplace.



"Old Days on Beardy's Reserve" by Sanford Fisher (1982).

In the 1960s there was a rush on the Northwest Coast culture and black shoe-polished totems could be found in every souvenir shop across the nation. Now there is a rousing business in sweatshops. Native artists are being exploited in the "limited edition print market," the T-shirt market, the publishing business, the doll market, and by the dominant society's artists, curators, writers, and granting institutions. This does not occur as readily in the West because the culture base is stronger and the cultural information, having been passed down from generation to generation, is held by the Native people.

In the West, where contact time is less than 150 years, we experienced a cut off from our culture by the residential school programme begun in the 1870s by the church and the government. This, along with the introduction of an agricultural work programme for adults, almost removed Native people from their cultural base. Herding people, displacing many, on to the reserves after the treaties were signed, however, proved to be more of a boon culturally for Native people as they were in a position of gathering and sharing knowledge.

On the Northwest Coast the Potlatch was outlawed until the late 1950s. On the plains, the Sweat-lodge ceremony and the Sundance ceremonies were not allowed as late as 1960. These ceremonies parallel the Christian church in terms of gathering and unifying people. It is very effective to outlaw strength-

ening, spiritual practices. Natives had to pay for permits to leave the reservations—small tracts of fenced land mirroring concentration camps. Indian agents often pocketed money made from selling meat rations, and the Native people had either no meat, or rotten meat, to eat. A sense of aimlessness prevailed, these were people forced into a dominant society soap playing 24 hours with the same script. Native people could not vote until 1962.

Native languages were not allowed in the school, children were beaten and punished for speaking "Indian." With the outlawing of the customs, the ceremonies, and by forbidding people the use of their own language, much of the culture was interrupted for generations. If a Native woman married a white man she lost her status, and so did her children. If a Native man married a white woman he kept his status, as did his children—this was government imposed intervention in traditional cultural practices. As a result, for 100 years a growing population of non-status Indians moved to the cities and small urban areas taking with them the knowledge of their elders. Now with the introduction of Bill C-31, government intervention is trying to restore the lost status to two and three generations of people.

As well as the displacement of ceremonies and language, Native people suffered the loss of their cultural icons, their reliquia. Ceremonial objects were taken from them and systematically collected

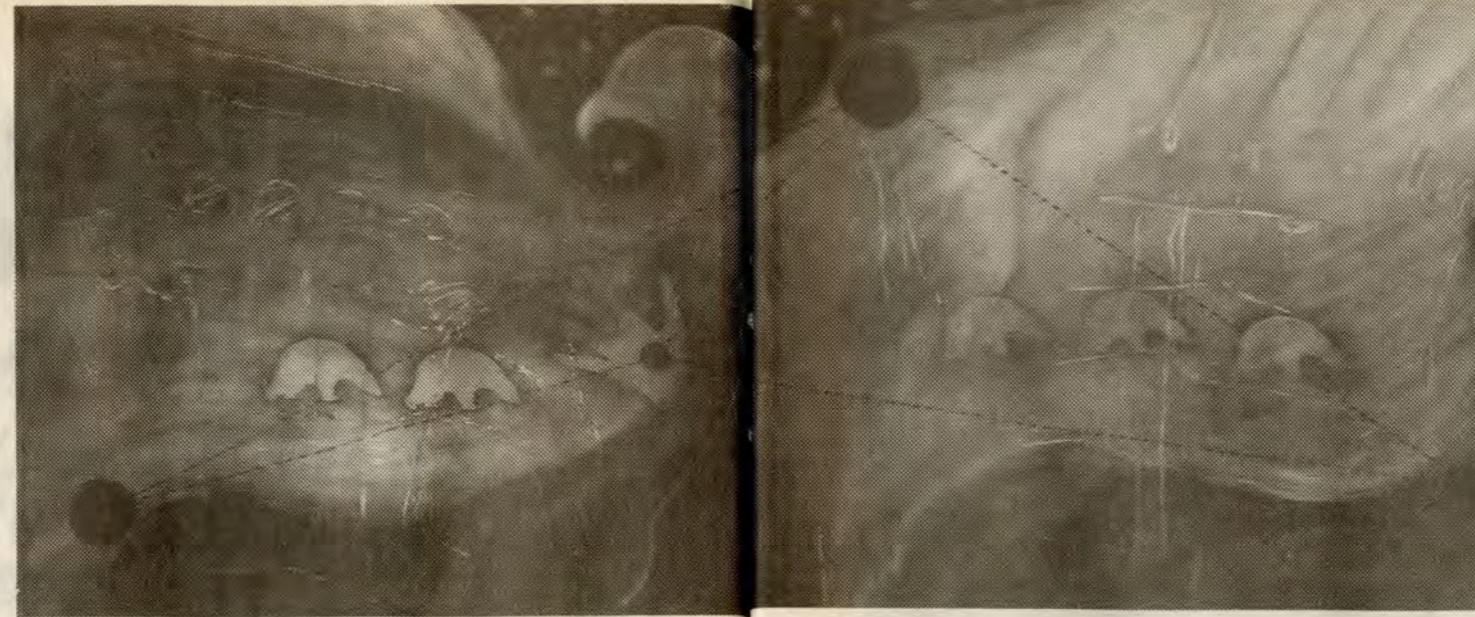
by museums and collectors throughout the world as evidences of a dying culture. Some of the more numerous pieces collected reside in collections in the U.S.S.R., Germany and Sweden. These ceremonial objects are an important link in the cultural practice of most ceremonial rituals. Without them life was meaningless, they were the cultural videos and bibles of the time. If someone were to remove the chalice from the tabernacle in the Catholic ritual, the ceremony could not continue. There would be no meaning without the symbolic ritual that goes along with that particular reliquiae, and the participants would have to deal with the horror of its loss as an icon. This is our heritage!

Because Native people were in a position of stress and closeness, they behaved like any people who are held in terrorist captivity: they examined their strengths and unified. Enough information was passed from generation to generation so that the language was retained, as was the ritual of the ceremonial culture which probably accounted for the enormous resurgence of the culture in the 1960s.

This was partially due to the education of the non-status Indian in the white world. Many were educated in professions, many went back to their people to share their knowledge. On the Northwest Coast Bill Reid, a Haida artist, was one of the major influences in the Renaissance of the Northwest Coast carving. Mungo Martin (Tony Hunt's grandfather, a Kwakwilt chief) also contributed greatly to the revival of ceremonial dance.

On the plains in the early '60s, Cree Chief Robert Smallboy from Hobbema, Alberta took a small band of followers, including his 89 year old mother, from the liquor ridden reserve west to their traditional lands on the Kootenai Plains. There they lived in tipis and learned about their ancient traditions. This led to the return of the Sweatlodge and the Sundance Ceremony and further unified the Native people of the Plains. The Smallboy dance troupe toured extensively, reviving an interest in dance for the generations to come.

At the same time, Alex Janvier was making quite a name for himself as a contemporary Native artist after graduating from the four-year art programme at the Alberta College of Art in 1960. He began to show his work extensively both nationally and internationally. In the East, Norval Morrisseau—an Ojibway who had raised his family living near the garbage dump on the reserve—contracted T.B. While in the sanitorium he began to paint his life history,



and the father of Contemporary Canadian Indian Art was born. Seeing his success, a number of young Natives, some of them pushed by their agents and patrons, began to imitate his style; curators and critics began to write about them and the Woodland school of painting was penned. Artists like Benjamin Chee Chee, Daphne Odjig became gross national products of Canada.

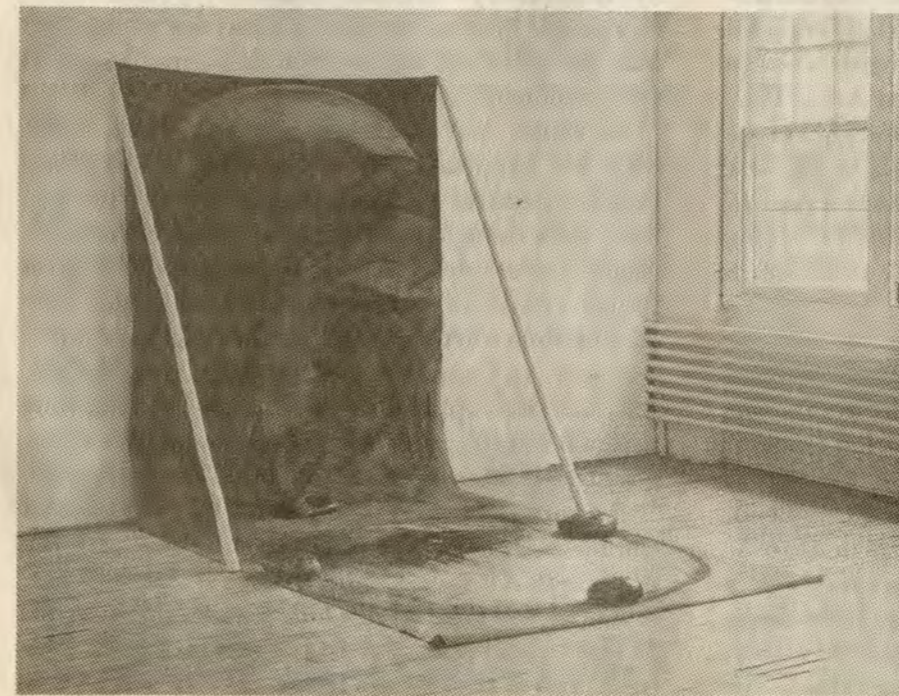
In the early 1960s, there was an explosion of Native art. As a result of this success by Native artists, white artists began to paint Native children with teardrops in their eyes; there was an attempt to romanticize the Indian, they were curiosities. Tourist shops abounded with fake artifacts and jewellery. Fringed coats and moccasins were the rage, the general public loved the idea of the Indian. This attitude, it seems, continues.

This year an exhibition was organized by Thom Hill and Deborah Doxtator at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario entitled *Fluff and Feathers*. The aim of *Fluff and Feathers* was to point out to the public that Indianess had been created out of Hollywood stereotypes, comic books, toys and folk artists' depictions. The exhibition pointed out that Indianess has been used to sell tobacco, oranges, medicines, motor oil, environmental conservation, and escape-fantasy recreation for adults and children; it showed that plains tipis and dress, tomahawks, totem poles, and beaded moccasins are all symbols of Indianess easily recognizable in Canadian popular culture.

This exhibition allowed people to put on Native symbols such as headdresses, buckskin, feathers

and blankets, but as curator Deborah Doxtator commented, "They will do this however, within the context of an exhibition that shows how distorted images of Indianess have been generated for centuries. This fantasy behaviour will be recorded for them by mirrors and video cameras so they can view themselves as unreal images too. This hopefully will stimulate visitors to think about how representations of Indians have been used for the purposes of the user and how they are not accurate depictions of how Indian people are."³

An exhibition of artifacts at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, summarized as the "artistic traditions of



Above:
"My Mother's Vision" by
Joane Cardinal-Shubert.

Left:
"The Earth Belongs to Everyone II" by Joane Cardinal-Shubert.

Canada's Native Peoples," pushed the false assumption that these objects were created for art's sake. Although the works were aesthetically pleasing, they were frozen in time—objects lifeless without their function. Native people have always embellished functional objects, but Native languages like Inuit, have no word for art. Ceremonial reliquiae are objects of beauty but the dominant culture has no business transplanting their cultural ethic as if to sanction that beauty or aesthetic which acts as an extra function only.

The exhibition was called *The Spirit Sings* but it pushed the notion that Native culture was dead, wrapped up, over and collected. A number of Native artists: Jane Ash Poitras, Daphne Odjig, Alfred Youngman, Alex Janvier, myself and others held a protest exhibition at the Wallace Galleries in Calgary. We protested the fact that Native culture was being used by the Olympics to foster a world view that Native culture was dead, all over, collected; and that what was still practised was frozen in the 18th century. We believe that the Olympics should have held exhibitions featuring contemporary Native art as it is now.

In these changing times, when the world has grown so much smaller through travel and communication, we cannot stay nailed to the past. As in all aspects of life, we push ahead to have the latest in technology and knowledge. We move ahead in art as well as trying to become mainstream artists. We have, however, achieved a greater role in the art world by

accident of birth. We are more visible, we are different, we have a sign on our foreheads INDIAN/PRIMITIVE. This stereotype is aided by exhibitions like *The Spirit Sings*. Many Native artists are educated in schools and universities alongside our white peers. We have access to all the latest information and modern technology. Many of us speak many languages, we have become professionals, critics, curators, administrators, artists and yet we still have an adjective in front of our name or our profession: Indian/Native Architect, Indian/Native doctor, Indian/Native lawyer, Indian/Native artist.

We are in the position of producing "art on the edge," which is the current trend every self-respecting curator in Canada is looking for to make their career. We have become part of the GNP of Canada. The Canadian Government is pushing our work in international exhibitions, but they are still not inviting any of us to the openings.

When the exhibition *In the Shadow of the Sun*, which is the signature exhibition to the Museum of Civilization, opened in Dortmund, West Germany in December of 1988, none of the artists in the exhibition was informed as to when the exhibition opened, nor were any artists even sent an invitation. No artists fees have been paid, and, although the exhibition opened in Ottawa in late June, only minimal information was provided to the artists about arrangements for press coverage, lectures or travel plans, or their part in the opening ceremonies. "It seems that we have to even combat the romanticization of the Indian past as well as fight off the imposed purism of many non-Indian anthropologists who are unable to accept innovation in Indian Arts. They don't seem to understand that environment changes culture and Indians too have changed in the last century."⁴ "Edward Curtis did not record a vanishing race," says Jaune Quick-To-See-Smith, "dying cultures do not make art, cultures that do not change with the times will die."⁵

In historical terms we have evidence, in both the U.S. and Canada, that Native peoples have been on this land base for thousands of years. Across this country we have several historic sites that teach of our culture's early focus.

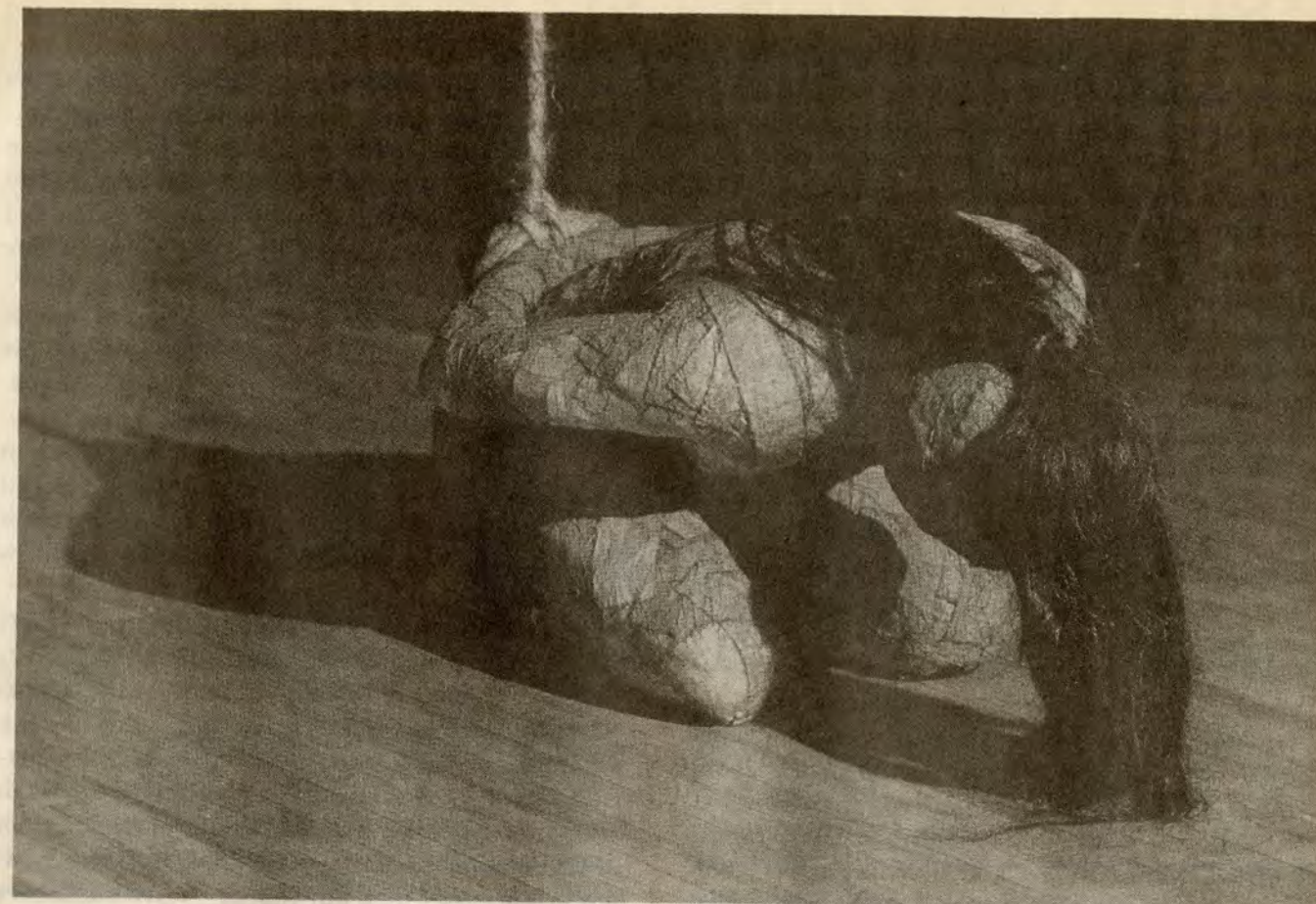
Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump, near Ft. McLeod, Alberta, is a World Heritage Site. It was in use over 6,000 years ago, about the time the pyramids were being built. On this land base we harvested medicines, we had acetylsalicylic acid from the red willow, we had natural dyes, fibres, fruits, vegetables. The

buffalo was a complete survival package. We were the first campers on the land. Our travois were our trailers and RVs. We were the first astronomers and environmentalists. We used pigment that has survived on rockfaces for thousands of years, we had our own stone tablets—the mountains and cliff faces—where we recorded our history. We made ceramics, our installation sculptures of Sweatlodges and Sundances stood for many years before they went back into the earth after their use. Our rock rings and medicine wheels are every bit as remarkable as Stonehenge or the Pyramids. We were the first performance artists and maintain that dance tradition. We have evolved into the 20th century as a people with our culture intact, and it is our reference to these traditional ways that continues to teach us and strengthen us. We have only been exposed to the Western world for little over 100 years. We have come out of our beginning to the space age in that time, and, while we were in this state of transition, we had to negotiate with the dominant society which has had thousands of years to evolve.

