

Volume 25 Number 2 \$5.50

art media politics

# FUSE

MAGAZINE

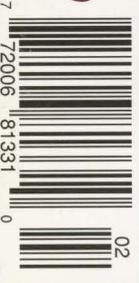
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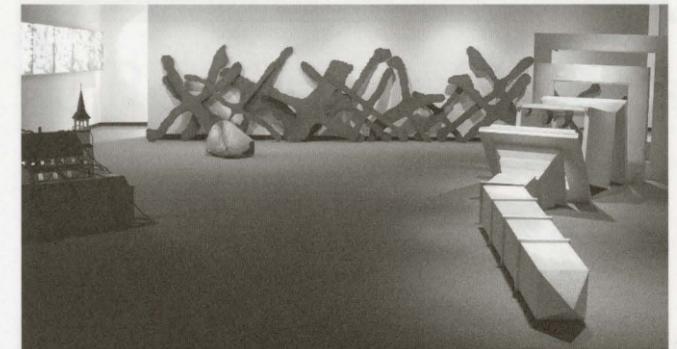
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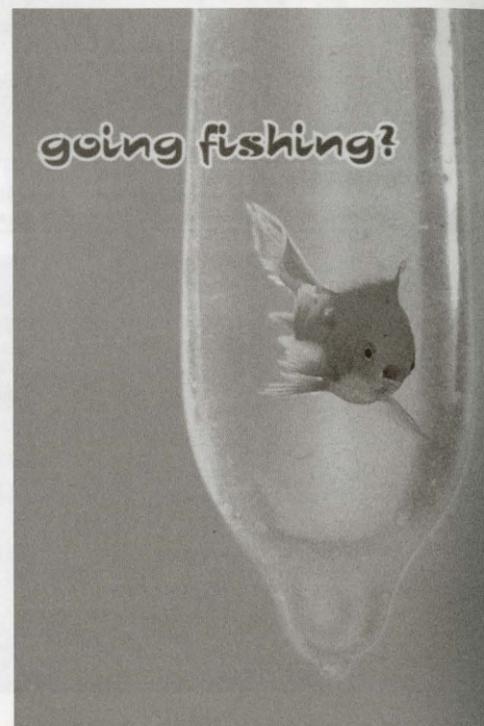
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MAGAZINE

Volume 25 Number 2 May 2002

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FUSE Magazine is entering its twenty-fifth year. Perhaps on an unconscious level, this anniversary in part inspired us to compile this issue. In many contexts, "25" represents the gateway between youth status and adulthood. As we look back on our history and chart a course for the magazine's future, it seems an apt moment to explore the experiences of the sector of the population that similarly exists in a period of youthful unrest.

The temptation to introduce this special youth issue of FUSE with earnest claims about young people as the "leaders of tomorrow" or their "power to change the world" is indeed great. But isn't it much more revealing to be perfectly frank about what we have here? Members of the editorial board solicited texts from a range of individuals who coordinate and administer youth-oriented cultural programs, the young people who participate in them, as well as those, both adult and youth, who theorize and critique this activity. This publication is the result — a selection of ideas, observations, theories, analyses and diatribes about the intersection of youth and culture.

Safe sex, graffiti, hip hop, First Nations rights, skateboard culture, heavy metal, social activism, institutions and the experience of new Canadians are among the range of topics that interface with visual and media art and culture in the lives of young people. There are many more points of contact between young people and cultural practice, cultural production and cultural institutions — the subject is huge and our approach is admittedly partial.

While we make no claims that these articles paint a complete picture of the topic, we do feel that they provide a certain amount of insight into the limitations and possibilities of bringing young people together with visual culture in institutional and other formal and informal settings.

Much of what is written about youth sits on one of two sides of a rather simplistic variation of the proverbial fence. Youth are often associated with crime, violence, and the murky cultures of the inner city or the couch cultures of their suburban counterparts. On the other side, youth have projected upon them overly romantic reveries of the glamorous and the dramatic - youth-as-hip, youth-as-visionary, youth-as-future, youth-as-genius. Those who work with youth and the youth who participate in arts programs are often required to relay overly celebratory, one-dimensional success stories about the programs in order to ensure the sustainability of the programs.

In an attempt to complicate this, we have tried to convey a layered, intricate and multi-voiced story with this collection of texts, communicating something of the complexity and heterogeneity of the ways in which young people and visual culture interface. It is also our hope to continue an ongoing dialogue to explore some of the issues raised here in future issues of FUSE. We have learned through this issue that youth and the arts meet on multiple levels, and we realize that we have only scratched the surface on this topic.

— the Board

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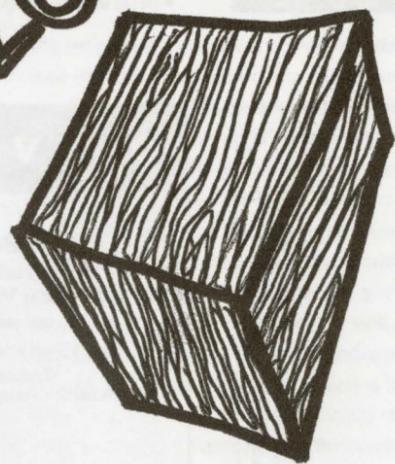
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## Difficult Knowledge and Contemporary Art: New Pedagogies for Adolescent Learning in the Art Gallery and Museum

by Warren Crichlow

Difficult knowledge is the stuff of contemporary visual art and, increasingly, it is the stuff of pedagogical practices of art education in museums. Coming from an education-based discipline, I acknowledge that the cultural study of teaching and learning is no longer primarily text bound. Rather adolescent learners today are, to varying degrees, as text savvy as they are comfortable negotiating technologies and image systems that proliferate the visual culture in which they construct personal space. It is in part through multiple circuits of the visual that young people announce new means for making both meaning and identity, and thereby possibilities for making change in a contentious culture. Beyond paradigms of art reverence and consumption, I see the

emergence of innovative pedagogical practices supporting a much different kind of adolescent learning in the art gallery and museum. Not limited by a requirement to inculcate aesthetic dispositions, new pedagogies of community collaboration and multiple references seek to both engage and challenge visual culture at large. These vibrant forms of art education in the museum seem intent on fostering dialogue among diverse youth on alternative forms of representation and supporting their collective projects to intervene imaginatively in issues of our complex visual and material present.

These intriguing developments have been occurring over a number of years now. While those of us in formal, state-regulated, school-based education have been subjected to the instrumentalities and rationalizations of neoliberal education, artists, curators and museum educators have, with varying degrees of success, moved in interesting and responsive ways to engage the demands of new curricula possibilities inherent in the nature of contemporary art work. There are certain assumptions about imagination that gallery space provides that open up a range of active learning possibilities and techniques — things that schools seem to have forgotten.