We have had our language and much of our ceremonial life—put on hold for much of that time—replaced with transplanted cultural traditions which, happily, did not take. It has taken us this long to say this doesn't work, and we have begun to return to our customs, beliefs and methods as they relate to the land base that we come from. We will teach the world, as one of the aboriginal peoples, how to again live in harmony—to create a balance. We can do this as a people because we have not lost our connection with the earth and the position we occupy as one of the components of the whole.

As artists, our work points out in ironic terms what has happened. We are creating works of art that are cultural signposts that we have to put up. Now, even though our artists have degrees from ivy league universities and colleges, we are still Native/Indian artists—a category somewhat like the category of women artists or folk artists—not to be taken seriously. In Canada one of our best known artists, Alex Janvier, applied to the Canada Council (our national funding body for artists) and had his proposal/application marked "Indienne," and cast aside.

Recently, in conversation with a Canada Council employee, Janvier was asked to re-submit with the promise that it would be taken care of. He declined, saying he had gone on this long without them.⁶ After 20 years working as an artist I cannot get a grant from them, two of the excuses being, "Oh we don't know



Edward Poitras: Detail of "Internal Recall," 1986 (one of seven figures in the installation).

who you are," and once, when I applied to use Emily Carr as my mentor, they remarked, "we're afraid if you go to B.C. you may start painting totems." This kind of patronizing attitude is more than annoying, it is incredible, outrageous, and racist—especially since I have been in more than five exhibitions that used my slides to gain funding from the Canada Council for exhibitions proposed by white curators. To one government body I am a gross national product, but to another I am a Native artist, not really an artist. How then, I wonder, did I manage three years of art college and achieve a BFA at a bona fide university. How did I end up graduating with credentials and become a non-artist because of my Native heritage?

In our world of Euro-Canadian and Euro-American dictums it is interesting to see the influence our culture has on mainstream art. As art that is viewed as primitive, we are dead art makers of a dead art. As such we are vulnerable to appropriation and vast pillaging by the dominant culture. Just as Picasso pillaged African art, and Max Ernst, and Paul Klee took much from Indian Pictograph/Petroglyphs, white mainstream artists today feel quite justified in

creating works rampant with misused symbolism and visual cultural language. Why else would Toronto artist Andy Fabo think that he could appropriate the imagery of the Sweatlodge ceremony and incorporate it in his steamroller rip off of cultural icons which seem of late to focus on the "mining" of art by Natives.

In her review of the exhibition (at Toronto gallery Garnet Press) published in *Vanguard*, Linda Genereux tries to legitimize Fabo's imagery by saying that he had seen a Northwest Coast mask.⁷ The Northwest Coast people do not practise the Sweatlodge ceremony. It is a Plains tradition, newly revived and a subject that is fundamental to the work of an internationally known artist of Native heritage. This is uninformed, irresponsible editing by *Vanguard*, a Vancouver-based art magazine, now defunct. Genereux goes on, assuring the reader that the artist is "choosing images which have been carried into the modern era." Fabo seems to regard other artists works as giant "Art K-Mart's."

MONEY, it does strange things to people. Not only are our cultural icons being played with but ancient ceremonies and sacred rituals are being mimicked by

artists who insist that their philosophies come from communing with nature. Blatant copies of the Sundance ceremonies and evidences of rites are piggy-backed by so-called environmental artists/tribesmen like Fast Würms, a Toronto Group that applies for individual grants as a group and get them on an ongoing basis. Is it because they are white that their interpretation of Native culture is suddenly a valid art form, and are their hikes from the grey scapes of the big city into the woodlands valid forages into a ceremonial time?

There are positive aspects to being a Native artist. Three years ago the National Gallery of Canada bought a work by Manitoulin Island artist Carl Beam, called "North American Iceberg." It was large, and its images were frozen in time. Photographic references to chiefs of the past were juxtaposed with a self-portrait of the artist. Diana Nemiroff, Acting Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery, put together an exhibition called *Cross Cultural Views*. International artists Jenny Holzer, Hans Haacke and John Scott were included. My work, the work of other Native artists Jane Ash Poitras, Robert Houle, and Bob Boyer were borrowed from collections and presented in the same exhibition. No catalogue was produced and the artists were not notified of the exhibition. However, this was the first time in its more than 90-year history that the National Gallery had bought the work of a Native artist. Why was it not included? The sad exclusion of artists of Native heritage from current contemporary art exhibitions is regrettable. An innova-

Henry Beaudry: "Poundmaker Negotiates Surrender."



tive approach is needed. Some groups, such as the Canadian Native Arts Foundation, and some individuals have risen to this challenge but the question arises: Why should we be exclusively relegated to Native exhibitions because we have been excluded from the mainstream apparatus? Will we set up our own foundation for every discipline?

I believe it is time for for this art racism to stop. It is up to the curators and administrators in this country to remain informed. Let them be the innovators. We have been the innovators all through historic times. I submit that the needed innovation in Native arts is for artists of Native heritage to demand their rights as citizens of this country and to expect those with influence to cut out their racist policies and attitudes.

In 1983 the Society of Canadian Native Artists (SCANA) held a conference in Hazelton, B.C. Surrounded by some of the oldest totems of the Northwest peoples, they pledged to become an information and lobby group for artists of Native ancestry networking with government and people in the arts. In 1985, Robert Houle, former curator of the Museum of Civilization, organized the Native Business Summit in Toronto which introduced Native businesses to each other and the public. In 1987 in Lethbridge, Alberta, the Department of Native American Studies at the University of Lethbridge organized "Networking, Swimming in the Mainstream." Featured at the conference were Edward Poitras, Bob Boyer, Pierre Soiu, Jane Ash Poitras, Carl Beam and myself. As well, the exhibition *Stardusters* was at the Southern

Alberta Art Gallery. Curators, critics and historians along with anthropologists, archaeologists, and gallery dealers arrived from all points. Representatives from colleges and universities in New Mexico and California were in attendance. Museum representatives from New York, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, Los Angeles and Phoenix were there to hear what these upstart contemporary Native artists had to say. We were all there for each other and a lot of positive exchange resulted: a video and publication are available from the

University of Lethbridge, Native American Studies.

The exhibition *Revisions* opened at the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff during the 1988 winter Olympics. Curated by Helga Pakasaar, and including artists of Native heritage, the exhibition aimed at counterpointing the Glenbow exhibition *The Spirit Sings*. Pakasaar is quoted in *Vanguard* explaining the meaning of "Revisions." The title "alludes to the process of amending and correcting history, specifically that of native culture, as well as suggesting the necessity for new visions from a native perspective."⁸



Jane Ash Poitras: "Churches came to Replace Our Medicine Lodges."

This is the only way to counteract the indiscriminate appropriations and plagiarism that is going on. Only by publishing imagery will it become apparent to these rip-off artists that Native people deserve the same professional respect given to the artists in the mainstream who have lawyers lurking in the background protecting copyright.

In Canada copyright is protected unless signed away. No one may copy the work of a living artist, and far from being upset by Arlene Stamp's reworking the Gladys Johnston paintings, I am touched by the fact that she included a bibliography with the work. Indeed there was no plagiarism there. However, when a friend of artist Miyuki Tanobe saw what she assumed to be Tanobe's work on a card offered as a gift on an Air Canada flight she was surprised on inspection to see the name of Alberta DeCastro, a Toronto artist. Tanobe filed suit in Federal Court in Toronto earlier this year.⁹

"Since the 20s, composers, lyricists, writers and authors have had the right to their intellectual property. In 1988 an amendment to the Copyright Act extended it to visual artists."¹⁰ Because of this amendment to the Copyright Act, it is only reasonable to expect that both arts and crafts organizations should set up stricter guidelines. Perhaps they should require artists to sign a waiver if they want to avoid being implicated in future art suits.

Intellectual Property legislation will become even more focused when provincial laws are created to protect the artist further. But the most critical change has to come in the educational institutions and in the

home. Copying is stealing. We need a return to personal ethics. So I have an announcement to make to all you artists out there with no ideas. Since you can no longer steal images from Native artists, forget about the Aborigines and the Maoris—we are in contact with them too.

In 1987 the aboriginal peoples of the world held a conference in Vancouver, and one of the important issues discussed was the protection of traditional ceremonial practices and cultural icons. These issues will be covered under the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and are being re-negotiated as an important aspect of the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States. At the Montevideo Round of GATT negotiations, it was noted that "failure to enforce intellectual property rights is a barrier to trade because that which is stolen is not sold."¹¹

This brings us back to MONEY. The critical reason behind artists ripping off other cultures is based on money and achieved by access to information available through technology. "This access to fashion and historic periods has produced what Thomas Shales has called 'The ReDecade,' a decade without a distinctive style of its own; a decade characterized by the pervasive stylistic presence of all previous periods of history."¹² It is Native culture, which retains a distinctive style of its own, that is so attractive to the public.

Collectors are willing to pay "big bucks" for this originality, which, in the case of Canada, may be the only true Canadian art. Artists who have hooked

themselves into the dictums of Toronto/New York/Europe are quick to recognize that here is a unique form of expression coming out of a distinct cultural ethic. They want a piece of the action—hence the imitation, plagiarism, copying and stealing. The fact that “Native art” is not included in generic exhibitions by the National Gallery and that Native artists are not the recipients of grants from the Canada Council sets the tone for how these artists are treated by other public galleries in Canada. It also determines that we are non-artists, and makes our work susceptible to pillaging because it is not published. The saving grace for Native artists is the commercial galleries that carry their work, and whose patrons are willing to put out hard-earned money for art that has, as the late Illingworth Kerr described a good piece of art, “a punch to it.” Money again!

As money is the scourge responsible for the land grabbing and the misuse of the earth so will it be the saving grace. When focus is placed on the amount of money lost by the breakdown of the systems of control, it will be corrected. In the art world it will be shown that to allow the plagiarism of the artists’ intellectual property (their art) will hurt the country financially. If Native artists are to continue to be part of the gross national product of Canada we cannot allow cheap imitations to exist and we cannot continue to finance their production with grants and the machinery of P.R. Similarly we do not need anthropologists and archeologists and government bodies going around anointing some of our first people with “Indian holy water” and supplying them with a number. It is not the number that people look for when they label one “Native” or “Indian” by their prejudice. If you look like a Native you are treated like one, and that is many things to many people. We all get the 100 per cent expression of racism, there is no 25 per cent or 50 per cent amount of prejudicial treatment.

The Canada Council’s recent decision to follow the ethnological dictums of the Heard Museum in Phoenix as to what Native art is is a big mistake. Native people know who they are and there is no need for a registry or sanction by an institution of a people. This is a self-conscious move on the part of people in power who obviously lack knowledge and therefore are operating from a position of fear. Art is art, and is determined by aesthetic. Aesthetic is determined by patronage, patronage comes from responses to art and reflects an appreciation by the

individual. Great art occurs when individuals in numbers both support and appreciate the work of an artist. Government bodies should not be in the position of determining who is an artist and who is not. Their function should be to aid the artist in the buying of materials and providing money for travel to necessary venues. Instead it has become an insular group of self-serving artists and in many places across the country, particularly the West, the laughing-stock of Canada. Does the fact that someone doesn’t know you mean that you don’t need the money to carry out an installation for a major museum? When I was unable to receive funding to make work for an exhibition, I went ahead anyway.

With a sense of irony I will dedicate my sculpture installation “Preservation of a Species: Deep Freeze,” for the exhibition Beyond History at the Vancouver Art Gallery May 31-July 15, 1989, to the Canada Council. Constructed of newspaper, masking tape and black paint along with elements found in my studio, I will privately call it “In the Red.” ■

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ENDNOTES

¹ Harry Hillman Chartrand, *The Crafts in Post Modern Economy*, The Canada Council, p. 22.

² Ibid.

³ Deborah Doxtator, “Fluff and Feathers,” *Arts and Crafts Quarterly*, Winter, 1989, p. 26.

⁴ Lucy Lippard, “Women of the Sweetgrass, Cedar and Sage,” Gallery of the American Indian House, New York, June 1 - June 29, 1985.

⁵ Jaune Quick-to-see Smith, “Women of the Sweetgrass, Cedar and Sage,” Gallery of the American Indian House, New York, June 1 - June 29, 1985.

⁶ Conversation with Alex Janvier, March 1989.

⁷ Linda Genereux, *Vanguard*, December/January, 1986/1987, p. 40.

⁸ Marie Morgan, “Il Revisions,” *Vanguard*, April/May, 1988, p. 16.

⁹ Ingrid Abramovich, “Artist Influence or Copying?,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, January 2, 1989.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Chartrand, p. 24.

¹² Ibid, p. 20.



NATIVE MYTHS:

trickster alive and crowing

BY LEE MARACLE

I have been accused of being a “fascist censor” by more than a few European writers alongside of the Women’s Press. The price of courage is usually persecution by cowards. “Who said this?” and “Who are these women of colour?” are honest questions by many people that I should like clarified. I said it and wish to respond to the dilemma “in my own voice.”

The sounds of night join my nocturnal obsession again; odd lonely automobile sounds between long pauses of steady neon hum. Urban sleep is suddenly interrupted by a Raven coddling her aching wing. From my politically correct, three-year-old, co-op townhouse fence, she nurses her wing.

“Raven, why aren’t you sleeping? You are disrupting some important business with your pitiful ‘broken wing again’ dance.” Edgar Allen Poe lies overtop a Bob Dylan album cover. His words emerge from Trickster laughing at this 39-year-old girl-child clinging tenaciously to an ancient indigenous image

immortalized by desperate white men more than 100 years distant from each other.¹ “It’s a bad joke Raven . . . to remind me that these white men re-stirred dreams of you in me when I was so young. Go to sleep, while I wrestle with truth and conscience.”

Raven stops coddling her wing, struts cockily forth and back across my fence and I have to remind myself that this typewriter, which is supposed to be a computer printer, and will probably die a typewriter before the terminals ever reach her, is my real friend. My typewriter and I have been together for some five years—’twas a hasty wedding entered into on the promise of the purchase of her twin, the computer, sometime in the future. Some time wedged between the needs of four growing children. They have already made too many sacrifices for their nocturnal mother’s childhood dream and their great grandmother’s hope that she become a writer. The offensive article on the issue of “Indian Mythology” and “censorship” to the right of me, my thoughts churning in front of me, and my library to the left, I stare at Raven, unable to begin.

Censorship; Noah Webster jumps off the shelf, heavy with his unabridgedness, tattered by 50 years of life, and spills the meaning of censorship into the vortex of my confusion: "Anyone empowered to suppress a publication." (Any of the officials at a British University" a most useless but interesting secondary meaning, Noah.) Publisher: "Anyone who arranges the publication of a work." The work belongs to the publisher in the sense that he (to which we must now add she) organizes and distributes it to the public, subject to the conditions outlined in a contract between himself (read herself for women's presses) and the author.

Raven flaps her wings at me, chuckling hysterically. I feel small in my moment of embarrassing discovery.

"Naturally," she crows. "Why do you think the publisher garners the lion's share and the writer but the leftover morsels? Why do you think the customary practice of publishers is to claim the publishing rights for the life of the book?" (Because it belongs to them?)

"Well, that helps Raven, but it doesn't answer my question, at least not entirely. It tells me the publisher has the right to choose what they publish. 'Letters to the *Sun* are edited for brevity and good taste'. . . 'your work has been rejected because. . . Perfectly just, given that the publisher is responsible for making the work public. My dilemma is that the publisher is *ipso facto* absolved of any accusations regarding censorship, given her right to choose. Censorship requires a third party official."

Raven just disappears, leaving me with the nagging suspicion that it is not just intellectual confusion that tears at my nocturnal wonderings.

From the shelves of my library, which steal more and more of my living space, dance W. B. Yeats's "Second Coming," and Sam Sheperd's *Cowboy Mouth*. An odd pair of white male writers which, I am embarrassed to admit to my feminist friends and even more ashamed to display before Native people, are a deep source of joy and inspiration to me.

"Ah, but *Cowboy Mouth*, William is such a wonderfully wicked modern rendering of your 'rough beast' marching 'to Bethlehem.' That one of the sons of Europe 100 years after you, in a place thousands of miles away, could take your 'Second Coming,' and dramatize it through the cowboy mouth of a woman—that a man could do this sincerely, honestly, almost prophetically, holds me in awe William." The typewriter pauses to accompany my awesome pause and there she be again, regal like a queen, chest puffed up, black, beautiful and still, a raven centurion taking the applause for Yeats and Sheperd.

Tis my turn to laugh. "Yes, the ol' black crow is Sheperd's 'second coming,' Raven." Raven; she just stares obliquely at my immodest cackling, another trick tucked within her wings. With uncommon slow grace her wings rise to form a perfect circle. Her eyes recess, harden, and take on a familiar slant. T'a'ah

emerges, her steely gaze centred on my childish indiscretion.² Mirth leaves me, replaced by a mature sense of loneliness for the old granny that took 100 years to part with her grandchildren. Her look reminds me of the origins of "eating crow." Only Black people were ever forced to eat our ridiculed crow . . . only white humans ever reduced this crow to a pie to be eaten by Blacks. "Four and twenty blackbirds, baked in a pie . . ." (that Black people were forced to eat, likening them to cannibals). Our Raven, forever tainted by this ugly metaphor for white supremacy. Trickster. Our Raven takes the human spirit to a higher place, a second becoming, a new humanity, yet I possessed enough of Europe's poison to mock Raven.

The truth faced; T'a'ah relaxed her glare and spoke: "You don't remember child, your own delight at the words of Emerson not so long ago . . . 'Look here, this sounds exactly like my T'a'ah . . . truth is universal . . . it is human, honest, riddled with the responsibility of personal choice, social conscience and love of nature . . . don't read the ancients to parrot their words devoid of understanding.'" Her words, my exact paraphrase of the *American Scholar*. The soft earth colours of T'a'ah's paisley cotton gown and matching scarf faded that my own fire might burn bright.

The onion is peeling back, exposing tears of shame. I rise, move to the comfort of the twin sisters—the lions. The twins, one of which perished in the lap of the other.³ There they sit, mountainous reminders of the glory of twinning spirits.⁴ Yeats, Sheperd. Poe, Dylan. Rusty and Lee.⁵ Yeats perished; in the breast of a cowboy mouth woman he found his final resting place. Poe perished in drugged madness to be reborn in the songs of Dylan. Like Poe, and Yeats, in the sparse walls of her kitchen, Rusty had found her resting place in the memory of her twin's mind—Lee—the woman who would strive unremittingly, in her brutal determination to survive, to bring Trickster/Raven to the modern world and move humanity to another place.

Raven, large and full feathered, rose above me from my bedding on the floor, melded with the ceiling and left me looking at the clock. I had only slept a half hour but I owed the world another gawdamned story. Birds chirped and I dragged my aching back to my chiropractically-recommended chair and began my obsession.

Granny, wispy and ghostlike, sat next to me cajoling my reluctance into enthusiasm:

"It's just another hill to climb, hee, hee, hee."

"Sounds like unbridled bragging to me," I respond.

"What? That you had a twinning spirit? Everyone has one."

"No."

"That you can write, everyone that reads can write, they just don't."

"It's that I do."

"You're just obsessed, that's all."

"T'a'ah, the very definition of obsession requires that I admit

I am pathological, sick."

Her last "hee, hee, hee" linked itself with the sound of my old friend going ticky-tack-type whilst my eyes stared catatonically at the street and my fingers reconstructed the craziness of my dream.

The truth is that you Europeans came here when we had the land and you had the bible. You offered us the bible and took our land, but I could never steal the soul of you. Occasionally, your sons and daughters reject the notion that Europe possesses a monopoly on truth and that other races are to be confined to being baked in pies or contained in reservation misery. They are an inspiration to me, but they are not entirely satisfying. Your perception of my Raven, even when approached honestly by your own imagination, is still European. The truth is that a statement I made at the Third International Feminist Bookfair, objecting to the appropriation of our stories, has nothing to do with censorship. "We are not monkey grunners in need of anyone to tell our stories."⁶

"We have a voice."⁷ "Don't buy books about us, buy books by us."⁸ "And, Move over."⁹

Since then, the debate about the appropriation of our voice and our culture has focused on censorship and freedom of imagination. On June 10, 1989, *The Globe & Mail* printed an interview with a white woman, Darlene Barry Quaid, who had appropriated our mythology. She admitted that she had lied and used us as a cover; when challenged, she squirmed, squeaking censorship to unnamed persons and the Women's Press. The truth is that creeping around libraries full of nonsensical anthropocentric drivel, imbuing these findings with falsehood in the name of imagination, then peddling the nonsense as "Indian Mythology" is literary dishonesty. (An odd thing for a writer to defend given the origins of literature: *litera*, truth.)

The laws against plagiarism were born to protect the intellectual integrity of the literary community. To cry "censorship" when caught trafficking in such truck is at best cowardly. I am told by the host of the *Fifth Estate* (who declined to air the interview with Anne Cameron and myself) that Timothy Findley, among others, is categorizing my objection (and that of The Women's Press) to such abuse and appropriation of our cultural heritage and sacred ways as "fascist." Ms Quaid claims it is "not exploitation" as her pockets jingle, full of the royal coins of copyright, gained at our expense. Our stories had original authors; we are not dead. Someone told these stories to someone else who reaped copyright, royalties, credit and the dubious privilege of bastardizing them. We have lost both revenue and dignity in the process.

The truth is that yesterday, my grandmother and I thought little of such things as copyright, royalties and exploitation. We were a desperate people facing extinction whose first consideration was the land along with the laws and sacred ways of our people that would protect the land from the fate this country had

destined us to. Under duress, we parted with our stories in the hope that in the wake of our-annihilation, our land would survive intact. We have survived. Not only did we survive but we speak our own language, understand our ways and write in English. To continue appropriating our stories and misusing them in the name of "freedom of imagination" is just so much racism. I and my old typewriter sit in my bedroom where the magic of Trickster lives. We object to the theft of our stories and the distortion of our lives. Those who would hide behind the lie of censorship to justify thievery and dishonesty don't hold the same terror for us.

Raven and I will have the last laugh. The Women's Press "Front of the Bus" coalition split with its lesser half because stories about women of colour written by white women are riddled with bias, stereotype and intellectual dishonesty. What is more important is that women of colour are entitled to author their own stories. I do not hear any outcries from any corner of the writing community about the penchant that women's presses have for publishing books about (white) women, written by (white) women and not men. In the minds of some white women, and many white men, women of colour do not enjoy equal rights. My typewriter is screaming now Raven. I too look for the day when Canada's white parents attempt to induce their children to "tell the truth" and their children throw back the food of censorship for their parents to eat. The fact is that a white person appropriating our stories because they lack imagination or knowledge of their own is still telling a European story. Use whatever you like to ground your story, intellectual Canada, but be honest. It is your story—it is not about me. ■

Lee Maracle is the author of *I Am Woman and Bobbi Lee*.

ENDNOTES

¹ Trickster is a mythic figure in the Native cultures of North America. He is known by the names Nanabuzo, Raven and Coyote.

² T'a'ah is a Native word for Grandmother.

³ The lions are a pair of mountains behind my father's village. Story has it that centuries ago these mountains were twin sisters, one of which died in the interest of the survival of their joint lineage. The two were immortalized as mountains, a reminder to her descendants that sometimes supreme sacrifices must be made in order to secure the survival of all. This sense of self and community is the foundation of our culture.

⁴ Twinning spirits: two people with a common world view, like spirits, but not necessarily living within the same time frame.

⁵ Rusty, from my book *I Am Woman* (Write-On Press Publishers, P.O. Box 86606 Vancouver B.C., 1988.).

⁶ Jeanette Armstrong, author of *Slash*, Theytus Books, 357 Brunswick Ave., Penticton B. C.

⁷ Chrystos, author of *Not Vanishing*, Press Gang Publishers, Vancouver, B. C., 1988.

⁸ Viola Thomas, editor/promoter of Native women's books, organizer of hapless B.C. poets and all round loyal indigenous woman.

⁹ Lee Maracle, author of *I Am Woman and Bobby Lee*.

curatorial cholesterol

by Clive Robertson

Starting this fall with the National Gallery, a number of major public art institutions will begin taking turns organizing the *Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art*. This collaborated project currently involves the National Gallery, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Musée des beaux arts, Montreal. The plan requires each of the participating institutions to choose a maximum of 15 artists, and with one throw of the ball attempt to dislodge the national coconut. As Philip Monk, a curator of contemporary art at the Art Gallery of Ontario explains, each curator in turn will be able to "correct the distortions" (regional and other forms of representation) that will occur as the project unfolds.

No matter how the *Biennial* turns out, each one of these exhibits will be nominally important. And while artists certainly do not begrudge each other the opportunity to be showcased, there is as yet no indication that this project will avoid the most basic curatorial pitfalls common to such unfocused surveys. Though the *Biennial* will not be the only contemporary art shows that the participating institutions will organize during the decade, there are three real concerns

that are consistently ignored. One is to have a national *Biennial* for younger contemporary artists; the second is to have a similar exposition focusing upon a disciplinary field that could offer an historical perspective covering from one to three decades. And finally—this certainly applies to the upcoming *Biennial*—to demonstrate some maturity by abolishing the traditional hierarchy that plagues the presentation of the various contemporary artforms. Photography, printmaking, video, film, and performance should be given treatment equal to painting and sculpture/installations.

Part of the dissatisfaction artists feel towards the proposed *Biennial* is the track record and low productivity of the major art institutions over the last 20 years. In short, there is a significant backlog of artistic achievements which have been critically acclaimed both here and abroad that have rarely, if ever, been given access to such institutions.

One problem has been the structural and political evolution of our major art institutions, rather than any systemic curatorial incompetence or bias. However, as many are aware, artists did try and rectify such shortcomings by initiating their own network of contemporary

art exhibition and interpretation centres. For artists, the accumulated experience of organizing regional, national and international surveys is considerable, and it is somewhat offensive that the major art institutions have not found it necessary or advantageous to reform their own practices.

Major public galleries remain the traditional sites for validating contemporary art. While exhibiting at the National Gallery is not quite the honour some of its staff believes it to be, it is very obviously a public reward that reflects on both the artist and the curator: the artist has to produce work of some significance, and the curator has to have the ability to recognize its significance. Though the curators at the major art institutions have spoken of the need for a curatorial community that will collaborate, they continue to make rhetorical references to unique mandates that have no basis in practice.

An example is the National Gallery's overplayed notion of its national mandate. While it is currently the only art institution in Ottawa that faces Parliament and is large enough to accommodate the on-going tourist influx, there are well over 100 other art institutions across



the country (artist-run, commercial, other public galleries) whose programming suggests a national, and at times an international mandate.

One source of continuing tension between artist/independent curating and the major institutions is in differences of curatorial objectives. At its most basic level, this is a difference of assessment of an artist's contribution to the development of contemporary art in Canada.

Both artists and institutions are eligible for state subsidies through a peer assessment model, which is only one of a number of competing models in the business practice of art production and dissemination. (Private and/or commercial galleries, for example, function with a partial patronage-by-investment system.) Conflicts have frequently arisen over who qualifies as a peer. Artists have objected

to the inclusion of curators who are often not considered peers because of qualifications, social or cultural background or professional experience. And for their part, public gallery curators have requested exemptions from the peer assessment model knowing that artists on such juries will in part evaluate competence and productivity. The National Gallery has in the past fanned such frictions by claiming exclusive rights to curate Canadian participation in two international Biennials at Venice and Sao Paulo. (When it comes to curating Canadian artists abroad at these and other high-profile events, the story of how so few have managed to exclude so many deserves separate attention.)

In its simple sense, curating implies an authored selection of artworks to be seen by an audience, usually in an institutional setting. In some attempted symbiosis, the curator/institution validates the artist and the artist's work validates the curator/institution. But what is going on is much more than accessing and interpreting the work to the public, buyer or sponsor.

The "authoring" aspect of the curatorial practice is an inheritance from a formal academic tradition of scholarship whereby trained art historians either taught, or were employed as curators for public or municipal art galleries. Active scholars of Contemporary art (seen academically as the period 1945 to the present) have experienced a rough ride from the early '50s until the beginning of the '80s. Firstly there were too many formal and sub-disciplinary developments taking place. To this was added a parallel re-evaluation of curatorial and management practices of all art institutions during the self-assessment process of the late '60s. While there may have been ideological trade-offs in the '80s, there are many curators, critics and artists, including myself, who still oppose the the continued privileged class-affiliation and cartel mentality that is endemic to what could be called the contemporary art industry.

The fact that there have been so few scholarly or populist textbooks on Canadian art during two decades when there has been an abundance of activity, reflects poorly on both Canadian publishing and the health of curatorial scholarship.

Though artists-initiated models of curating are not without their faults and contradictions, there is an implicit recognition of peer accountability and attempts at curatorial inclusion and democratization. While these attributes don't add much to the work itself, they are prefer-

able to the tired voice of the museum curator who, in a form of professional defence, states: "I am, therefore I choose."

There are many reasons why artist-curated projects have filled a curatorial vacuum over the last two decades. These include an immediacy of energy, proximity to the source of production, and familiarity with the detailed social developments of production.

One of the silent aspects of the curatorial process is the issue of employment. A friend of mine, a senior media artist, was badly mistreated by a major public gallery that also happens to be organizing one of the upcoming *Biennial* exhibits. The work was virtually sabotaged, and payment for agreed services and costs was overdue. When it was suggested that he make his experience public—in print—he declined. Requests from such institutions to show his work, i.e. employ his services, were already too infrequent.

If we look at the major public art galleries we can, without surprise, observe that the bigger the institution, the larger the managerial bureaucracy, the longer it takes to accomplish quite simple tasks. Most of these institutions are headed by boards of directors from the private sector; increasingly their patrons and co-sponsors are corporations, and their audience profile is changing from local residents and visiting art buffs to tourists looking for spectacles. Servicing living artists is only a fraction of their overall function.

The major institutions have substantial resources at their disposal. Curatorial direction and potential is often separated from allocation and management of those resources. As OPSEU (Ontario Public Service Employees Union) has pointed out, there is an increasing push by management to privatize these institutions. Historically, there have been a number of fights to get artist-representation on the boards of such institutions, and, with few exceptions, such inclusions have reflected tokenism and have been ineffective.

Brydon Smith is an Assistant Director

(a Divisional Head) of the National Gallery responsible for Collections and Research. As Smith is responsible for staffing his division he is also ultimately responsible for allowing the position of Curator of Contemporary Art to remain vacant for a decade. Diana Nemiroff is the Acting Curator, Contemporary Canadian Art. Nemiroff has recently exhibited perhaps more women artists at the National Gallery than any other major public gallery in the country. She also supports exhibition rights for artists in an institutional community that has opposed such rights. Nemiroff (see interview) is opposed to a committee model for curating survey shows because, like other museum curators, she feels it creates "too many compromises." Relocations and retrofits can hamper curatorial plans for years at a time. And then there are the ideological functions these institutions are obliged to host, as ceremonial and social sites for the local business and professional elites, and assortments of photo opportunities for diplomats, visiting heads of state and royalty.

Similar "problematics of the workplace" affect Phillip Monk at the Art Gallery of Ontario. And clearly the faults lie with the institutions and their warped sense of authority, and not with the individual curators. This has been demonstrated by the fact that the efforts of Susan Ditta, video curator at the National Gallery, and Barbara Fischer, formerly at the Art Gallery of Ontario, now at The Power Plant have been appreciated by artists.

And finally, the irony in most of this is that many of the major Canadian curatorial players of the '80s gained their initial curating experience working in or in collaboration with the artist-run galleries. Perhaps it's time for them to re-evaluate the successes of domestic alternative curatorial practices, and, in the spirit of encouraging a curatorial community that collaborates, they should actually collaborate with artists' organizations on controversial projects such as the *Biennial*. ■

Interview with Diana Nemiroff Acting Curator of Contemporary Canadian Art at the National Gallery

FUSE: Perhaps you can start by giving some background to the series of *Biennals* and the collaboration between the major public galleries.

NEMIROFF: After the *Songs of Experience* Jessica Bradley and I began thinking about whether it would be a good idea to do a real survey given that "Songs" had been perceived as a national survey when it hadn't tried to be one. In travelling we heard a lot of expressions of interest in the National Gallery's *Biennial*, for example. And all of that was coming from artists. The farther away artists were from the centre the more they were interested in such surveys. It seemed to us that the whole community had become large and complex but quite fragmented regionally so that there were not that many opportunities to pull it together.