In the art gallery, art objects and in particular contemporary art objects provide difficult and unsettling knowledge that require, indeed risk, learning experiences that need to be put together through process, even as an immediate demand for coherence threatens to fall apart. In this moment of learning, although it seems entirely irrational, what is happening is in fact something relational and conjectural. In the art gallery, learning may be seen as an open and accessible process, where the aim is to make linkages and connections, among art, artists and audiences with an emphasis on the relationship between art and everyday life and where such experiences can provide both ambivalence and uncertainty, but also potentially enjoyable and illuminating insights.

The knowledge contained in contemporary art concerns the way the world was seen and perhaps questioned by artists both in the past and



in the present. The artwork's knowledge is merely documentary evidence of some "real" or a fixed meaning. Rather, an artwork permits a more profound sharing of the artist's imagination — what the critic John Berger calls "artist's experience of the visible."

In our present, to look at art is an experience that has become less inert, less fixed, by the singular or prescribed ways of seeing. We know that the way we look at and experience art is affected by a whole series of learned assumptions about, among other things, beauty, truth, genius, civilization, form, status, value (material and otherwise), taste and social relations. It is precisely this recognition of learned assumptions that has done much to move learning in the visual arts institution away from a pedagogy of disinterested art appreciation and toward the development of a critical capacity to convert perception into meaning making.

Learning in the visual arts institution is now as much about an open-ended process of interpretation and translation of art as it is about the experiential process of the public, that is, the general viewer or audience, who is necessarily needed to complete the circuit of communication art initiates. This viewer is understood not just as a consumer, but potentially an active learner, one who learns to use visual culture and to imaginatively and politically engage institutions and public life in the everyday world. When students enter the art gallery to see con-

meanings and many forms of meaning making. We are no longer confined to the whole image. Rather, practices of isolating and working with details (as found in the art-school slide show or encountering art at the high-school computer lab) present possibilities of new forms and



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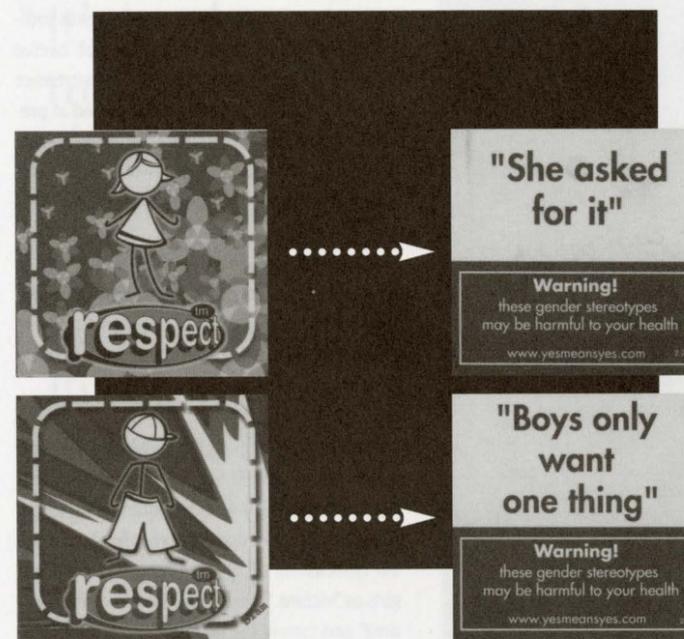
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the world differently. There are no guarantees in art. As Berger puts it, "in an age of pictorial reproduction, art as information can neither be put to use or ignored. Information carries no special authority within itself. To put information to use is either to modify it for a particular time, place or purpose, or to change it totally to fit given needs and given conditions."

Berger argued for the possibilities of creative seeing made possible by the technologies of reproduction. In a variety of modernist and now postmodernist art movements, artists have exploited these questions and viewers are in turn encouraged to further exploit these possibilities. In essence these possibilities mean that an image will be used for many different purposes and that reproduced images, unlike original artwork, can lend themselves to many

ing in the world. Whether the image is photography, painting, artifact, installation or mixed media, learning in the art gallery is always about the complexities of the image or the object or the space. It allows us to engage in practices of signification that involve our own subjective capacities and to take and produce meaning within the complex interplay of what we see, what we discern and what we notice. These are the important aspects of what images mean in our visual culture and what they might mean for the practice of adolescent learning, even in a time of difficult knowledge.

*Warren Crichlow is Associate Professor of Education and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, York University. His recent research and writing has focused on cultural theory in education and artistic practice in relation to learning and the pedagogical context.*



ephemera from Project Respect™, recto and verso (trading card), 4.5x4.5cm.

I think within the context of Project Respect™, "yes means yes" portrayed a woman who knows what she wants positively. No means no didn't promote a decision-making process. What it did was to address that when someone was saying no, you stop. But I don't think it promoted discourse about everything up to that point. Most importantly the difference between the two is that no means no is about understanding someone else. Yes means yes is about understanding yourself. And yes means yes means communicating what you desire with someone.

— Eden Ratson, 20, 17 during Project Respect™, when she was a key member of the creative team.

Having a female superhero makes us remember women are there. It's not about being the best; it's about being significant. For female youth, we have a lot of pressure not to be feminist, it's for old cranky women! There's a lot of pressure not to stand up for your rights as a girl. I've found boys have pressured me not to fight for my equality. It's important to have characters like Luci Lubricant to show us women can be powerful.

— Sarah Malleson, 16, currently part of Condomania's Planetahead.ca Team Players youth-website creative team

## Superheroics and Desire Made Fresh: What do Girls (and Women) Want?

by Katherine Dodds, in conversation with Eden Ratson and Sarah Malleson

Much of the discourse about what constitutes "self" constellates around questions of sexuality. And at the heart of many destructive forces lies the devil of gender stereotypes. To put it bluntly, *human* desire and need for love and intimacy have been colonized by rigid romantic codes, at the core of which lie beliefs that police the nature of sexual difference, and patrol the borders between the sexes.



Introducing, Naveen, 2001, mixed media, 7x7cm. From an AGO Studio Workshop with students of Fletcher Elementary. Instructor: Greg Seale.

in the present. The artwork's knowledge is not merely documentary evidence of some "reality" or a fixed meaning. Rather, an artwork permits a more profound sharing of the artist's imagination — what the critic John Berger calls "the artist's experience of the visible."

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When students enter the art gallery to see con-

temporary art, they confront art of the present that demands that they both alter and question the way they see their present and the history of the present. Art, even if it may be purely conceptual, is no longer mysterious, unique and exclusive, an object to be worshipped or revered.

John Berger, who wrote the influential *Ways of Seeing* in the early 1970s, was concerned with questioning and altering the way we see the past. In an age of what Berger, following Benjamin, called pictorial reproduction, we are free to see art not just as more information, but as a point of departure for making further meaning, for both seeing ourselves and acting in the world differently. There are no guarantees in art. As Berger puts it, "in an age of pictorial reproduction, art as information can neither be put to use or ignored. Information carries no special authority within itself. To put information to use is either to modify it for a particular time, place or purpose, or to change it totally to fit given needs and given conditions."

Berger argued for the possibilities of creative seeing made possible by the technologies of reproduction. In a variety of modernist and now postmodernist art movements, artists have exploited these questions and viewers are in turn encouraged to further exploit these possibilities. In essence these possibilities mean that an image will be used for many different purposes and that reproduced images, unlike original artwork, can lend themselves to many

meanings and many forms of meaning making. We are no longer confined to the whole image. Rather, practices of isolating and working with details (as found in the art-school slide show or encountering art at the high-school computer lab) present possibilities of new forms and meaning making, new points of inquiry and exploration, new arguments and new conclusions, both allegorical and metaphorical.

Berger's argument is that our own critical capacities to use technologies of reproduction, such as photography, film montage, Xerox copies, writing and others, allow us to enter into a dialogue with the authors of meaning and to make other forms of art using a variety of processes that reach new conclusions and achieve new uses of visual information.

Images make references to other images, events and ideas. The viewer may be informed by those references but may also be called upon to make new references and interpretation. Those references in turn become references for other interpretations, and so on. We know now, especially now, that information is not static. It is always moving, changing the conditions of interpretation and action. In this sense, learning in the art gallery has more to do with creating conditions that provide an initial structure that supports and encourages viewers' individual and collective acts of seeing the visual and seeing in the world. Whether the image is photography, painting, artifact, installation or mixed media, learning in the art gallery is always about the complexities of the image or the object or the space. It allows us to engage in practices of signification that involve our own subjective capacities and to take and produce meaning within the complex interplay of what we see, what we discern and what we notice. These are the important aspects of what images mean in our visual culture and what they might mean for the practice of adolescent learning, even in a time of difficult knowledge.

*Warren Crichlow is Associate Professor of Education and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, York University. His recent research and writing has focused on cultural theory in education and artistic practice in relation to learning and the pedagogical context.*

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I think within the context of Project Respect™, "yes means yes" portrayed a woman who knows what she wants positively. No means no didn't promote a decision-making process. What it did was to address that when someone was saying no, you stop. But I don't think it promoted discourse about everything up to that point. Most importantly the difference between the two is that no means no is about understanding someone else. Yes means yes is about understanding yourself. And yes means yes means communicating what you desire with someone.

— Eden Ratson, 20, 17 during Project Respect™, when she was a key member of the creative team.

Having a female superhero makes us remember women are there.

It's not about being the best; it's about being significant. For female youth, we have a lot of pressure not to be feminist, it's for old cranky women! There's a lot of pressure not to stand up for your rights as a girl. I've found boys have pressured me not to fight for my equality. It's important to have characters like Luci Lubricant to show us women can be powerful.

— Sarah Malleson, 16, currently part of Condomania's Planetahead.ca Team Players youth-website creative team

## Superheroics and Desire Made Fresh: What do Girls (and Women) Want?

by Katherine Dodds, in conversation with Eden Ratson and Sarah Malleson

Much of the discourse about what constitutes "self" constellates around questions of sexuality. And at the heart of many destructive forces lies the devil of gender stereotypes. To put it bluntly, *human* desire and need for love and intimacy have been colonized by rigid romantic codes, at the core of which lie beliefs that police the nature of sexual difference, and patrol the borders between the sexes.

column



cover of Monday Magazine 26:6 (10-16 Feb 2000).

In this context, how can we have activism after absolutes, and agency after self has been deconstructed? Through my creative involvement with two youth projects — Condomania and Project Respect™ — I have had the opportunity to experiment in the real world with such intriguing theoretical musings.

Now, with feminism more than a generation old, the young have inherited a battleground of the sexes littered with the landmines of representation.

Their dilemmas of defining self, and determining agency, take place with a MuchMusic soundtrack

and culture bought on credit with a Coke card. Diffracting the orders of signification requires strategies in keeping with the times. Give 'em a chance to make their own media and watch deconstruction made simple and reconstruction made possible.

#### What Means Yes?

Project Respect™ is an integrated multimedia campaign based in Victoria BC, which was the brain child of Monica Blais in 1998. It was comprised of an advisory committee of twelve youth; four youth were members of a creative team that conceptualized a video aimed at preventing acquaintance sexual assault among teenagers. (The video was produced and directed by Danielle Prohom Olson.)

The video employed TV Nation-style tactics in its production, and an accompanying media strategy included a bus ad campaign and street demonstrations. School programs and a website were also developed.

The project sought to chip away at a key root cause of sexualized violence: gender stereotypes. However, we were committed to an approach that did not reinforce the stereotypical typecasting of boys as “perpetrators” and girls as “victims.” We asked, “Are you a script victim?” and turned the blame away from individuals while we drew attention to the structures that gave rise to problematic situations.

A key slogan in that campaign was “yes means yes.” During an interview with the local cable station, Eden Ratson, seventeen at the time, articulated a complex idea: “If a girl can't say yes, she can't really say no.”

This “Foucault-for-fourteen-year-olds” soundbite brings ideas into the consciousness of those beginning the struggle with sexuality and power dynamics. If it remains a girl's job to be passive, if in no way will she be rewarded for acting on her own desires, then according to the scripts it's her role to resist and the boys role to persist. Thus, young men and women, at an age when sexual exploration is both inevitable and necessary, are being typecast in the roles they will play for the rest of their lives.

“It's hard to make a female character with an outgoing, tough, female spirit because in society we have taught women to be the exact opposite.”

These days, when the rules about marriage and sex are no longer written in stone, in some ways the young are in even more danger. It's no secret that many first sexual experiences are less than ideal. The pressure to have sex is intense, and an equal pressure to know your own desire, and make your own decisions does not counter it. Instead the norm is to just let things happen. And all too often being prepared for the consequences, physical and emotional, is not in the equation. And sadly, the slut label as a denigrating term has not gone away. If she's asking for it, she deserves it. Behind that lurks the shadow of this discussion: violence. It's what makes theoretical musings more than mere academic parlour games.

As Ratson points out, there is a need to break the code of silence on the pleasure side:

That was a big message we were trying to counteract, that not saying anything was itself sexy. That indecision and ambiguity is part of what it means to be an attractive woman ... and that is bollocks! I think the slogan worked because of the way it was combined with very sexy shots of people. It wasn't about being with someone and yelling at them what you wanted, but rather that consent, or consensuality, could be just as

sexy as everyone was saying not saying anything was.

#### We Love Luci, But Can She Be a Hero?

Into this picture surfs Luci Lubricant, riding her wave of lube. She's sexy. She's sassy. “Think you're ready for some action?” she asks.

Do we require representation in order to have agency? Sarah Malleon, one of the youth creators of Condomania's planetahead.ca, thinks the answer is yes. Condoman has been around for a number of years as a “branded” character, and he has proved to be overwhelmingly popular.