Something else that seemed to be lacking was that the whole scene is what you might call flattened in profile in the sense that you tend to go to the top very fast and then that's it. It's very different from Europe where if a particular artist is taken up by one curator, chances are that a show will be followed by other shows in other institutions. Whereas in this country once an artist has a one-person show they tend to be dropped. The profile of an artistic career in this country tends to be very flat, it tends to end very soon after it begins. It struck me that a show that would attempt to be carefully selected according to tough criteria put on by a prestigious gallery

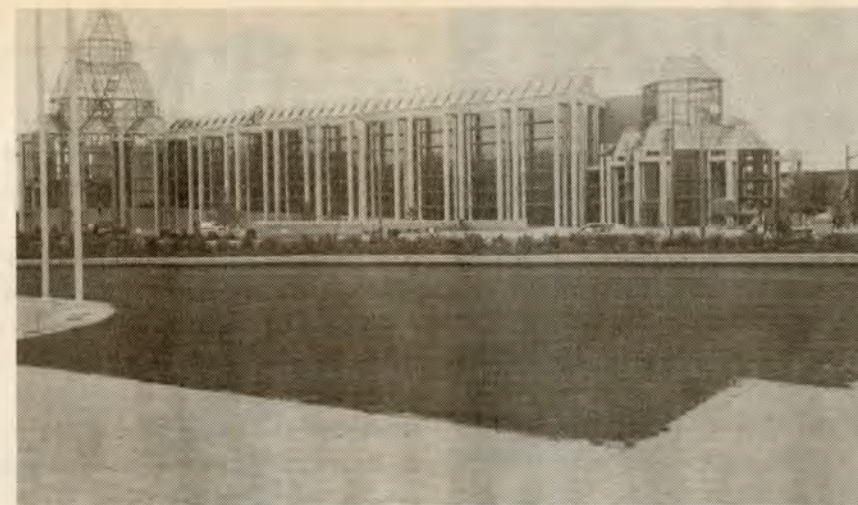


Photo by Clive Robertson.

The National Gallery moments before the opening of the Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art. The Greenhouse effect?

such as the National Gallery could answer two kinds of lacks: one being a national perspective, the other being the lack of places to go at the top. So I had proposed to do a Biennial and that proposal had been accepted although the show was modified to a Triennial because it was considered to be too difficult for us to do every two years. But I wasn't really too sure I wanted to do that kind of show, although I believe that there are arguments you want to make for being able to have a national perspective, there is a tremendous amount of resistance in this country towards centralizing tendencies. And I realized that it would be very badly perceived if the National Gallery were to take unto itself that power of selection. It seemed to me at this point of time that it was quite inappropriate that we should do so when there's quite a lot of interesting curatorial work by various curators at different kinds of institutions across the country, so we are certainly not dealing with a monolithic situation where the National Gallery is going to say "this is the way we think it is this year." I broached the project to Phillip Monk (Curator of Contemporary Canadian Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario) and it turned out that he had been having relatively similar discussions although it hadn't really taken the concrete form of an exhibition proposal and so we talked of doing something collaborated—not just the AGO and the National Gallery, but finding other galleries whose

curators would be interested in doing a national show. So we started making enquiries, and that's how we lined up the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Musée d'art contemporain. We thought they were all galleries that had the physical facilities to do a big important show, that they all had access to interesting curatorial perspectives. Through conference calls and meetings we decided that we could have a national perspective taken from various institutional curatorial points of view over the course of say a 10-year period, decentralizing, allowing the exhibition to take place in different parts of the country where such exhibitions don't normally take place. There's a sponsor for the National Gallery exhibit, Xerox Canada, and the hope is that they will stay on line for the others. Although this is the first contemporary exhibit they've sponsored, their involvement to this point has been exemplary in that they seem really interested in the art. The sponsorship will defray a substantial amount of the costs but certainly not all of it. There are a lot of unknowns in a project like this: the other galleries will have to go to the Canada Council, and obviously their requests will go to juries and those juries will make their decisions as they see best. So nothing can really be counted on at this point. However, that is the system within which we have to function in this country. If the shows manage

to create a certain sense of event, we could be successful. One of the things we need in Canada is more of a sense of ritual, more opportunities to come together and recognize ourselves as a community—to see that we do have interests in common. And it seems to me that to be able to do that beyond the local level, one needs events like this or others that can offer a meeting place. You could say that nowadays the tendency is towards more international shows, and I do favour a context in which Canadian and foreign artists can be brought together because I think that there's at least the potential for unbiased judgement. But as we know, in reality, we're often excluded because we aren't Americans, we aren't exotic enough. In other ways there is a kind of self-mirroring effect between the United States and Europe that tends to exclude Canada.

FUSE: Do you think that artists themselves are really concerned about that?

NEMIROFF: Yes. I think many artists are concerned to eventually obtain some recognition on the international scene.

FUSE: But is that always done through such structures? It doesn't necessarily have to happen at the supposed highest levels of validation for it to work, or gain reputation for the artist?

NEMIROFF: It certainly doesn't. I think there are many examples that you and I could cite of artist-initiated exchanges that have been very fruitful. On the other hand, events such as *Documenta*, Sao Paulo, Sydney and Venice are not negligible occasions either. And these also have a role to play. In this context I would say that one object for this series of exhibitions is to provide a high profile event to attract informed foreign visitors in a context where we can make links that we think are significant.

FUSE: Putting your own event aside for the moment, isn't there a danger of such events backfiring, and hasn't there in fact been a critical failure in such art fairs over the last five years?

NEMIROFF: I think it's quite a complex situation, because curiously the events seem to lose none of their importance even when they backfire. I think we're living in a time

Photo by Clive Robertson



Preparations in the great hall of the National Gallery for a post opening fête for patrons, politicians and some artists.

when there's too much consensus in the art world. I think the same names come up again and again that tightly enforce those kinds of consensus. That's always the negative aspect of seeing the same work over and over again. The criticism of the last *Documenta* was more about the organization than the artists selected.

FUSE: Did you and the other curators look at other models for curating a national survey as opposed to your normal and personal, individual curatorial practice? Did you ever consider chairing a curatorial committee inclusive of a range of curatorial expertise or accountability?

NEMIROFF: I can't speak for the others. They aren't always used to assuming a national mandate and that, I think, is rather different for them, a difference that they themselves will have to explore and come to terms with—I feel something hidden in your question that I would like to address. I could call it, rather unflatteringly, the committee model. In that sense there could be a democratic process if the committee model were used, and, of course, we know it by the more flattering term jury by peers or the Canada Council. I'll explain to you why I'm less interested in that and why I'm not sure that that model assures a greater degree of accountability. My experience at *Optica* (an artist-run space in Montreal) which is exactly where it worked beautifully, and I think the reason it worked was that their audience was

relatively limited. People were not questioning whether or not we were responsible to the whole country, indeed they certainly did question whether we were successfully fulfilling a responsibility to the francophone artists in Montreal. There's nothing wrong with the committee model as long as it is not the only model. I don't think it is the only model or the best model in this situation. What it would do most certainly is to take the heat off me. It is very hard to do this type of project as an individual with confidence unless you are an extremely arrogant and focused person who is so convinced that you have the answer that those things don't trouble you, but they do trouble me a lot. The only thing is that when I have worked on committees I have been very conscious of the compromises and the trade-offs—perhaps it seems reckless of me to set myself up as such a big target. We all, as a group of curators, could have juried each one of the shows. The only thing is we would have got more homogeneous shows with less difference each time and it would have been a safer proposition for us. A show like this is a killer in one sense because either you've got a tremendous curatorial ego and therefore you want the biggest curatorial forum that you can find for yourself, or you're quite likely to be taken down with the show. Though "Canadian Art" is an abstraction, you and I both know that there are lines of common interest amongst Canadian artists, and those could be

interestingly sketched out and there are many different lines that could be shown to exist and discussed. It's important not only to do analytical work but also syncretical work and to try and make those connections. So that's why I'm doing it.

FUSE: Given the way that art museums have of defining their audiences, it is believed that survey shows in general tend to be "safe" or "soft" in comparison to similar exhibits curated within artist-run centres.

NEMIROFF: One way of putting together a show that would be less likely to be criticized as being "safe" would be to emphasize younger artists. Here's my argument for not doing that. I'm not looking for a certain homogeneity of establishment. I think that there are relatively few opportunities for artists in mid-career. I think we have a tendency, because of the nature of the structure of support in this country, to give young artists a great deal of support relatively speaking, and that support tends to fall off dramatically. I'll say this though it may sound naive, that to be included in a national show in the National Gallery—to be one of the 25 artists included—is an honour. I really tried to ask myself whether I felt convinced by this work, whether I felt this was the work that I wanted to validate in this exhibition.

FUSE: What happened to the video, film and performance in your survey?

NEMIROFF: The first thing I would like to say with regards to video and film is that in the past year we've done important surveys in those media, and to date we haven't done anything for the rest of the visual arts. I didn't feel that I had to include each of the representative examples of the best work in each of those media. So they're not there. Performance tends to boil down to a manpower problem. It's a funny thing, one of the things we agreed on was that there wouldn't be more than 25 artists in the show, and it is very difficult to narrow down such a large pool. Other curators will cut it different ways. ■

S W E I V E E R



Still from *Midweekend* (1985) by Caroline Avery.

FILM

Will The Reel Avant-Garde Please Stand Up?

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIMENTAL FILM CONGRESS

Innis College, The Goethe Institute, The Art Gallery of Ontario Toronto
May 28 - June 4, 1989

by Catherine Russell

"I feel guilty for not making films that will change the world"
from Mary Filippo's
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

From May 28 to June 4, more than 150 people from Europe and North and South America assembled in Toronto for a week of viewing and discussion of experimental film. The *International Experimental Film Congress*, the first such gathering in 10 years, was hosted by Innis College, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Goethe Institute. A badly needed opportunity for filmmakers, curators and critics working in a very marginalized area to identify themselves as a community, the affair

was unfortunately, but inevitably (given the number of strong-minded people involved), fraught with tensions from the outset. An absent group of New York filmmakers circulated a petition challenging the "official history" of the avant-garde that was allegedly promoted by the Congress, and there were notable absences from the Toronto film community. As Janine Marchessault noted in her introduction to a programme of "Work of Young Canadians," which she curated



Stills from *Water and Power* by Pat O'Neill.

for the Congress, perhaps such a boycott was not the most effective strategy of opposition.

Nevertheless, a community of some kind did emerge, some excellent films were screened, and film junkies all got a fix, good enough to last until the next Congress, which was proposed to take place in Europe in about three years' time. To the credit of the Congress's organizers, a range of forums, curators, venues and panel and programme topics provided the potential for diverse approaches to experimental film. In fact, there were so many events packed into the eight days that it became something of a marathon to make it from the Critics' Sidebar, which started at 9 am every morning, to the Open Screenings at the Rivoli, which went on until last call at 1 am.

Unfortunately, the organizers' abdication of curatorial responsibility for the Sidebar and the Open Screening—accepting all submissions—not only compounded the time problem, but left no time for discussion of the morning papers, and so the Rivoli programmes ended up being a parade of largely mediocre films. More reasonable hours of the day were filled with panel discussions and screenings curated along thematic lines, as well as "Special Presentations" of older films. The assembled international curators' rationale for their programmes was extremely diverse, and tended to be based on personal "taste" rather than representativeness. In the context of the polemics and uneven programming, the lack of informed, articulate and intelligent debate regarding the history, status, aesthetics and politics of the avant-garde was the Congress's most serious deficiency. Film was either discussed in terms of personal taste or in terms of generational difference—a new guard damning the old guard and claiming to represent a "new generation." The tone was set by critic Fred Camper, who pronounced in the first panel ("Deaths and Resurrections of the Avant-Garde") that "no good

films have been made in the last 10 years by anyone who was not making films in the 1960s." Filmmaker Stan Brakhage subsequently stated his objection to films with a "cause," which, he said, "upsets the aesthetic balance." The two kinds of filmmaking that were being played off against each other, like fashions, were not only "old" and "new," but modern and postmodern, male and feminist, canonized and alternative, non-narrative and new narrative. In the only paper that came close to theorizing this distinction, film theorist Maureen Turim characterized it as a difference between "vision" and "textuality"; a difference between the cinematic eye and the social and textual "I" as categories of subjectivity. Unfortunately, neither Turim nor anyone else was able to take up this distinction in discussion of any individual film. As long ago as 1976, Peter Wollen identified two avant-gardes and the distinction he articulated then, between the British co-op movement and European, politicized, narrativized, intertextual filmmaking, seems to hold good today in the polemics that were circulated in Toronto.¹ The Congress organizers, in their choice of curators and invited filmmakers and speakers, leaned toward the side which Wollen crudely condemned as "a preoccupation with pure film, with film about film," and which feminist critics such as Constance Penley have described as a "phenomenological gestalt" of perceptual mastery.² The other pole, committed to a politics of representation and a deconstruction of subjectivity in film language, may not have been equally represented, but the threatened loss of aesthetic standards entailed by such a perversion of artistic praxis was the implied impetus for the Congress's inception. While both sides seem to me to have valid arguments, there is little room for compromise when the differences are repeatedly characterized in terms of styles and personalities, rather than history and textual analysis.

When you do get around to the films



Still courtesy Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

Still from *Black Cat White Cat* by David Rimmer.

themselves, these polemics are often revealed to be false oppositions. Many of the highlights of the week's screenings, such as Pat O'Neill's *Water and Power*, retain something of the aesthetic sensibilities of the older avant-garde in a highly textual, culturally specific form. Produced in 35mm, utilizing many of the computerized optical techniques that he developed over the last 10 years for Lucasfilm, O'Neill's film is a powerful and stunning essay on L.A. Collapsing and juxtaposing images of the landscape and environment of Southern California on an epic scale, *Water and Power* oscillates graphically between despair and desire. In rich sound and colour, this is a big, expensive experimental film, but its fragments of narrative and the found language of neon, along with the regional emphasis, make it a valuable antidote to the Reggio/Glass collaborations (*Koyaniscatsi*, etc.) that have recently paraded through commercial cinemas as experimental film. Where these films reduce cultural difference to aesthetic universality, O'Neill discovers

historical difference in the ruins of late capitalism. In his depiction of L.A. as a site of loss and spiritual decay, O'Neill shares with the old guard a "ressentiment," a sense of loss or belatedness not unrelated to the debasement of experimental film itself in music video culture.

Challenging "the tyranny of the image," Brakhage's most recent film, an addition to his *Dante Quartet*, approaches another level of experience in the cuts between shots, occasionally extended into photographed darkness. With a similar use of rapid editing and fleeting imagery, Sandra Davis's *Maternal Filigree* (1980) screened in a programme called "The Body in Film" curated by Bruce Elder, likewise demonstrated that an aesthetic of vision outside of textual, narrative, cultural and political concerns, remains viable. The problem lies in the lack of critical language for, and historical understanding of this aesthetic. It is endangered in part because of the poverty of avant-garde film criticism, stuck for the most part in the creation of canons of

great works. Because he's dead, Hollis Frampton's oeuvre provides an excellent fetish for the recovery of a dying mode of film practice, and indeed, devoting two-and-a-half days to Frampton's work might well have fueled the Congress's detractors. Situated quite securely within the canon of "visionary film" as defined by film scholar P. Adams Sitney, Frampton's medium-specific work, produced mainly in the 1970s, is exemplary of a high modernism of avant-garde film. But this is no reason to denigrate it. The Frampton screenings were a small fraction of the Congress, and yet these rarely screened films were absolutely breathtaking treatments of light, temporality, language, film history and sound. While the epic scale of Frampton's incomplete Magellan project, which was to include a film for each of the 365 days of the year, is indicative of his Joycean ambition, his radical engagement with the film medium is crucial to any historical understanding of avant-garde film.

Other historical highlights included William Moritz's programme of "Abstract Films of the 1920s," featuring rare tinted prints with soundtracks. Leger's (and Ray and Murphy's) *Ballet Mecanique* with George Antheil's original score and Clair's *Entr'acte* with the music of Eric Satie, were revealed to be very different films than the silent versions we are familiar with. Other finds from the American avant-garde included Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley's *Schmeerguntz* (1966) about the portrayal of women's bodies in the media and in scatological domestic strife, *The Man Who Invented Gold* (Christopher Maclaine, 1950) and *The Golden Positions* (James Broughton, 1970), all of which involve the tendencies toward narrativity, performance and representational politics being claimed by the "new generation."