Condomania, a Vancouver-based sexual-health promotions program, rose to the occasion of providing a female counterpart. The program, whose youth facilitators have done about 300 in-school presentations, also has a presence at local dances and raves, where they hand out condoms and lube. Planetahead.ca, Condomania's website, was created by a team of twelve high school students working with coordinator Lu Ripley and Good Company Communications.

Creating a sexual female superhero presented its own set of challenges. As Malleon notes: “It's hard to make a female character with an outgoing, tough, female spirit because in society we have taught women to be the exact opposite.”



ephemera from Project Respect™, recto and verso (trading card), 4.5x4.5cm.

As we tested the prototypes with different groups of youth it was interesting to see how Luci was scrutinized. It was not easy to make a strong, sexy, female cartoon character. The act of creating her was an exercise in breaking down the stereotypes. As Malleeson puts it, "We were looking to find the slick, funky in-between, not so much just spandex underwear, but a sexy skirt. Not too naked nor too covered." She adds, "I think it was important to put her in a sturdy stance." And even though she is pleased with how Luci turned out, Sarah does worry that she will be seen as the sidekick and not the equal partner.

However there is another function to Luci; she brings the word lubricant into the vocabulary of young men and women, who have all heard of condoms by now. It makes the condom equation into more of a process, and reminds young men in particular that there is a partner involved.

Within feminist theory the problem of representation remains. In a theoretical climate marked by the alleged end of history, the end of authenticity and even the end of gay, we may well ponder whether the future is feminist. How do you portray so much difference as equal? Perhaps hope lies less in the linear feminism of cause and effect, and in the murkier manifestations of cyborgian systems.

#### The model: Interactivity in Action: Convergence in Real Time with Real Teens

Interactivity is a marketing stand-by these days. How it plays out in the social marketing of values and identity is more complex, and potentially more fruitful. We are all children in the post-linear explosion. Representation reaches a crisis when it is seen as the essential endpoint in the linear system. However, representation as one mode, within a nodal network of interactions, is less fraught with the taint of ideological absolutes.

And, when we expand the definition of media to include us, then the individuals involved in these projects become literal parts in the communication system. And the representations, be it a phrase such as "yes means yes," or a superhero

such as Luci Lubricant, or the persona we take on, all become talking points of entry in the process, but not the final destination.

Both Planetahead.ca and Project Respect™ invoked a multimedia, interactive approach. Together the creative teams of these projects make media and disseminate media, and their actions play a part in the media loop.

The website launch is documented and pictures are fed back into the online 'zine. Luci Lubricant and Condoman get interviewed on a local TV show, while Sarah and fellow participant David are interviewed on CBC radio. Respect™ Revolutionaries hit the streets with their signs: How do you consent to sex? They end up in the news; the newscast is edited into their video.

The simple multi-nodal feedback network, when literally incorporated by the attitudes, values and behaviors of individuals, gives birth to the meme machine; viral marketing made flesh. A communication process, which is more about strategy than pure ideology. The result is behavior that counts, and making media matter.

*Eden Ratson, now 20 and a first-year arts student at McGill in Montreal, was a core member of the original Project Respect™ creative team. She scripted and directed a video PSA as part of that project as well as assisting with the media strategy and all aspects of production.*

*Sarah Malleeson, 16, is high school student in Vancouver, and is part of the Condomania website creative team that has just launched planetahead.ca. She helped develop the cartoon characters, including Luci Lubricant, and wrote parts of the website, including "From the Planet of the Players to the Cyberslut, His and Hers Quizzes" in the Planet Under Pressure section.*

*Katherine Dodds has a BFA from the University of Victoria and an MA in feminism and visual arts from the University of Leeds, UK. She is currently president and creative director of Good Company Communications, a social marketing ad agency with a special interest in youth projects. She can be reached at <http://www.hellocoolworld.com>.*



ephemera from Project Respect™, recto and verso (stickers), 5cm Ø.



ephemera from Project Respect™, recto and verso (stickers), 5cm Ø.

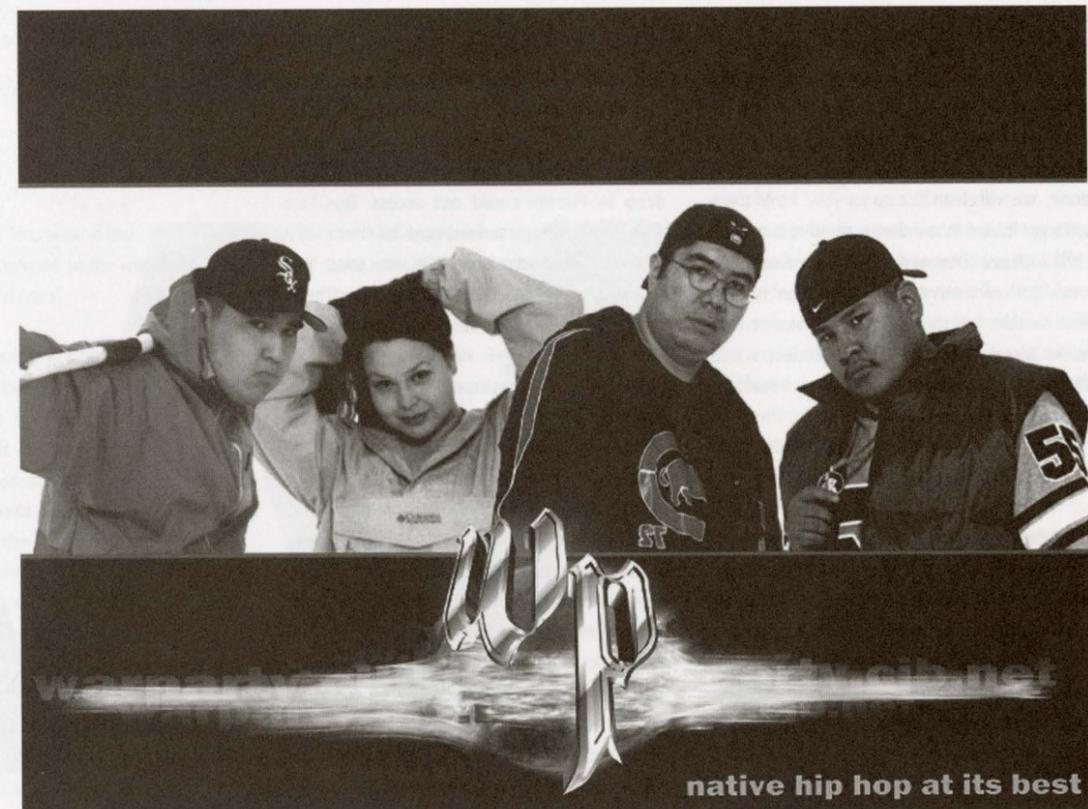


Photo: Carlos Godoy. Courtesy Arbor Records.

## WARSTORIES: Working with Youth and Hip Hop

by Paula Gonzales

*Latin hip hop artist and youth worker Paula Gonzales a.k.a. Bomba describes her work with youth and hip hop in Chile and talks with members of the recent Aboriginal Music Award winners, War Party.*

#### In the beginning...

My piece was looking real good. I had approximately twelve cans, and it was a legal wall. Arte-3, Chino and Huaso had helped me to prime it and had dutifully watched over the arsenal of paint. As I sprayed to map out my design, it dawned on me that I was painting my first graffiti mural in my native country, Chile, and that only a few years ago I could have been shot on the spot for conducting such

"subversive activities." While I refocused on the wall and inhaled the familiar toxic fumes of spray paint, a crowd had gathered across the street from me. I looked back to see everyone looking at the huge "Bomba" on the wall. Most of the "audience" consisted of youth under the age of eighteen. I waved. They all waved back. Pretty soon, everybody was closer to the wall and asking questions, kissing me on the cheek and explaining in excited voices, "girls don't do this, you know."

It was four o'clock on a Thursday afternoon in the blistering summer sun found only in the ozone-depleted sky over Chile's capital, Santiago. From the corner of my eye, I could see some youth at the far left of the wall crouched over two empty cans I had left to throw away later. I said, "Hey, what's up?" The two youths looked up at me. "We are going to clean this up for you, okay Bomba? We'll just do the cans right now." The youths began huffing (inhaling) the fumes from the cans. I quickly snatched

away the cans and started yelling "Yo! What are you doing, homey? What are you doing?" "Oh...this is nothing. I can huff like eight all day if I want. It's so easy...cheaper than glue or gasoline. I don't have money for weed...you should just give us the cans when you're done...we will clean this up for you." I told them to forget it, and that if they wanted to hang and chill with us, they were not allowed near the cans. Both of them could not have been older than twelve, but the littlest one, the one who spoke, already had dark circles and deep set little wrinkles around his shiny eyes. I took his hand and walked him to a spot under the nearest tree. The other youths helped the other 'huffer.' We gave them some water.

Welcome to Puente Alto, one of the biggest suburban complexes built outside of Santiago. Walking along the tiny streets with neat row houses, you feel like you are in a film set of suburban ghettos in the United States. The only difference is that it's not a set, these are real houses with real people.

In Puente Alto, cheaply built, tiny three-room houses fill the streets to accommodate Chile's working class and undesirables. In the winter, the houses flood, in the summer, the heat becomes unbearable. What's more is that the entire block knows your business; privacy is the biggest of all luxuries. The further into Puente you go, the further south, the closer you get to "La Pintana," one of the biggest "poblaciones" or ghettos in the country. Not even the uzi-packin' police are allowed to enter La Pintana. To go into La Pintana, you must have "bail" or a secured way into the streets: a cousin, an aunt, a grandparent. You just don't walk into La Pintana, the supposedly "classier" ghetto in Puente.

Walking around La Pintana, I realized that these kids, the 'huffers,' had nowhere to go and nothing to do. The drug thing (crack or glue-pressed weed) was so out of control that the adults were making money off the children. And when the children had no money for the drugs, they would go out and rob passers-by with homemade guns. (When I left six months later, I was handed a homemade pistol, or "hechiza," as a good-bye gift, crafted by some of the youth).

"Where is the community center?" I asked, hoping to coordinate something there. "Oh...they don't open in the summer...it's so far anyway, Bomba, just stay here with us." It was true. By foot, it was close to an hour to the nearest community center, something the kids deep in Puente could not access. Bus fare alone was enough to feed each of them for a day or two...and even accessing food was scarce. Most of the families lived on a single income, earned by working fourteen-hour shifts, six days a week. Healthcare and education were privatized, considered "luxuries" by many folks. And the community center really was closed for the summer.

My mind reeled. In desperation, I e-mailed my good friend Marc in Canada asking for some money. Marc had told me "If you are in trouble, just holla! Let me know!" He wrote back and covered me: "I will send some money. Just keep them painting or something!" That "something" turned into endless cyphers and graffiti walls. More money for more paint, walls and cyphers. Pretty soon, nobody was huffing anymore, they were too busy coming to my house to make "el hip hop."

Making el hip hop at Bomba's meant rhyming, drawing and politicking in the backyard, feeding those who had no breakfast, lunch or dinner and finding clothes. It became more than a full-time job, seven days a week, 24 hours a day. And the youth just kept on coming. We would rhyme for four, six, sometimes eight hours. I realized that if I weren't an MC or a graffiti writer, maybe none of these kids would be here at all. It was in these moments that I loved el hip hop more than anything in the world.

Coming back to North America, I looked out the airplane window wondering what the hell I was going to do when I got back home. Something fundamental had changed in me. I decided that from now on all my lyrics and art had to be focused toward empowering youth. Until now, I had never really thought about it too much. I had just gone ahead and done what I felt needed to be done. But all of the sudden, I felt a sense of conviction like never before to battle anybody who was fake, and to forge spaces for

"While we were learning

the rhyming basics, we had to take a good long look at ourselves and we saw things that were overwhelming."

the young people. This was no industry bullshit, this was real life survival. In the winter of 2001, this became crystal clear.

Winter 2002 was proving to be completely different in geography, but not too much in content. I was hired as a harm-reduction worker in Toronto's west end, conducting cyphers in youth shelters and house arrest homes for "juvenile delinquents." I kept seeing the same ethnic demographics in the "correctional" institutions: Black, Latino or First Nations. The more I went to these places, the more I understood the youth problems to be international. But where were the youths making serious moves to voice this?

In an age where bling bling and thug life rules supreme, it's certainly hard to get a grip on the real plight of the youth.

#### Conversations with War Party

In Canada, people like War Party are keeping it real and making serious moves. The group consists of Cynthia "Girlee Emcee" Nicotine-Smallboy, Rex "Rexshop" Smallboy, Karmen "Kool-ayd" Omeosoo and Tom "Big Stomp" Crier. The crew don't mess around. They've been at it since 1995, first as an independent group, and now touring the whole continent, spreading the message and their indigenous style of hip hop. Song titles such as "This Land Was Ours," "It Just Ain't Right" and "Feeling Reserved" from their first album *The Reign* are meant to educate non-natives about the unwritten history of First Nations people. They have recently received a Canadian Aboriginal Music Award for best hip hop album of 2001, placing them at the top of the list for Canadian talent.

I spoke to Rexshop and Kool-ayd on the phone. "We felt a bunch of things needed to be heard about our people. Most people here only really know about Louis Riel. Well, hip hop has, in a way, replaced our own culture, but it has also

filled the void to express and reveal history ... real Canadian history," stated Rex "Rexshop" Smallboy, executive producer and founder of War Party. Not only do they reference life on modern-day reservations in their songs (all four members reside on the Four Nations Reserves in Hobbema, Alberta), they are also in the process of blowing up and shining light on a renewed sense of native pride through hardcore lyricism. "We rhyme about the reality affecting our communities. It's not always pretty, but we're trying to come up with a peaceful process to speak up on these issues. There are some people out there who get paranoid about us speaking about things that happened in the past. Some people start asking 'who is that about, them or me?'"