Examples of newer films that exhibit these characteristics, which featured in various programmes and forums over the course of the Congress, included *The Black Tower* (John Smith, U.K.), a

Greenawayesque film about subjectivity, narrative time and urban landscape, Brady Lewis's *The Suicide Squeeze* (U.S.), about film noir and baseball, which the filmmaker himself brought to one of the Open Screenings, and Peggy Ahwesh's *From Romance to Ritual* (Super-8, U.S.). These last two were striking in their excellent, but very different, uses of performance. Two entire programmes stood out as consistently engaging, intelligent and well-crafted: Howard Guttenplan's "Work of Young Americans" which, besides Ahwesh included films by Mary Filippo, Lewis Klahr, Jon Moritsugu and Phil Solomon; and Joao Luiz Vieira's programme of the works of Brazilian filmmaker Artur Omar. Omar's work is so richly intertextual and allusive that it requires some explanation to be comprehensible, (which Vieira provided to the extent possible). Although we are bound to miss a great deal, the sense of cultural density that speaks through each of these films is in itself rewarding.

Cultural criticism in the form of irony and aesthetic cynicism distinguished the American and Brazilian programmes from the European collections curated by Deke Dusinberre (Britain and the Continent), Alf Bold (West Germany) and Rose Lowder (European film in a "Thematic Screening" called "Filmed Reality and the Reality of Film"). With a few exceptions, these programmes consisted of tedious abstractions with little formal or political excitement or intelligence. Bold said he avoided films with language because of the impossibility of subtitling in this mode of production, and Lowder cited the lack of granting agencies in France for the economic and thus representational minimalism of the French experimental film. Neither argument was particularly convincing nor excused the banality of the programmes, and other Congress participants offered evidence that more interesting work was being done in Europe. Unlike most of the North and South American films (both Ahwesh



Still from *Hand Tinting* (1976) by Joyce Wieland.

Still courtesy Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

and Brakhage are important exceptions), the European filmmaking evidenced a tendency toward economic self-marginalization, an implicit adherence to a handmade, craft-oriented aesthetic of resistance to the cultural hegemony of high-cost production values. In this respect, it should be noted that Omar's films, like O'Neill's *Water And Power*, are produced in 35mm. In Brazil, experimental films are heavily subsidized as indigenous shorts that precede Hollywood features in commercial theatres. While this may be one direction the avant-garde is headed in, George Kuchar's film and video work, not represented at all at the Congress, is another example of the non-minimalist possibilities of ultra-low-budget cultural/textual experimental cinema.

Two programmes of Canadian film, both of recent work, predictably identified as "boys' films" and "girls' films," were curated by Mario Falsetto and Janine Marchessault respectively. The boys we've seen before—Hancox, Kerr, Rimmer, Hoffman and Elder: a lot of ressen-

timent and landscape. Marchessault's challenge to the canon (and there could be worse canons) was extremely disappointing. Except for Michael Hoolboom's *Was* (cued by Teresa de Lauretis's reading of Calvino), a film which rubs up against Toronto with a critical visual sense of its architectural and personal interiors, the "other" poetic explorations of subjectivity and cultural specificity fell flat, lacking confidence in their construction as if they had been made too carefully. One might agree with Marchessault's sentiments, but the last 20 minutes of Elder's *Lamentations* (excerpted in Falsetto's programme), with its rich overlay of visual, verbal and written texts outstripped any of the work of the so-called younger generation. During one lunch-hour, Vancouver filmmaker David Rimmer premiered his latest film which he shot in China. Like Elder's images of North American Natives, Rimmer's *Black Cat* features the filmmaker as tourist, situating himself in the world, seen by the cultural "other." Again and again, the distinctions perpetrated by the exclusion-



Still from *Imagining October* (1984), by Derek Jarman.

ary tactics of the "institutional" avant-garde, and the pluralism of their detractors, break down.

German filmmaker and curator Birgit Hein spoke several times about the importance of sexual expression for women filmmakers. Her programme of erotic films by European women drew by far the largest crowd at the Congress. At the centre of the programme was a film called *Mano Destra*, an hour of images of a dominatrix and her victim in a variety of excruciating poses with nicely tied white ropes, both partners played by filmmaker Cleo Uebelmann. The strong black and white *mise-en-scene* was compelling for 15 or 20 minutes, but, as an articulation of sexual liberation, this bondage marathon was not nearly as encouraging as Hein's own film (with Wilhelm Hein)—found footage of B-movie heroines with knives—entitled *Uncanny Women*. A panel discussion on "Libidinal Liberation" featuring Hein as well as Carolee Schneeman, Bruce Elder and Noll Brinkman failed to address issues of sexuality in any productive fashion. Schneeman and Elder's presentations were both centred on a singular, universal conception of The Body, the mythic vulva in Schneeman's case, the sacred earth mother in Elder's. Indicative of the total lack of attention to difference was Noll Brinkman's essay on colour, which was not about the colours of peoples' skins, but attempted to claim colour sensitivity for a feminine aesthetic. Hein's emphasis on sexuality and the prominent role of nudity in experimental film remained unaddressed in terms of feminism or censorship.

Two things became abundantly clear about these panels. First of all, filmmakers should be respected for their creative endeavours in celluloid, but should not be invited to speak about much besides their own work. (As Turim pointed out, however, it is only in the presentation of experimental films that filmmakers' personal appearances and comments on their work are taken for granted as a curatorial

and critical necessity.) Interesting presentations by Michael Dorland and Joao Luiz Vieira generated no response and vanished in the wasteland of tired polemics. While numerous filmmakers spoke to the assembled congress, most of the critics were banished to the early morning "sidebar." It is true that many experimental film critics are also filmmakers, but few filmmakers have the theoretical language to tackle the issues that were at stake. What was badly needed was a discussion of the critical categories that are most productively applied to experimental film, and an historically informed appreciation of the shift that is increasingly apparent in the style of the avant-garde. Even such issues as funding, distribution and curatorial policy could have been more productively addressed. Instead we had to listen to filmmakers decry critics' tendencies to either reduce their work to semiotic jargon or ignore it completely and to condemn everything that threatens the sanctity of the art, from feminism to video.

Secondly, the panel and programming topics as well as the specific presentations and films tended to situate experimental film outside of any cultural politics. Until late in the week with the Brazilian and American programmes, few of the films had people in them. The unspoken desire on the part of many Congress organizers and participants to establish a narrow, exclusionary definition of experimental film adheres to a conception of artistic praxis that, as Hein noted, has been entirely commodified by the culture industry. The meagre audiences that artisanal, medium-specific, "visionary" films continue to draw encourage many filmmakers, especially those with a commitment to cultural politics, to expand the boundaries to reach a more diverse audience. And yet, without the "art" label, the institutional affiliations through which the Congress was assembled (which include corporate sponsors and arts councils besides educational and art institutions) would not have been

available at all. While Marchessault rather abruptly and misleadingly characterized all public funding in Canada as a form of state censorship, it is difficult to believe that anyone can still have faith in a pure distinction between aesthetics and politics, that the politics of representation can be ignored in this day and age and that subjectivity can be unproblematically aligned with the camera eye, and yet artist-heroes abounded at the Congress.

At the closing assessment meeting it was generally agreed that pluralism is what is needed for a more representative Congress. Video, addressed at two forums at the Congress, remains avant-garde film's "other," the most immediate cause of the cinema's death, which Michael Snow pronounced as imminent. While two opportunities were provided to tackle this issue, a panel and a screening, both were extremely weak. Grahame Weinbren had been invited to talk about his interactive video projects, which he did not do very well. Simon Field's programme of Film/Video crossover featured interesting works by Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway (with Tom Phillips), the latter on tape, but concluded with a 69-minute tape called *E.Etc.* by David Larcher that seemed like an overchromakeyed music video without a decent soundtrack. Few people stuck it out to the end.

Besides questions of media, pluralism also refers to the rich overlapping between experimental and documentary film practices and even narrative modes. Narrativity has long been the great bourgeois taboo of experimental film. Yet a larger conception of the avant-garde, one that might include the Godardian project and the important feminist inheritors of that project—Yvonne Rainer and Chantal Akerman—does not entail a compromise with the great monolith of the mainstream, but an internal critique of narrative and documentary forms. Indeed many would argue that it is only by these means that subjectivity might be rendered a more socially complex category. Following

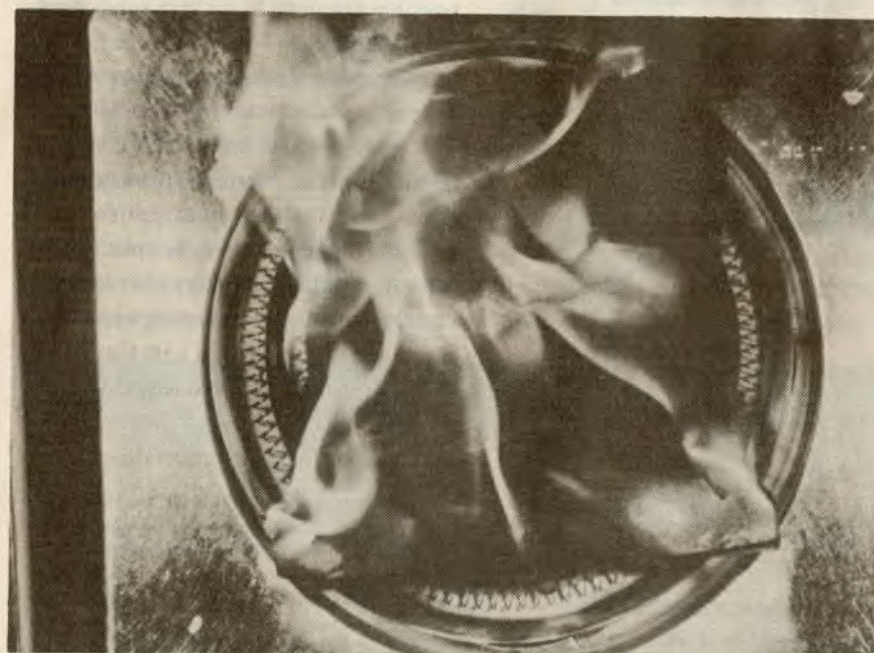
Warhol, the incursion into documentary modes in which the pro-filmic (those in front of the camera) also becomes a subjective presence is another means by which the status of the artist-hero might be challenged. These notions may be perversions of an idealized pure experimental film, but in the work of Chris Marker, Johan van der Keuken, Trinh T. Minh-ha, the medium-specific principles of light, sound and montage remain creatively and experimentally handled outside the conventions of film language.

The evening of June 4, a group show of Buffalo and Berlin filmmakers, performance artists and video at the Music Gallery called "The Tragedy of Structuralism: A Bomb From Below," provided a welcome relief from the by then reified air of the Congress. Although the programme was uneven, it did feature some excellent work from both American and German sources, and had all the explosive energy and experimentalism that characterized the avant-garde in the '60s, demonstrating that if undergrounds do eventually solidify into institutions, new depths continue to fester.

Obviously no Congress, even one mounted on the scale of Toronto's, can be all inclusive. People, films and ideas are always going to fall through the cracks. Despite all this divisiveness, despite the predictable observation in every other panel, introduction or address, that someone or some film was "missing from this Congress," it was a pleasure to spend a week with an international community of people with a commitment to experimental film—even if no one could agree on what that was exactly. What is badly needed is a recognition of two or more avant-gardes, and less territorialism on everyone's part to claim the title of experimental film. The lack of direction of the avant-garde, and the lack of recognition of its enrichment through the engagement with critical theory, mass media, other media and other modes of film practice, was disappointing. In this sense, the Congress was perhaps a missed



Stills from *nostalgia* (1971) by Hollis Frampton.



opportunity.

However, the organizers should be congratulated for even conceiving of such an assembly, from which emerged some of the largest audiences of alternative filmmaking that have been assembled in any country for decades. The Congress demonstrated to all of us that avant-garde film is alive and kicking, that "the crisis" exists in our minds, not in the films. Moreover, it is not a crisis by any means specific to experimental film, but one that pervades almost any area of artistic endeavour in which aesthetic standards struggle against the apparent relativism of critical theory. Optimistically, I would hope that such standards might be defined outside the realm of masterworks and radical formalism, and that awareness of representational politics does not necessarily lead to cultural relativism. I also hope that there will be future congresses of experimental film in which these issues will be addressed head on, rather than whined about in self-serving accusations. ■

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ENDNOTES

¹ Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," *Edinburgh '76 Magazine*, 1976.

² Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom, "The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories," *Screen* 19:3 (Autumn, 1978), p.118.

**THE STATE OF THE PARALLEL SYSTEM
CALL FOR PROPOSALS/MANUSCRIPTS**

In the '70s, artist-run centres emerged as an alternative for artists. Today, their future and viability is being questioned. FUSE is interested in hearing from artists, administrators, writers and critics.



Please direct all correspondence by December 15th to:
Editorial Board, FUSE Magazine, 183 Bathurst Street Toronto.





David Rasmus, *Untitled* (Tim).

EXHIBITION

Homomyopia

HOMOGENIUS

Mercer Union, Toronto
June 22 - July 22, 1989

by Andrew Sorfleet

Although we have certainly contributed to this country's cultural life as a group we have been robbed of our culture.

Like blacks and women, we are taught, by omission, that we have no heroes and heroines and certainly no role-models.

In spite of the restrictions homosexuals have, in fact, become artists, athletes, writers, but the masses of homosexuals have had no benefit from this fact. We have had to depend on the ruling elites who have taken over our talents and used them for their own profit, like the Kennedys who decorated their court with Gore Vidal. This is the expropriation of our cultural resources. We refuse to entertain them any longer with "camp" for their profit.¹

The above quotes are excerpts from a working paper prepared by the Chicago Gay Liberation organization for the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention plenary session, held in Philadelphia, September, 1970. Today, in Toronto, nearly 20 years later, I ponder

what real effects these words had. I try to envision the power in the voices, now barely audible, that delivered this and many other manifestos. With a gay community almost 10 years into an AIDS crisis, the voices of gay liberation are threatened. We not only have to demand the right to history and culture, we must demand the right to stay alive: the right to adequate medical care, to free, anonymous testing, to life-saving drugs and an end to cruel placebo trials and government inaction. This is not to say that AIDS activists and the voices of gay liberation are synonymous. They're not. But AIDS has been so ingrained in the public perception of gay men's culture—a community so specifically isolated in dealing both with the trauma of illness and sexual repression perpetuated by an inhuman media circus—that it is no longer possible to sever it from the psyche of gay consciousness.

Despite the threat presented by AIDS, gay culture in Toronto today seems strong. The past year has seen a surge of gay related festivals, performances, screenings, gallery exhibits, and conferences. Many of these events were specifically related to AIDS, but many also focused on celebration, on representing ourselves. Presented in conjunction with Gay Pride Week, *Homogenius* was one such exhibition.

To quote from the press release:

Homogenius celebrates the 20th anniversary of an event which took place at a Greenwich Village gay bar known as the Stonewall Inn. The response of the patrons who fought back against the raid on the bar and the ensuing riot, have become recognized as the symbolic birth of the gay liberation movement, a movement leading to the establishment of the gay press, a range of gay activist organizations, a new consciousness among gays and lesbians, and a greater public awareness of these issues. As artists visible in the Toronto art scene, this collective wanted to underline the importance of sexuality to their art practice.

Homogenius aligned itself with the theme of this year's Lesbian and Gay Pride Day. It became known as the Pride Day Show. Lesbian and Gay Pride Day is exactly that, which is not to suggest that

the lesbian community and the gay men's community are one and the same. They're not. There are many lesbian and gay communities divided not only along lines of gender but also of race and class. These are different communities which intersect on a common ground of oppression: oppression based on sexual orientation. *Homogenius*'s attempt to align itself with 20 years of political struggle suddenly loses credibility when you realize that women, who fought hard for both women's and gay rights, have once again been denied representation. They have been excluded both as participants and as audience. Perhaps Pride Day's theme of "20/20" (20 years after the Stonewall riots and Bill C-150, the criminal code reform in Canada) wasn't really oriented towards women anyway.

Having set gender problems aside for a moment, I still leave with the feeling that I have found neither the political struggle nor the history which *Homogenius* claims to have chosen for its pervasive theme. This is not to deny the importance of the work. While many pieces in the show are both slick and beautiful they also speak from, if not of a sexual position, a position that traditionally dared not speak its name. It must be

difficult for the visual arts community, still dealing with its homophobia, to have some of its veteran and up-coming members publicly declare themselves "out." In this way *Homogenius*, as a statement, could become an important political document. What the work lacks, however, is a sense of context, a sense of history.

Tom Folland's essay "Stigma: Gay Politics—Gay Aesthetics?" was commissioned by the collective to complement the exhibition as a history of a local gay art practice. It was funded through a grant from the Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal. It was to be something with which to approach the work, a document about culture and communities. But the essay doesn't talk about a history of, or for, gay art. Instead, it weaves a tangled web of political, sexual and literary theory for a general art audience ("the public") to decipher.

Notions of public and private raised in Folland's essay are exemplified by Toronto's struggle over Pride Day this year. Metro Toronto City Council's final refusal to proclaim Lesbian and Gay Pride Day as an official celebration exists ironically in a rhetorical and historical twist. Mayor Art Eggleton declared that he

"believe[s] sexual orientation is a private matter and none of the government's business."² The debate, centred on a public/private distinction, found us fighting this time for the right to publicity.