Rex and Karmen told me that they recently received some hate mail. I ask them to read it for me, and although at first we are laughing at the sheer ignorance, the hate seeping through the words made us all grow quiet by the time Rex was finished reading. The tone became solemn. "Sometimes it's intimidating to have so much power through the word," Rex continued, "we always used to go by our hearts, but now we are making rhymes that are more careful with our words." I was touched by their honesty. I was also touched by the fact that they told me this crew literally had to sit down and train themselves to rhyme from scratch, on the rez.

"So why not rock music?" I asked.

"Hip hop is the tool that was there for us to use. We were influenced by people such as Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Common and Nas's lyrics, the positive and the aware...that is sort of our direction, although I think we are still trying to find it. Our new album shows a lot of growth...our first album was definitely about discovery. We are trying to cross into the mainstream, but we also had to make the decision that if a label does not

want to take us as we are, we're not into it. After September 11, things changed. People started looking for things that had more meaning, 'cause everything dear to us was threatened. Honestly, our problems seemed small compared to the problems of the rest of the world. So the conditions were there. At this point, I believe the industry will follow what people want."

"My goal is to make this a better world for my son (Rex is married to Girlee Emcee). If I can teach people to be smarter about our history, I am going to do that. My dream is to have First Nations people that are not afraid to dream and who can have something that they feel pride in. There is a resurgence taking place in who we are as a people and we play a big role in that. We can't let the reserve limit us. While we were learning the rhyming basics, we had to take a good long look at ourselves and we saw things that were overwhelming. We felt outraged about the past and so our new stuff is focusing on empowering our people. We are coming to talk to our people. Our new song "What If?" focuses on what life would be like if we said "No." Our mandate is to destroy all stereotypes. We want people to understand our history and we will take our future into our own hands. People are starting to wake up."

We said our goodbyes and I was left ready for action...again, but in a different country, more awake than I have ever been...right here in Canada.

People are you ready for the WarParty?  
I say, bring it on!

*Chilean-born Paula "Bomba" Gonzalez has been back and forth between Toronto, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Santiago for the past two years. She is best known for her murals in the West end since 1987, as well as her unique rhyming styles fusing English and Spanish. Her latest projects include "La Cuarta," a short documentary about the hip hop scene in the north of Chile.*

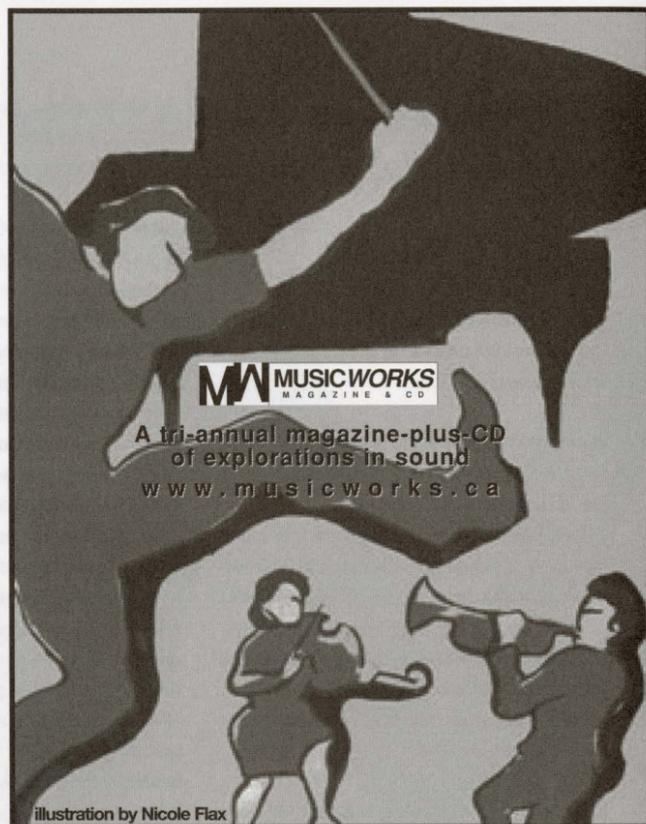
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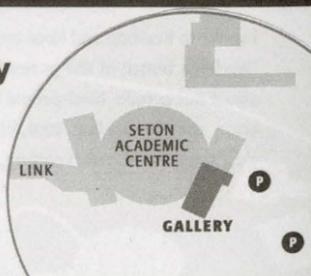
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# Round Table

The Fountain of Youth: A discussion about cash, culture and the currency of being young.

*[Faded text from the reverse side of the page, mostly illegible.]*

*The following are excerpts from a series of exchanges between with a number of youth facilitated by members of the FUSE editorial board to incite a critical dialogue about the relationship between youth and institutions.*

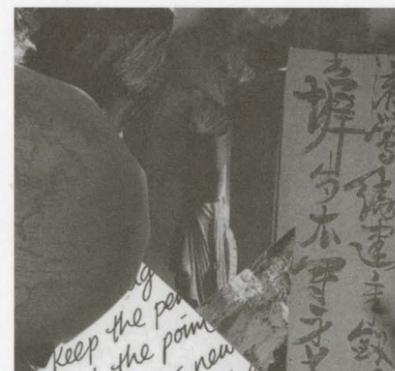
**FUSE:** In recent years, there has been a proliferation of interest in “youth” as a lucrative demographic, as the focus of media attention (both positive and negative) and as new constituents for political and cultural institutions. Do you feel that this targeting of young people has improved the opportunities available to youth and the profile of youth culture in general? Whose interests do they serve?

**Danielle Allan:** The targeting of youth is strange and follows a trend of giving voice to marginalized groups who generally have been silenced. I agree with some arguments that the voice these groups have been given fit into an already accepted frame. Ultimately, representations of a whole are only determined by small parts of it. This model presumes that a homogeneous group of “youth” or “women” or “Chinese-Canadian” actually exists. This is why I am having some difficulty with the term “youth” here. For me, it represents something other than those who are simply young. It is an institutional word itself, used to describe young people in an institutional setting: “youth worker, youth centre, youth hostel, youth programme, the youth of today ...”

I can't describe anyone I know as a youth, because it stands for something other than me or us, it is a concept that no actual group of people can adhere to. Variation on who the word actually refers to is also problematic. I would agree that it is not only categorised by age, but that a number of other variables would be more productive. Is a twenty-one-year-old person who works a full time job and raises a family really a youth? What if that same twenty-one-year-old joins other young people to protest against free trade? What I mean is we all simultaneously occupy both youth identities and adult identities. The term youth as a defining concept leads to these sorts of empty stereotypical discussions about “youth culture,” as though the term can designate a complete and homogeneous subject.

**Roxanne Elder:** In some ways the opportunities for youth have improved. However, these opportunities usually last for a very short period of time. In many cases, programs are implemented in order to grant youth access to resources or knowledge but are usually short-term projects or are cut all too quickly. Funding is granted to special projects rather than programs designed to reach long-term goals. More often than not, I find these attempts of targeting youth to be very self-serving. The institutions' primary motivations are to ascertain potential funding and the desire to reach a demographic with a product, skill or idea deemed important.

**Kitty Mak:** I definitely feel that targeting young people has improved opportunities available for youth. However, in a corporate sense, I believe that there is a certain age, at the beginning of



*Favorite, Rebekah, 2001, mixed media, 7x7cm. From an AGO Studio Workshop with students of Fletcher Elementary. Instructor: Greg Seale.*

your teenage years, when you are trying to “blend in,” and the images created by advertising are a place to find that refuge — this is prime time for corporations to maximize their profits. I do find that most teenagers grow out of this phase of depending on others to develop their identity and image.

**Fuse:** There is a kind of media capitalism around youth as a demographic that includes corporations, the media and “culture narcs.” Its consumers are both trained by and the product of corporate/media attention. Douglas Rushkoff’s recent documentary “The Merchants of Cool” reveals the phenomena of “cool hunters,” youth who are among the 20 per cent deemed to be “trend-setters” who act as corporate correspondents reporting new trends in youth culture to consulting firms. Companies across the spectrum then purchase this information and incorporate findings into campaigns that target the 80 per cent that are considered to be “trend followers.” Many of these companies argue that employing youth in this capacity is “empowering” and allows youth themselves to sway the market. Do you feel that this is the case?

**RE:** I personally feel these youth are being pimped. They never see a tenth of the revenue/profit that is made off of them. I don’t know if we can say that youth are swaying the market. They are the biggest consumers right now, both the leaders and the followers of tomorrow, as was the case the previous generations. In society’s eyes, youth are becoming increasingly rebellious as years go by but what people name rebellion is often fashion. When they move into the next demographic category, more pacified products are created to coincide with a new phase in their lives.

**DA:** One of the video jockeys at *MuchMusic* contacted a collective I was working with to organize last year’s Reclaim the Streets. When I called her back she explained that she was coming to the event and wanted to do an interview. She asked me to ensure that it would be someone young, and I replied “all my friends are young, not to worry.” I chose someone who was scheduled to play music that night, since the interview was with a music station. On the day of the event, the person I had selected returned after the meeting with a message that the VJ wanted to speak with an organizer instead. The VJ obviously did not notice that the host park for the illegal street party was surrounded by cops and it would have been foolish to voluntarily identify oneself as an organizer. I think the

VJ’s real problem was that we didn’t send her someone who appeared young enough, and was unable to represent the young bubbling hipster that organizes cool urban events. I heard she eventually just interviewed a young hippy guy who had no critical analysis of what Reclaim the Streets is. Obviously our personal ideas of young didn’t correspond. I use this to illustrate that “young” sells. Youth is marketed just as any other commodity is.

In response to your question regarding empowerment, the interaction between corporations and youth is too transparent to feel empowering. It is obvious what the company really wants. However, if you’re already aware of this transparency, there are ways in which you can use such transactions as a space for resistance. For example, what we wanted to do with the *MuchMusic* interview was draw attention to the commodification and gentrification of Queen Street. We wanted to discuss the marketing of a certain image that is attached to a certain place in the city. We wanted to talk about public space and to encourage participation instead of witnessing another spectacle. It would have been very fitting to go on *MuchMusic* to discuss these issues. There are ways to take advantage of the dynamic between corporations and “youth.”

**ND:** I don’t think youth have power in this situation. We don’t have any power over the media. Everyone is interested in our demographic financially but this is not necessarily empowering, whatever that means. I don’t think “trend-setting” people actually exist. The trends they set probably come from what they’ve seen on TV. We have no influence on what’s cool. But who cares!

**KM:** While corporations may operate under the guise that they are “empowering youth,” I also feel it is necessary for youth to educate themselves about corporate culture, and see past it. I feel that we are increasingly defined today by what we own, and this “corporate empowerment” agitates it. Trends are fickle; people should reflect and think about whether or not they are doing things that they actually want to be doing, or what others are saying they should be doing.

**Fuse:** Even the look and feel of protest is brought into marketing campaigns like the Gap “tagging” their own stores with the word “denim.” Do you think the media plays a role in developing an awareness of activism as a legitimate practice? Or does the media

sensationalize protest, render it “hip,” thereby demeaning its purposes and processes?

**RE:** I don’t know, how can one completely avoid being bombarded by these influential images on a day-to-day basis. I feel it is all about individual choices. There will always exist spaces and forums for voices outside of this but, again, each of these spaces lasts for a very short period of time. Once discovered and, especially if there is a significant impact, institutions will always find a way to incorporate this individuality or marginal space into their strategy.

**DA:** I read an article for school by Susan Ruddick, “Modernism and Resistance: How ‘Homeless’ Youth Sub-Cultures Make a Difference,” which details punk culture in Hollywood. In it she points out that the initial punks were radically political but after time the successive waves of people who started to identify as punk were more influenced by how the media defined them. The third-wave of punk rock in Hollywood seemed more like a superficial reincarnation of the media’s misunderstood image of “punk.” This made me reflect on what a friend had suggested about the media hype surrounding the recent protest in Quebec City; that the large number of people who flocked to the demonstrations came because they had been exposed to all the media coverage of this and similar protests. The media legitimized (sensationalized?) the event more than any poster or word of mouth could, it made it real. Suddenly the image of the protest reached the masses. This is precisely the moment when the media can actually restructure a movement, either by placing its focus on a minor leader and glorifying them, or by placing the emphasis on a certain irrelevant part of the event, like violence for example, and turn it into a totalizing image.

**ND:** This is a battle that will never end. There will always be that 20 per cent of kids who try to break out. There will always be the other 80 per cent who’ve given up (or who have never tried), follow trends and spend thousands of dollars on clothes annually. The ratio may change but the split remains the same. I guess you could say I situate myself somewhere in the middle. I don’t expend too much effort either way. I don’t spend a lot of money and I definitely don’t set trends. I’m not a “rebel teen” who only wears it if it’s never been on TV. I wasn’t in Seattle or Quebec City. On the other hand I’ve gone two years without buying a new pair of pants.

I try not to watch TV that much. The music I listen to tends not to be aired on the radio very often. I’m eighteen and I don’t have a job (yet). My parents are very generous when it comes to money but I’m becoming more and more conscious about it with age.

**KM:** The Gap has always employed very lucrative marketing schemes that border on propaganda. This is not to say that I admire it; in fact I stopped shopping at the Gap several years ago when I acknowledged the incredible power the Gap has over the consuming public. I do not want to be another contributor to their bottom line.