Folland's essay begins to map a history of the oppressive use of the legal distinction between public and private. Folland argues that the criminal code reform of 1969, which decriminalized sexual acts between two consenting adults in private, was an attempt to address the inability to enforce control of homosexuality. The state, which had no place in the bedrooms of the nation, now has a definition of public with which to police gay men's traditional public meeting places. By imposing a definition of public the state gains greater surveillance of gay peoples' lives.

Homosexuality (and sexuality in general for that matter) has been banished from sight through the construction of a public eye. This is the same public eye which historically has been used to scrutinize and categorize sexual "aberrations" into distinct species now contained within medical and psychiatric definitions. While *Homogenius* is about becoming visible to an audience, it fails to acknowledge that these notions of "public" raise concerns



Photo by Peter MacCallum, courtesy of Mercer Union.

Andy Fabo, Regan Morris, and Robert Flack.

in the construction of that audience.

From what I could decipher, Folland's essay discusses theories of unification which would map a linear history for the construction of gay men's identities. Traditional models of repression and liberation fail to address the real social implications of a new collective cultural identity. Reform bills like C-150 mark the birth of a modern homosexual conceived by the late 19th century sexologists. One hundred years later, the transition from a criminal model to a sick or insane one is complete. The social implications of the rise of a gay liberation movement deliver the new gay man. This new, collective identity is imposed upon what is really a very heterogeneous group of people. However, contradictions arise from Folland's claim of an "authoritarian collapse of difference," because he neglects to discuss the added complexities of the construction of lesbian identity. Because of this oversight, Folland's essay ends up reinforcing a dominant model of sexuality.

The economic, social, political and sexual enslavement of women defines their sexuality as passive (an attempt to cover up women's active sexuality). This means that not only are lesbians oppressed because of their sexuality, they are oppressed because of their perceived lack of sexuality. While gay men have been oppressed by dominant representations of gay sexuality, lesbians have also been oppressed by their lack of representation (dominant or otherwise). According to dominant concepts of sexuality they simply do not exist. Nor could they be found in *Homogenius*. They were noticeably absent.

Folland's essay assumes that the "dangerousness" of gay men's sexuality to the dominant patriarchal order is based in a different sexual practice: on a premise of penetration. On this premise, gay men's sexuality would expose the arbitrariness of an active/passive binary. In referencing Andrea Dworkin, Folland fails to recognize the implications inher-

ent in lesbian sexual practice. Lesbian sexuality threatens the dominant social order, not only by exposing the arbitrariness of an active/passive binary, but more importantly, by denying the phallus its symbolic importance. Folland's suggestion that Tennessee Williams veils homosexual desire through the "accepted form of literary female sexuality" matters little, since rape is still the demonstration of social and political power.³

All of this has political implications for gay men. Rather than a scenario of the abdication of power by being penetrated (this still acknowledges the symbolic power of the phallus) the argument must be taken one step further. If the phallus was to be socially deflated to a position of a sexual organ, a locus for physical pleasure, then sexual orientation would have a possibility of challenging the "hierarchical genital organization of patriarchy."⁴ The deflation of the phallus into the penis would be an important step in the abolition of sex-role stereotypes, the dissolution of boundaries between straight and gay and the struggle for sexual self-determination. Sexuality could become an emancipatory practice. This would give credibility to the Marcusean claim referenced by Folland, "for polymorphous sexuality as a libidinal-political act."

But where does all this leave me in dealing with the art? The work in *Homogenius* does not struggle with the psychoanalytic containment of sexuality; it struggles with a lack of visibility in dominant culture. However, these two struggles are not mutually exclusive. *Homogenius* struggles to surface as what it is: work from different social-sexual positions of gay men and an attempt to address collective cultural identity. It's about a community.

Problems in *Homogenius* arise not only out of its incongruities with the catalogue essay, but also from a notion of audience. Many pieces in the show function more in a field of art history than they do in a history of gay liberation. Stephen Andrew's work, for instance, references

a linear history of representation and takes its title from John Berger's poem, "Brief as Photos." It charts a line from chiaroscuro to *trompe l'oeil*, to perspective, to photorealism. David Buchan's "Vivid" references a painting from the Fontainebleau school circa 1594. "Coup de Grâce" by Andy Fabou uses Andy Warhol's "10 Portraits of Artists" and "Double Self-Portrait." General Idea's work references itself. I ask myself: whose history is this?; whose culture?; whose community? When claims to a gay politic are bracketed by the art gallery system, access to a political history becomes absolutely crucial. Not only is *Homogenius* trapped within gallery/museum walls, it is trapped within gallery/museum history.

Within the gallery/museum context, the search for a gay aesthetic can become fraught with problems. It rings of the all too familiar clichés of gay men having a natural inclination towards the arts, a belief popularized by Freud's theories of sexuality. It is also problematized by the wish of some gay historians to claim a natural gay aesthetic. An essentialist notion of a gay aesthetic functions to obscure the possibility of a gay aesthetic cultivated out of gay political struggle. (This is why an essay on the history of local gay art is so important!) If a gay aesthetic becomes the reproduction of the dominant aesthetic by those who feel excluded, what happens to a history of gay political struggle?

This is where a public/private distinction becomes so important. In a heterosexual, capitalist culture our public life buys us our life in private. People quickly disassociate themselves from a radical sexual politic to secure their own positions while benefiting from gains made by that politic. Parallels of the oppressions of gay men to the oppressions of blacks and women can be drawn, but as white gay men, we are functionally invisible. We are caught between being complacent with either the denial or acceptance of our sexuality. People will accept



Photo by Peter MacCallum, courtesy of Mercer Union.

Robert Flack, Richard Banks and Micah Lexier/Regan Morris.

us as white men and either deny the possibility that we are gay or will accept our gayness as incidental. In either case, people will refuse to deal with our sexuality, with our differences. We should be building coalitions not comparisons.

Armed with an artillery of liberal humanist ideology, dominant culture readily co-opts our politics and communities. With reviews like Donna Lypchuk's "Transcending Matters of Sexuality in Art" any political location for gay culture becomes whitewashed with an essentialist claim of transcendental universal human experience.⁵ This strategy functions to disavow any economic and/or social privilege and to eradicate difference.

In the context of *Homogenius* it seems our culture has been stolen because as gay artists we have become dependent upon an art/gallery system. Dominant culture functions like Amerigo Marras's theory of television.⁶ We have become dependent upon its mediation in order to watch our own reality. According to Marras, "The result of this consumption strategy leads to the elimination of critical judgement and political consciousness where politics do not disappear but rather . . . become invisible."⁷ Even the most political work is susceptible to dominant culture's co-optive strategies.

In the context of the gallery/museum as it now exists, political work stands to forfeit its effectiveness. Amerigo Marras believed that radical video held the potential to change the structures for viewing television. Dominant culture presents only two alternatives: co-option or marginalization. It rarely yields opportunities for changing the existing structure. If culture is to be an emancipatory practice it must be wrested from the museum or the museum changed.

In the context of *Homogenius*, works which do try to grapple with personal and political content become detached from a vernacular reality. The structure of the gallery/museum remains unchallenged. Dialogue between the works is lost. Not negotiating the politics of the show through the existing art/gallery structure defers those politics to that structure. The work then stands little chance of political intervention. Our acceptance comes at a cost. We become complicit. We stand to lose both our culture and our politics.

In her review in *Metropolis* Donna Lypchuk writes that, "Thomas Folland's brilliant, entertaining essay . . . is an eyeopening document that details the history of local gay art practice in Toronto."⁸ Folland's essay doesn't mention the history of local gay art practice. The press release states, "the collective

has commissioned an essay on the history of the local gay art practice in Toronto by Toronto curator and writer Thomas Folland." Lypchuck raves about an essay she must not have read. The press release was enough. With this kind of commitment how much time did she spend looking at the work? Is it in this context that the true meaning of *Homogenius* can be read? "Homo" from latin roots means "man." From greek roots it means "same." "Genius" means "natural" talent or aptitude. Are we to believe that gay art must naturally be more of the same? ■
Andrew Sorfleet is a 4th year student at the Ontario College of Art.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Working Paper for the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention". *Out of the Closets: The Voices of Gay Liberation* Ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young. New York: Douglas/Links. 1972.
- ² *The Globe & Mail*, June 16, 1989.
- ³ Rape can also be the demonstration of a lack of power. Men not only rape to demonstrate their power over others but also to assert that power within themselves.
- ⁴ Folland, Thomas. *Stigma: Gay Politics - Gay Aesthetics?* p. 4.
- ⁵ *Metropolis*, July 13, 1989.
- ⁶ Amerigo Marras, "Revolutionary Process and Organization of Telemedia." Quoted in Dot Tuer "The CEAC was Banned in Canada" *C Magazine*, No. 11.
- ⁷ *Ibid*.
- ⁸ *Metropolis*, *ibid*.

MUSIC

Womad Powwows

WOMAD FESTIVAL '89

World of Music Art & Dance
Harbourfront, Toronto
August 9 - 13, 1989

by Marva Jackson

Bustling and colourful, *WOMAD Festival '89* lit up the lakeshore at Harbourfront for six days of world music, art and dance. British folk/rock political bard Billy Bragg, who shared the stage for five nights with a variety of performers, gave on-going commentary about the necessity of changing the system from within, regardless of commercial ties. He often referred pointedly to the treatment of disenfranchised workers by Molson, *WOMAD's* major corporate sponsor. Najma Akhtar's interpretations of traditional, and more contemporary jazz-like Indian ghazals (Urdu love poems), and Montreal's Chamel No. 6 with inspired percussionist Assar Santana, who brought audiences to their feet dancing up a storm to great latin-jazz melodies, were a few highlights.

Despite drawbacks like significantly higher ticket prices, less free venues and the controversy surrounding Molson, 100,000 people attended *WOMAD '89*—about the same as last year. This year distinguished itself, however, by an increased commitment to more Canadian representation both on stage and in the art galleries. This was reflected in the range of Canadian performers, from Toronto's rock 'n' roll heroes the Razorbacks, to the Old Agency Drummers, purveyors of Alberta's Native culture (specifically that of the Blood nation), to the heightened visibility of Native artists through two shows. The Community Gallery exhibited Paul Hogan's installation "The Necropoglyph of the Holy Crow: Funerary Art of the Chong" and York Quay Gallery

featured "The Art of the First People" which had work by other Native artists including Jane Ash Poitras.

WOMAD's well attended opening ceremony, held in the York Quay Gallery, was led by Cree elder Vern Harper accompanied by the Eagle Heart Singers. Harper moved everyone at the gathering with a speech on self-responsibility and each individual's responsibility to the earth. In order to allow the audience to truly be participants instead of remaining as spectators, more background information about the religious ceremony and the Native visual artists was needed in the *WOMAD* programme guide. Later that evening a much larger ceremony was conducted on the Shipdeck Stage and, at the invitation of the elders, the audience did participate with men, women and children forming a ring on the stage demonstrating various Native dance steps. Ottawa-based Seventh Fire, made up of musicians from Heart & Soul and Thom E. Hawks & the Pine Needles, reiterated Harper's theme of self-responsibility with positively charged performances throughout *WOMAD '89*, fusing reggae and rock with traditional Native rhythms. Lead singer Allen Deleary was a particularly strong presence sharing the panel at "The Rattling of the Drums: Political Expression in World Music" forum with Billy Bragg, Jamaican storyteller Miss Lou and Ugandan folk singer Geoffrey Oryema. Overall, the panels and workshops, still offering free admittance, were better attended than last year's. One of the most popular workshops was given

by Ghanaian master drummer Abraham Adzenyah, who was sitting in with the Toronto-based Flaming Dono Group. "The Voices of Women Today" workshop was a more organized and positive experience than the 1988 version due in part to better organization and the presence of host Itah Sadu. Excellent performances occurred consistently throughout *WOMAD '89* with performers such as Quebecois harmonica player Alain Lamontagne, Toronto's international ghazal stars Afzal and Munni Subhani, the Usafiri Dancers and Siyahka Theatre of Energy.

Other Black Canadian programming, albeit Toronto-centric had brilliant singer/playwright Diana Braithwaite sharing the stage with Miss Lou and others for the celebratory "Black Voices" show supported by an enthusiastic audience. *WOMAD* even scratched the surface of Toronto's hip-hop culture with the "Beat Factory Hip-Hop Revue." While most were there to see Michie Mee & L.A. Luv, outstanding performances were delivered by Dream Warriors, Kool Skool and Ken E. Krush. The only incident which marred the show was continuous heckling from a few members of the audience especially during Ken E. Krush's performance eventually provoking him to confront them. Harbourfront's security measures were questionable considering that the hecklers were able to continue their harassment of both audience and performers. The audience and performers were the ones responsible for diffusing a potentially explosive situation, one of the most positive statements yet in favour of Toronto's hip-hop community. Unlike the other events, most of the hip-hop revue audience was young and Black, which seemed unusual. All too often festivals of this kind are marketed towards a white middle class audience. Hopefully next year *WOMAD* organizers will realize their full responsibility—to advertise to a wider community more in keeping with its multicultural mandate. ■

EXHIBITION

Gummy & Pokey

VISUAL AIDS
A TRAVELLING EXHIBITION
OF AIDS POSTERS FROM
AROUND THE WORLD
Toronto Western Hospital
July 24 - August 4

By Brent Cehan

Strangely, the postmodern awareness of reification has let writers toy with the claim that AIDS is indistinguishable from its mediation. Postmodern strategies characterize the essay and commentary accompanying *Visual AIDS*, an international survey of AIDS posters recently exhibited at the Toronto Hospital and in its new HIV clinic. Organizer James Miller, a professor at the University of Western Ontario writes:

Just as there is no single disease process involved with AIDS there is no single objective truth underlying all the representations of the syndrome. We know AIDS only through its various fictive constructions as "The Plague" or "The War Within" or "The Judgement of God."

The syndrome with all its socially constructed meanings does not exist in isolation from its representations or from their producers.¹

This position recalls Douglas Crimp's essay "AIDS: Cultural Analysis; Cultural Activism"² which deconstructed the authority and objectivity claimed by the media, medical science and government to re-assert the priorities of those people directly affected by the crisis. But AIDS and its representations, while interrelated, are not the same thing. Part of "the crisis of representation" is that most prominent "fictive constructions" do not correspond to the truths of the syndrome at all. Besides promoting neo-conservative sexual attitudes, they are faulty models. The perception of AIDS as a "fatal disease" results in inadequate treatment and services. The tendency to see AIDS as an occurrence in a broad-based mediascape—a survey of mass media being the

result—can also distract attention from people living with AIDS and obscure the material dimensions of AIDS related illnesses.

Writings on and about AIDS point toward activities and experiences that exist outside of representation. Activism is informed by concern with factual information (means of transmission, drug

effectiveness and availability) as well as redefining the metaphors and strategies surrounding the crisis. This kind of engaged experience and knowledge translates into more valid and useful representations.

A critique of *Visual AIDS* addresses my own position as art reviewer and mediator. People living with AIDS, HIV positive people and members of ACT Toronto or AIDS Action Now are better placed to write on AIDS. What I know of the syndrome is mostly based on what I've read in gay and mainstream media. Any commentary must account for its writer's position. As a gay man, I recognize that most commentaries on AIDS are also commentaries on gay sexuality and that people with judicial, political and/or media power seem untouched by the expressions of people actually affected by the crisis.



To pick a recent example, the regular drug information appearing in "AIDS Update," published in *XTRA!* and *Rites*, two Toronto gay publications, directly conflicts with *The Globe & Mail's* recent claim that "AZT . . . is the only drug that appears to be successful in slowing the progression of the virus."³ The potential effect of such frequent and misleading reporting on the availability of drugs makes one both angry and careful. This negligence is a demonstration, not only a metaphor, of our relationship to the state and media.

Visual AIDS was developed at the University of Western Ontario from discussions for the course on AIDS and the Arts conducted by Professor James Miller for the Frontiers of the Humanities seminar. The Toronto incarnation of the display was divided between two locations: the HIV clinic and the hospital lobby. Beside each poster is a card indicating its country of origin, the producer and an analysis of the imagery. James Miller and the organizers from the Frontiers of the Humanities Seminar and the AIDS Committee of London are to be congratulated for using the structures of academic study to generate social action. But the postmodern concern for the cultural positioning of producers and audience expressed in Miller's essay seems tentative in its current placement/position at a hospital.

Most of the safe-sex posters are in the clinic. Most of the misinformed posters are in the lobby. The anti-sex messages conveyed in their illustrations and bold type are more immediately accessible than their commentary. This commentary's ironic and at times inscrutable style (with references to a "Rhomeresque beauty" or "a gay Venus rising from the sperm bloodied sea") locates the intended audience as artists or theorists rather than patients or hospital visitors. What we need are presentations from a variety of engaged positions, not an international survey analyzed by a single commentator, however enlightened. The



posters are presented without dates, display history or the composition of the groups that produced them. There are no posters by activists, PLWAs (people living with AIDS), lesbian or women's groups or North American people of colour.⁴ Because the hospital setting tends to legitimize the posters' messages, it may have affected the display of activist posters, however, it makes the presentation of anti-sex posters questionable.

The safe sex posters on display, most produced by independent AIDS committees, promote the use of condoms by employing prominent gay erotic images. While I realize that their intention is to eroticize safe sex, not rethink male eroticism, I preferred the European cartoons that make sex energetic and fun (condoms are called "gummies") to the anonymous weight trainers in heat. Many posters demonstrate how visual puns can elude conservative censorship. In one example, two traffic signs, a phallic "STRAIGHT AHEAD" and "DO NOT ENTER" are titled, respectively "WITH" and "WITH-OUT." Condoms appear as the letter "O," romantic moons, and balloon animals.

Other posters document that the inadequacy of governmental response was on an international scale. Given the patterns of HIV infection, methods of prevention that acknowledge the sexual practices and social position of gay men are clearly necessary. Instead, these posters advised abstinence, (hetero) monog-

amy and, failing that, condoms. Safe sex information, which was already being produced by various independent groups, was later partially funded. This government strategy recognized people personally motivated to deal with the crisis, but reneged on any obligation for them to officially address gay men in public. The subsequent official responses, derived from the romantic convention that makes the pleasurable and rational incongruous, associated heterosexual sex with death. The show's paperback murder mystery images of hearts turning into skulls and lovers engulfed in flames present familiar sex paranoia in new contexts. France, for example, identified an attractive woman and man as a "fatal beauty" and "a real killer." Canada's campaign heralded "The New Facts of Life" and features a barely illuminated newspaper headline and the slogan "Attack on AIDS" written in blood-red spraypaint. Its overall grainy texture suggests decay. This poster's additional metaphor—AIDS as spy warfare—is complicit with the continuing portrayal of homosexuals, HIV positive people and the virus itself as misleading and devious. Its current manifestations are the front page status of unusual forms of transmission, often coupled with a corresponding lie that as a class, HIV positive people intentionally infect others.

But these metaphors become "facts of life" only when they are enacted in social relations or influence government policy. One example is Ontario Health Minister Elenor Caplan's decision (to be tabled in September) to spend \$1.4 million of the Ministry's \$7.3 million budget on tracing the previous sexual contacts of HIV positive people.⁵ Whether Caplan believes these metaphors or not, such representations make the state's real and imagined claims to omnipotence appear necessary to the public's welfare. Their results make spending money on monitoring rather than social and medical services seem reasonable. To be more effective, the deconstruction of ideolo-

gies expressed by these posters should also deconstruct the structures responsible for their production. Miller's representing of the posters for critique moves them into a field of professional analysis, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is far removed from the goals of informing the public and challenging the media. It does not create a strategy that recognizes the capacity of people living with the syndrome to articulate their own concerns. The absence of this strategy places PLWAs as "the unknown." As the issues in the crisis become more centred on services and treatment, developing representations from lived experience becomes essential.

The problems surrounding the presentation of *Visual AIDS* at a hospital indicate broader issues. Current academic theory is distinguished by concerns for the roles the media and the social play in consciousness, as well as the meanings of authority and authorship. Oddly, it often produces a practice that doesn't operate effectively in a social context. But the reification of uninformed positions does not imply the equality of all positions or the necessity of presenting them. The absence of a "single objective truth" doesn't deny the existence of real experiences or the institutional structures that affect them. The posters displayed in *Visual AIDS* make it clear that their expression is still necessary. ■

Brent Cehan is a Toronto artist and writer.

END NOTES

¹ Visual AIDS, *Rites* magazine, May 1989.

² *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1988 p. 3-16.

³ On July 13, 1989, Aids Action Now protested the slowness of Bristol Myers in releasing the anti-viral drug DDI.

⁴ I'm not counting the "AIDS Does Not discriminate" or the Patti Labelle "Get the Facts" poster.

⁵ *Rites*, July/August, 1989.



Video still from *Suture Self*.

MUSIC

Nothing Sacred

SUTURE SELF

Violence & The Sacred
Distributed by
Freedom in a Vacuum,
Toronto, 1989
60 min.

by Glenn Cooly

For the record, Violence and the Sacred is a band. So say current members Greg (Potemkin) Van Alstyne and Sri. As far as they're concerned V&TS's films, videos and performance art pieces are secondary to the music they've recorded and performed live since 1985.

For an audience, V&TS is a challenge. Featuring a line-up that has included up to nine artists and musicians who've come and gone project by project, and who've occasionally split into separate groups under the same name, it's difficult to know just who or what V&TS is. More to the point is the tone of the band's work: an unabashed nihilism that has thumbed its nose at critical and popular appeal.

V&TS's few conventionally structured

songs—like their upturned cover version of Bob Dylan's "Masters of War"—are typically raucous and visceral. Their preferred form of music—random improvisations by several musicians along with programmed synthesizers and taped found sounds—is cacophonous, sometimes wholly unlistenable. Louder than Munch's "The Scream," faster up the river than Conrad in a Chris Craft. In film and video, that barely describes their tame stuff.

Suture Self, the video with accompanying soundtrack that V&TS released last summer, is no exception. Inspired by the perturbing montages of filmmaker Arthur Lipsett (see *FUSE* 12#6), to whom the video is dedicated, *Suture Self* is an

unrelenting stream of enervating and horrific chunks of data appropriated from across the mediascape—mob violence, pornographic ecstasies, TV hucksters, news headlines—and specially filmed dramatic footage. The imagery is united formally by an extensive use of colourization effects and by the soundtrack, which ranges from signature V&TS bursts of noise to delicate and intricate passages. The video's sparse dialogue consists of textual readings from the pages of Georges Bataille, Samuel Beckett, Maurice Blanchot and William Burroughs, which convey themes one would expect from these four writers of the Apocalypse.

Suture Self rolls rapidly from fragment to fragment, scarred in the interval by post-production effects, abruptly emerging in recognizable vignettes, then sinking back into an electro-primordial sea of blips and flashes. The video

achieves a thematic unity towards the end, when it reaches a lengthy scene around which the imaginal chaos congeals. The scene, shot in a grainy black and white and repeated several times, portrays a disembodied pair of hands that clutch at the buttocks of a male torso as if they were religious objects.

This monochromatic reprise, evidently adapted from Bataille's *The Solar Anus*, sets out the organizing principles of *Suture Self*: post-structuralist elucidations on the anxieties and contradictions that characterize late capitalism. The scene's ambiguity and cold dramatic edge, along with its truncated eroticism, express a metaphorical unity between desire and excrement, pleasure and putrefaction, fascination and horror. Such motifs of existential crisis run throughout *Suture Self*, and reach a crescendo during its final passage; footage of the press conference at which Pennsylvania Treasurer R.

Bud Dwyer took his own life in front of live TV cameras, after confessing to charges of political corruption.

Suture Self is a seductive electronic-age poem of alienation, and for this very reason, it is not without problems. The aestheticization of nihilism is a risky artistic endeavour, especially in light of the current critical upswell which considers such a blunt strategy of negation as tantamount to political inertia and disempowerment.

But viewed more generally as a part of V&TS's activity, the video acquires a fuller meaning. The band's artistic nihilism exists alongside an inseparable pro-social engagement manifested, for example, in its uncompromising refusal to perform in venues it considers homophobic, racist or sexist; and in its presence among Toronto's various activist communities. V&TS is well known for benefit performances like the one it staged a few years ago on behalf of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) support group, after five activists were arrested. The benefit raised money for the ALF defense fund, drew a fair amount of public attention to the animal liberation movement, and yielded *Cathexis*, a cassette containing some of V&TS's best songs.

This synthesis of artistic and social practices differs from the problematic avant-garde project to aestheticize the everyday. For V&TS, there are two separate elements in motion; firstly, it is the production of an art that mimics or mirrors the most troubling aspects of late capitalism, in effect creating a subversive (i.e. implosive) feedback loop. Secondly, the cultivation of a decentered, non-hierarchical milieu in which the sutured self can revitalize itself, a milieu that can accommodate the kind of community-based activist groups V&TS has involved itself in.

Such a strategy of resistance is difficult and, in many ways, contentious. The way V&TS carry it off, though, makes it easy to at least suspend disbelief. ■

Glenn Cooly is a Toronto-based writer.



Still from *Hot Chicks on TV*.

VIDEO

Hot Tramp, I Love You So!

REBEL GIRLS

A SURVEY OF CANADIAN FEMINIST VIDEO TAPES
Curated by Susan Ditta
National Gallery of Canada
February 14 - May 21, 1989

by Christine Conley

A naked woman stands before a stationary video camera. In honour of her birthday she shows us her birthday suit, complete with scars and defects. Presenting each "flaw" to the camera for scrutiny, she offers a brief account of how it was acquired—a chronicle of illness and accidents that map out the artist's personal history from birth to the present. Lisa Steele's matter-of-fact presentation in *Birthday Suit: Scars and Defects* documents her survival in the risky business of everyday life and provides an antidote to the hothouse flower variety of femininity offered up by countless magazines and media productions.

Birthday Suit combines personal storytelling with formal manipulations of the medium that maintain the artist's control over visual access to her body.

Intimacy is permitted on her own terms. Steele's use of the stationary camera and direct address reveals and destabilizes the subject/object dichotomy that has shaped representations of women.

Birthday Suit was produced in 1974 and is an appropriate chronological starting point for *Rebel Girls*, a survey of Canadian feminist videotapes curated by Susan Ditta at the National Gallery. It introduces elements of feminist video intervention—recording our histories, the personal as political, reclaiming the female body as subject rather than spectacle—which are common to many of the tapes in this exhibition. It is also indicative of how feminists have used form to reveal content, creating an essential critical space around even the intimate testimony.

As a major survey (nearly 16 hours running time covering 14 years of production), *Rebel Girls* offers a welcome opportunity to gain an historical perspective on the use of the medium by Canadian feminist video producers. Its presence at The National Gallery is particularly significant, not simply because of the power of such institutions to legitimize the medium and the politics, but because it exposes the work to a much more diverse audience than one encounters at artist-run centres and art-conferences. Despite this, the exhibition has not been compromised by efforts to "popularize" the medium or to "sanitize" the politics. Both controversial and emotionally charged issues—lesbian sex, nudity, birth control, rape, sexual harassment, "slashing"—are certainly there.

Neither is the show an amalgam of tapes selected with an eye to covering all of the issues and the whole country. To begin with, there is no representation from the Maritimes or the Prairies. All but three of the tapes (there are 32 counting Anne Ramsden's trilogy *Manufactured Romance* as a single work) were produced in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal or Quebec city. Given this regional disparity, one can only speculate on how feminist production has evolved in the "off-centre" centres (especially Winnipeg, Calgary and Halifax), vis-a-vis those cities with larger independent video communities.

As for the issues, these are brought into focus by the curatorial essay, which provides an historical context for feminists' early engagement with the medium, and by the organization of the tapes thematically, rather than chronologically, into seven programmes: "The Body Politic," "Requiem for Romance," "The Personal is Political," "Memory," "Mythology," "Desire," and "She Works Hard for Her Money." The tapes do not sit neatly within these categories; there are many instances of thematic overlapping that connect works. But what is underscored by this framework is that *Rebel Girls* is

Still from *Suture Self*.



not about some vaguely defined feminine artistic sensibility, but about specific feminist cultural strategies. While encompassing a diversity of formal and conceptual approaches to the medium, the tapes in *Rebel Girls* are distinguished by their linking of women's social and political oppression to systems of representation, and by attempts to transgress and re-code these conventions.

Regional differences are also discernable. Proportionately, documentary is the favoured format in Quebec and Vancouver, while many of the Toronto tapes, such as the Hummer Sister's *Hormone Warzone* (1984), rely on humour. The nine francophone tapes reveal a strong sense of collective identity in terms of Quebec culture as well as sisterhood. For instance, Nicole Giguere's *On Fait Toutes Du Show Business* (1984) looks at female pop performers in a province where indigenous popular music has a strong following. There are no francophone tapes in either "Requiem for Romance" (women loving men) or "Desire" (for the most part, women loving women). Similarly, deconstructing the soap opera (Anne Ramsden's *Manufactured Romance*) and the Harlequin Romance (Paula Fairfield's *Relative Activities*) appear to be an anglophone preoccupation. The tapes that offer sexual transgression as transformative and empowering are from Toronto and Vancouver. While humour is an important mediating device in the Toronto tapes *Pure Virtue* (1985) by Tanya Mars, *Frankly, Shirley* (1987) by Marg Moores and *Playing with Fire* (1986) by Marusia Bociurkiw, the tapes from Vancouver—*Delicate Issue* (1979) by Kate Craig and *Scars* (1987) by Lorna Boschman—are intensely visceral, "too close for comfort," to quote Kate Craig.

Pleasure, transformation and empowerment are key themes in Elizabeth Vander Zaag's *Hot Chicks on TV* (1986), for instance, or Sara Diamond's *Heroics: Definitions* (1984) a conscious effort to invest women's everyday struggles with a value and status usually reserved for the

exploits of men, challenging the notion of heroism as an individual act of public bravery.

The potential power of collective action is central to Diane Poitras's *Comptines* (1986)—where images of an individual woman and girl are electronically replicated and extended to suggest the dynamics of collective struggle—and to Diane Heffernan and Suzanne Vertue's co-production *Quebecoiserient* (1976), a vintage documentary of the first anniversary of the Women's Bookstore in Montreal. In Helen Doyle and Hélène Bourgault's *Chaperons Rouges* (1979), women deconstruct the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* and fight back against sexual violence and victimization. Collectively-produced documentaries such as *No Small Change: The Story of the Eaton's Strike* (1985) by Emma Productions; *Concerned Aboriginal Women* (1981) by Amelia Productions, and Kem Murch's *The Fleck Women* (1978), also highlight the power of collective action.

In her curatorial essay, Susan Ditta quotes Lisa Steele's assertion that women video artists have taken on the recording of their memories as an act of survival. The strategic importance of such recollecting is supported by Vera Frenkel's tape *The Last Screening Room: A Valentine* (1984) where the erasure of personal stories from collective memory signifies a state of imprisonment. However, where recollection goes beyond living memory towards a visual reconstruction of the past, there is a danger that the critical distance will be displaced by an aesthetic distance.

Consider Susan Rynard's *1932* (1988). An exquisitely produced tape, *1932* situates a woman in a series of tableaux that point to the various institutions marking the boundaries, rhythms and rituals of an insular life: "home," "church," "school." The graceful gestures of this anonymous woman are her only speech. Visually analogous to the beautiful objects that surround her, she is part "still life." The sensibility of Rynard's *1932* is similar to

Joyce Wieland's film *The Far Shore*, yet unlike Wieland's *Eulalie* there is no breaking away—no dive into the lake—no suggestion of personal or social transformation for the female protagonist. In short, there is no way out.

Similarly, Tess Payne's *Life on Our Planet* (1987) makes connections between the market-driven goals and practices of animal husbandry—"minimum of fat and maximum of red lean meat"—and the mass-media fed obsession with gourmet food, body image and exercise regimes, but offers little resistance to the notion of woman as domestic animal that it cleverly constructs.

Feminist video production has a history of reflecting the women's movement back onto itself and of pointing to the ways in which artistic production intersects with other social and political practices. What then are the implications of videos that are informed by feminist analyses of media, yet removed from any implicit desire to make us see ourselves and each other differently, that is, to envision the potential for change.

Ditta's curatorial essay acknowledges a general shift away from the urgency of earlier feminist documentaries and media critiques towards a more reflective vocabulary. The questions raised by *Rebel Girls* is where such reflection signals a retreat from the enormous challenges facing feminism as a political movement in the '80s and '90s and a disengagement of artistic concerns from the social and material conditions of production. The absence of women of colour and aboriginal women as producers from both *Rebel Girls* and feminist video communities speaks clearly of the need to both re-examine issues that were critical to early feminist production (such as access) and to reclaim the integration of video practice with specific political strategies to reformulate who is speaking to whom—and why. ■

Christine Conley is a writer living in Ottawa.



Video still from *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade*.

VIDEO

Everyday People

ORDINARY SHADOWS, CHINESE SHADE

Paul Wong
Distributed by Video Out
Vancouver, 1988

by Richard Fung

Most Western images of China are produced by people relatively unfamiliar with the people and the country they are shooting. With few exceptions, what we get are public images of ancient artifacts and political meetings, or else the peering eye of the voyeur. Paul Wong's new feature-length video tape *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade* offers a different vision—a private China that is particularly accessible to "overseas Chinese."

Shot on home Video 8, the use of which is not restricted in China, *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade* is in many ways a home movie. Yet this is a home movie made by an experienced and inventive video artist with a superb eye, both as a cameraman and documentary-maker. Wong's position in the tape can best be described as a participating observer. One is always aware of his particular relationship

to the people he is shooting. As a family member who speaks the local dialect, Wong and his camera move with ease through the villages. People send messages back to relatives in Canada: "I would like to use your house for one or two years. My sons need it to house their staff." As a trusted outsider, he is used as a witness to peoples' dreams and to their pain. A physician finds a sympathetic ear for the politically motivated abuses suffered by her family. A restless young woman confesses to her desire for an overseas boyfriend.

Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade is composed of several movements, loosely organized so that they frustrated expectations for linear progression. The first segment shows Wong's relatives in Canada talking about China. Their image is inset into slow-motion footage of Vancouver's

Chinatown, specifically images of the dragon dance. In visual terms, this sequence economically suggests the relationship of ritual re-enactment to the affirmation of cultural identity. In searching out the past as way of dealing with the present, one could say that the staging of the dragon dance is fueled by the same desires that motivate Wong's trip to China.

The second, and most interesting, segment of the tape is *verité* footage of time spent in southern Guandong province, particularly in the villages of Taishan—home to most early Chinese immigrants to North America. For many Chinese viewers, this footage would be a bit like watching a tape about going to the supermarket. But for anyone familiar with China only from Western representations, this footage is something of a revelation.

EXHIBITION

Art to Spin Dry By

IT ALL COMES OUT IN THE WASH

The Laundromat Project
May 1 - May 31, 1989

by Carolyn Langill

At its most successful, the tape transcends the narrow lenses that have framed Western views of China— clichéd images of mystery, exotica and politics. These are images outstanding for the ordinariness that they capture: pigs peeing; chickens being killed for a banquet. A lengthy sequence of a bicycle accident, in which a crowd of onlookers swears and trades accusations, underscores the vast array of images of China that are not usually shown.

Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade vigilantly avoids a simplistic, digestible reading of China. The tape is after all only about a very tiny corner of that vast reality. Even so, within its small geographical range, the footage moves from village to city, from rice fields to discotheques, and from poor peasants to the new bourgeoisie. Wong also attempts to undermine the fetishization of the documentary image by placing the written English translation in the centre of the screen, rather than as subtitles at the bottom. The viewers attention is directed to the fact that reality is mediated through the process of shooting and translation. However, other distancing devices are less effective. The inconsistent use of matting one image into another is sometimes unnecessarily distracting. Similarly, the sequence on the Cultural Revolution, a snappily edited montage of political slogans and Mao memorabilia, is aesthetically engaging but raises expectations for a political analysis that the piece is not capable of delivering.

Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade does not have the analytical rigour of the *Long Bow* films by Carma Hinton and Richard Gordon—Hinton was born and raised in Beijing—but neither does it fall into the traps of exoticness and otherness common in so many pieces on China. Wong's tape searches out human connections—it is a tape about people. ■

Richard Fung is a Toronto-based video producer.

In May a collective of local artists launched The Laundromat Project, a series of site-specific exhibitions located in 18 laundromats around Toronto. While *It All Comes Out In the Wash* ran for one month officially, some of the work remains in the laundromats today. The idea of using this unconventional site as exhibition space came from Janet Moore who, in turn, was inspired by a similar project in Vancouver. Moore, Kristal McCance and Michael Longford put together a call for submissions which was sent to schools, galleries, laundromats and community centres.

The proposals that came back were not screened. Basically, the Laundromat Project Collective included anyone who had secured a laundromat that would show their work. The collective decided not to impose restrictions on the proposed works nor to set a mandate for the project as a whole. Their objectives were simple: first, to establish an alternative venue for exhibiting, and second, to expose the arts community to a group of artists who are making strong work and are not content to sit and wait for the mainstream machinery to "pick them up."

The decision to exhibit in community space as opposed to gallery space was a conscious choice. This choice, and the interaction of the site-specific works and the laundromat patrons as "audience" distinguished this project as a progressive strategy.

Laundromats qualify as ideal community centres. People go there regularly and are required to remain for a period of time. It can be safely assumed that the work exhibited had, on average, much

more attention than most gallery exhibitions. Surprisingly, or perhaps not, the collective found it difficult to secure laundromats. Laundromat owners readily took on the role of curators and accepted or vetoed proposed work. For example, Janet Morton's homage to domestic idealism and Doug Moore's disturbing large format xeroxes of children's faces were removed shortly after being installed at the Budget Coin Laundry. The owner did not consider the work "art." Although the owner's attitude had not been anticipated, it is understandable because they depend upon the satisfaction of their customers for revenue. The artists, however, were not deterred and quickly re-installed their work at another coin laundry. The work the artists submitted was not compromised for the benefit of the laundromat owners or customers and artists did not condescend to the public. All too often it is assumed that the general public cannot handle contemporary art, that they are hostile to it. However, many artists are speaking a very familiar language, the language of the mass media. Glossy photographs, text, and video have all been adopted to sell ideas as opposed to consumerism.

Covering one wall in the Hollywood Coin Wash, Sandra Meig's large panel painting sported the slogan "The kind of clean of which you dream." The work undermines its own declaration. Odd cartoon-like characters painted in deep pinks, blues and oranges spring out from behind the large block letters that make up the slogan, used by a cleaning company a few years ago. Meig's work seemed positively innocent juxtaposed with the

Hollywood posters and stills that adorn the walls of the laundromat. This dialectic emphasized how North America's preoccupation with sterility and cleanliness may outweigh its obsession with celebrity. Whether or not the clientele of the Hollywood Coin Wash experienced a leap of consciousness by viewing this work is not the issue. The value of this exhibition, and those of the other artists, stems from the choice to exhibit in such a public space, exposing patrons to art that is usually seen in more formal venues.

A photodocumentary piece by Bill Crane at the Coin Laundry further exemplifies this point. The work was comprised of two separate elements. The first consists of three photographs depicting a crowd participating in a pro-choice demonstration in front of the Morgentaler clinic in Toronto. Another work nearby (also photodocumentation of the protest) includes a series of smaller photographs butted against one another to form two panels. Between the panels is a permanent laundromat sign—"This is your coin laundry please keep it clean. The management." Given this juxtaposition, the statements on the placards—"Keep your laws off our bodies," and "Women's liberation through Socialist revolution"—held by the crowds take on a status equal to the laundromat signage. The "objective" documentary aspect of the piece proved to be an interesting part of the public's interaction. Some customers at the laundromat were quite pleased to recognize themselves, or friends, in the crowd. Despite its charged content, the work remains apolitical. The importance of breaking the boundaries usually imposed by a gallery space and promoting public and community interaction and awareness is ironically emphasized by one of the people photographed at the rally: Phillip Monk, the Art Gallery of Ontario's curator of contemporary Canadian art.

Tony Tavares and Calla Shea opted for more traditional methods in their large-scale works. Tavares's large dip-



Laundroart at the Launderama.

tych painting dealt with issues surrounding the exploitation of aboriginal peoples and his interest in immigrants and their contributions to the development of Canada. The Portuguese text above the paintings was highly accessible to the laundromat's Portuguese clients. Calla Shea's poetic text and large format photograph of an art deco doorway from a Hamilton train station lent the Kensington Market facility an ethereal quality.

Wendy Coburn's pristine architectural model of a utopian laundromat seemed even more vivid against the dark panelled walls of the Launderama laundromat. Her exhibit was installed just prior to a renovation of the laundromat, so, in grand Toronto tradition, the model became a prediction of what could exist. Illuminated from below and encased in plexiglass, the model became an ironic mimic of those many models that falsely suggest a public consideration of a building before it is erected. But Coburn's laundromat—with a roof-top conservatory and pool, a third floor gallery, second floor gallery and, lest we forget, first floor laundry facilities (all in the shape of a gigantic washing machine)—was no ordinary locus of laundering. It could be the Disneyland of laundromats, competing with the other visions of the future that continue to grace the city of Toronto. As children peered through the window

at the luminous object, the impact of the work on the community could be seen.

This project was an honest endeavour to broaden the art community's perceptions regarding exhibition space and audience interaction. With a virtually non-existent commercial market, artists have the freedom to exhibit in alternative spaces. Although alternative projects are not new to this city, they are infrequent. Perhaps this is a blessing inherent in the curse of Toronto's art scene. Artists can find strength in the weakness of their position and take risks that they may not otherwise attempt.

With the dissolution of progressive collectives such as Eye Revue and Chromazone, an event such as The Laundromat Project is considered an anomaly in a city still relying heavily on a pressured parallel gallery system. As a community, it is our responsibility to support and encourage such endeavours. It is interesting to note that the collective came under criticism for being elitist in their assumption that they had a right to show in a laundromat. This irony exemplifies the discouragement emerging artists face in this city. Surely it is time we started to praise each other's efforts and resist Toronto's inertia. ■

Carolyn Langill is an artist living in Peterborough.

Salvaging Graceland

GRACELAND ART RODEO

An Exhibition of Outdoor Sculpture, Performance Art & Music
2639 48th Ave. S. E. Calgary, Alberta
August 26, 1989

"Let's put Calgary in the title just like they do on the Stampede posters."

"O.K. 'The First Annual Graceland Art Rodeo: An Exhibition of Outdoor Sculpture, Performance Art and Sound Works. The Greatest Outdoor Art Show on Earth... In Calgary'. A bit unwieldy."

They are making up the poster for the August 26 all-day art blitz out at Graceland, seven acres of junk on the outskirts of Calgary, amidst which four artists now have permanent studios.

Graceland, named after the junkyard's present owner, Grace Colton, is becoming a bit of a mecca for sculptors, painters and pyromaniacs. The Sunday night door burns, dresser burns, or art burns, are becoming regular events. Not that they weren't always regular. They just weren't always events. Bart Habermiller, principle organizer of the art rodeo, started living out there three years ago, and has been burning away much of the mess left by the Calgary Demolition and Salvage Company ever since.

Since Bart went to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to do a Masters degree last fall, care of the yard has been in the hands of Tim Westbury. Tim, a sculptor and video artist, has seen much of the land cleared, another large studio built and plans for a glass shop drawn up.

The poster done, Tim and Bart head out to the yard to clear some more junk. The work appears aimless. Boots go in

the boot pile, wheels go with wheels, as space is cleared for sculpture. Seventeen artists will be creating site-specific pieces for the 1989 Graceland Art Rodeo. All will be working in collaboration with the yard. The core group of artists—Tim Westbury, Beth Harmer, Jorge Boldt and Michel Demuth—work at the yard year round.

Besides Bart, three other Alberta artists have returned from Chicago for the event. David Clark, a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, has returned for a month before heading to New York to attend the Whitney Museum's studio programme. Robert Hamilton and Jill Armstrong, now at the Banff Centre, have returned to their native Alberta for this event. Adding inter-



"Mirror Landscape" by Swiss artist Alexander Birchler.

national flavour is Swiss artist Alexander Birchler, also currently at Banff.

Graceland, now transformed into a seven acre sculpture park with pathways winding around site specific art sets the scene for the event. Performance art and music works by local artists are planned for the early evening. Life-size tanks made out of wood, a ballet performed by half-ton trucks, sculptures made of whatever, wherever, as big as the artist's heart desires, are all underway. At 8:35 pm, the Hawaiian Sunset Ceremony begins. Across the property, encircling the yard, drummers will converse as the sun dips out of sight. From nightfall on, the entertainment moves to the stage, where performances continue, moving into sound works, and culminating with live local bands. It is a salon style event—always something happening. The attitude is, anything goes.

"In Chicago, you're always surrounded by restrictions. Everything is determined by a door. Art has to be 32 inches wide," Bart says, explaining the attraction for artists to participate in this outdoor show. "Pretty much all outdoor sculpture is dictated by government and corporations. There is very little opportunity for young emerging artists to be able to work on such a scale."

Graceland has a history of performance art going back to the spring of 1987 when *The Night of the Living Junk Mon-*

keys and *Dusk 'til Dawn* first established the junkyard as an art venue. After seeing a rash of performances set within the city, Bart realized there was a real contradiction in the type of work Calgary performance artists were doing. They were dealing with natural elements, smoke, earth, and fire, but they were performing in very theatrical environments. Everything seemed to be catering to the comfort of the audience. Bart decided to put the emphasis back on the performer.

The first Graceland performances were "something of an experiment to see how far people would go to watch something," Bart explains. The turnouts, 75 at the first performance, and 160 at the second, answered his question. Sponsored by the Canada Council, and covered by the CBC, these first performances required the audience to stand outside in the snow, for the sake of the performance.

This year's event also puts the attention back on the performer. What is going on at the yard is a perfect study of labour in the Marcusian sense: "In his labour, man supercedes the mere 'objectivity' of objects and makes them into the means of his life. He impresses upon them the form of his being and makes them into his work and reality."¹ This kind of activity goes on year-round at Graceland.

The mandate for artists participating in the show is to use the materials at the yard, either as resource or inspiration. While "found object art" is almost a natural expression for those working at the yard, the setting and atmosphere add a dimension that is unique in the art world. The process of working there, creating order amidst the mess, strikes a balance that can only be read in the easy movements and expressions of the artists. Ironically, there is no distinction between working on a piece of art or working on cleaning up the yard, piling boots here and pots there.

It is all the same energy. It all goes into the yard. The art is just a different way of organizing the material. For the most part, everyone understands what has to be



"Wheelhouse" by Alex Caldwell.

done. Artists make Graceland, but Graceland shapes the artists.

For over a month, activity has been almost solely directed at preparing for the art rodeo. The weather is irrelevant—as long as it doesn't rain.

The yard was bustling in the weeks leading up to the event. Publicity snowballed when crews from the well-established media came out for a curious look. The CBC, local T.V. station CFCN, and even CBC Radio's *Morningside*, picked up the story.

But why not? The sculpture park was a larger than life playground. The keel of a ship grew out of the ground. The re-

mains of an airplane tail crashed back down. A row of movie seats, without the seats, sat atop a small hill. An abandoned house, transformed with candles and icons of feminine passage spoke of midwives, birth, and women's secrets. An enormous gravel painting, rusty chimes, an alcove of eleven objects, spires of rust and piles of tires. It all had people asking, "Is this one of the pieces?"

The posters said high noon. That's exactly when the dark, wet, morning sky began to clear. By 12:15, the sun was shining. Auspicious? Many of the first visitors were coming in cold. Is it a given that most people have never been to a



Photo by Mary Anne Moser.

"I can hear your footsteps on the ground," performance by Dean Bareham.

junkyard turned art colony?

Just inside the gates, a 12-foot-high glass furnace roared. In homage to Tyman Brosz, a glassblower who died suddenly this summer, several of his colleagues decided to build a primitive fire. They laboured for days, building the oven, packing bricks and clay, cutting and stockpiling truckloads of kindling around the pit. The morning of the rodeo, the furnace was lit, but after 10 hours of firing, it became obvious it would not reach the necessary temperature.

"It was successful," Dean Smiley maintained in soot-covered splendour. "We know what we have to do next time."

Grace Cotton's house, now Beth Harmer's studio, became a playroom for the day. Tim Westbury's studio posed as the performers' retreat, and Michel Demuth turned his studio into a curry and beer house. Visitors milled about until late afternoon when the series of performances began. By following the programme, and the odd announcement from

a loaned P.A., the crowd assembled for site-specific shows.

Tchaikowsky blaring across the acres signalled the start of the performance art. Six half-ton trucks gathered for the elegant truck ballet. What it lacked in grace and poise, it made up in humour, as trucks with bows (bags of garbage) putzed in unison around and through a grassy clearing.

Minutes later, a nude, muddy Dean Bareham emerged from a vine and mud-covered hole in the ground. "Smell it," he whispered, handing dirt to those close by before crawling back into another hole hidden with mud-caked sheets. We've seen him in this mud-clad state before, and furthermore, we know we may get dirty.

We traipse to the back corner for "Is one (dis)connected?," a performance by Jeff Norgren. The relationship of the yard to the larger context of the art world was the theme of this loaded but enigmatic ritual. To the audience, it entailed the splitting of a stump using nails. But Jeff's

performance, like Dean's, required an interaction with the yard for days before.

He had roped off an enclosure the same dimensions as the yard. The stump he cut was in the same position with relation to the enclosure as it was to the yard. By using common hardware (nails) in an inappropriate way (to sever rather than bind) he illustrated what all the artists working at the yard in some way do: use old objects with pasts of their own, in new contexts, to create something fresh.

Across the field was "The House That Frank Unbuilt." David Clark's kinetic sculpture went off without a hitch. By starting a small chemical explosion, he set off a series of reactions by which the sculpture dismantled itself. The last connection dumped water on the fire that started it. Ah, the hand that feeds, and all that.

It was back to the studios for curry. Curry and beer was followed by another performance, "Persona Non Grata," by Jorge Boldt and Tony Amaral. The piece expressed the not unfounded fear that developers may move in, unmindful of the artistic energy that has been invested. Graceland is, after all, surrounded by industrial development. In an effort to secure the future of the property, plans are underway to form an artists' co-op.

Colleen Kerr, Nelson Henricks, Cheryl Koprek, and several other well-known performance artists from Calgary ushered in the stage performances. By then, the beer was flowing, and the atmosphere was festive. The Vinegar Toms and impromptu musicians picked up the pace with some old time rock 'n' roll.

Almost on cue, well past midnight, it started to drizzle. Within minutes, the crowd disappeared. And there stood Bart and Tim and me, by the fire, in the rain.

Next year, we'll do it again. ■

Mary Anne Moser is a writer living in Calgary.

¹ Marcuse, Herbert (1972). *Studies in Critical Philosophy*. London: NLB.

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