**Fuse:** The January issue of *Canadian Dimension* on “Youth Activism” poses the possibility that youth will carry forward “the movement” against the corporation. Do you think that this could be the case? Is this a realistic expectation, given how deeply the corporation has infiltrated the everyday lives of young people?

**RE:** It would be a fight, but as one can clearly see, youth nowadays do still do not feel that they have a stake in society, hence the nihilistic direction that they are slowly heading in. Most often the negative things are emphasized and the positive things downplayed. There are very few youth groups that exist with the intention of developing diversity within individuals. Programs must meet criteria, whether this is the criteria of the corporation or the funder. In the dominant ideology competition is the driving force and money/material wealth is the central goal in life. Unfortunately, there are a lot more people who have bought into this than those who have not.

**KM:** I feel that there are too many movements and that they overrated. Granted, I have to admit that I went through an anti-corporation phase for several years with “No Logo” in hand. Now, I don’t think we should be overly concerned with corporations and bringing them down. There are better things to worry about. As long as you can see through the guise of corporations, and know what you believe in, you’ll be fine.

**Fuse:** What about other public institutions? The Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Gallery of Canada, the Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery, The Power Plant and many other institutions such as municipal governments have programs that have targeted young

*Need Speed*, Erio, 2001, mixed media, 7x7cm. From an AGO Studio Workshop with students of Fletcher Elementary. Instructor: Greg Seale.



*Firelight*, Felicia, 2001, mixed media, 7x7cm. From an AGO Studio Workshop with students of Fletcher Elementary. Instructor: Greg Seale.



people and invested them with some ability to engage in decision-making. They too use the language of youth empowerment. Many of you have been involved in programs like these. From your experience, do they indeed work in the interests of youth? Are youth given the authority to make real decisions?

**DA:** It is strange how institutions view their role in this dynamic. It comes back to the category of youth and all the implications that are attached to that word and that concept. I find that these institutions have a sort of good-guy-helping-out-the-less-advantaged attitude which is full of good intention but is in fact buried under a we-are-the-older-and-wiser-adults rhetoric. In my experience, the youth view it differently. By taking advantage of, say, access to video equipment or expertise made available to them, they in fact make it fit into their own agenda, taking what they want from the service, but leave behind the rhetoric that goes with it. "Free or cheap access because I am a youth, and all I have to put up with is some weird condescension or bureaucratic BS. They accept the youth definition in exchange for access to something they want.

Just like any organization, to make it work for the people involved, it has to be initiated by them. It has to equally distribute the voice and influence of each member participating. The alternative high school I graduated from is a good example. S.E.E.D Alternative was actually initiated by students and their needs, and was eventually accredited by the board of education. The students have as much say in the organization and structure of the school as the teachers and are involved in the weekly general meetings. Ultimately, there is room for the students to challenge any policies that are currently in effect. The school has a staff of eight teachers, but people from outside the school, who have expertise but may not be professionally trained teachers, may teach courses as well. These volunteer instructors either propose a course they want to teach or groups of students will seek out instructors for courses they want offered. The school is directly affected by what kind of students attend and their individual needs, as is the staff that they hire. What I am trying to illustrate is that this school is a place where some of the organizational structures of more conventional education institutions are discarded in order to acknowledge what the students and teachers as individuals and as a collective want. Its structure doesn't allow for an authoritative administration over a passive student body. The students share the responsibility in making decisions.

**KM:** From my own experience, non-profit organizations aren't usually out there to manipulate youth or to use them as pawns to further their bottom line or hidden agendas. In my experience with public institutions, they have worked in the interests of youth, especially in the past couple of years. On the AGO Teen Council, I definitely felt as if I was given the authority to make real decisions. The only incentive or "agenda" that I have seen is that they are interested in bringing their organizations into the future.

**RE:** I have been involved with a few of these institutions. I have worked with the Art Gallery of Ontario's program, saw the Toronto Youth Cabinet and I am not sure that youth had any real decision-making authority in either. They seem to hand over enough decision making authority to appease young people, but not enough to allow them to produce drastic change. What I have noticed is that these institutions produce opportunities to bring forth ideas and carry them out, but they are both limited and limiting. The programs to me appear to be acting in the interest of youth, however there are always underlying and ulterior agendas.

**Fuse:** Why do you think art and activist organizations might be interested in you? Why this issue of FUSE for example?

**DA:** I definitely question the motives behind this issue of FUSE. Any kind of institutional activist organization is always trying to recruit youth. They are considered to be a resource. They bring with them style, image, energy, labour, the longest potential membership ... I wonder why someone like myself is being given so much space and authority to answer these questions? How am I supposed to represent the idea of youth when I don't consider myself one? I am almost insulted by the term "youth" unless I agree to take it on in exchange for something I want access to. So what are my motives in even responding to these questions? My hope is that FUSE is actually being as critical as these questions are.

**ND:** I've never read FUSE magazine before.

**RE:** Different youth projects in these organizations have brought a totally different demographic to the venue, whether its an art gallery, a cause, City Hall or a magazine. They bring an additional audience, an audience that does not know where the institution is

located, about the issues behind the cause, who their political representatives are or where to get information. The juxtaposition of youth against old institutions always makes the news for a couple of days.

It gives profile to the organization, but most people are uncritical about what is going on. It's automatically fine if its for young people and doesn't involve them getting into trouble. It always "youth and..." and the idea is presented as ingenious. I don't know about why Fuse is doing this issue but likely to get people interested.

**Fuse:** Do you think that these organizations, such as public institutions, publications and activist groups, mirror the ways in which corporations and media romanticize young people?

**KM:** It's a different kind of romanticism, for different purposes. Youth, as the leaders of tomorrow, should constantly be observed and commented on. However, it's important that generalizations aren't made from the actions of a select few individuals.

**RE:** One only needs to read between the lines to realize they are often no better than the corporations. Their motives are often identical: demographics, money and even personal interest.

**ND:** I think that these institutions might be interested in youth because "we are the future." The sad thing is that we are always shaped by the older generation through the media and through their influence as teachers. They may be romanticizing what young people will do but I believe they are simply trying to do something that is obvious: encourage the "trend setting" youth to simply fight back against a media who is trying to create a monoculture of identical people with the objective of increasing sales and income.

**Fuse:** We have talked about the interests of corporations, the media and other institutions. Where do you fit into all of this? Is it possible to exist outside of the manipulative forces of media capitalism? Are there ways to resist or refuse its forces? Where do you find and develop your voice? Are there programs and individuals that assist you in this? Are there other ways that you find to express and educate yourselves? Is there an outside of the gaze of institutions? Does their need to be?

**RE:** You always have to find a way to create your own opportunities and to try not to sell your soul. It is difficult to find your place when you have older people who profess to genuinely want to assist, however they themselves have their own agenda that is more self-serving than youth focused. Those that are sincere are few and far between. While there are opportunities outside of the mainstream, there are also limits to the amount that you can do as a young person; some legislation or policy that says that you are too young to have access to resources, or too young to know and understand their use and, therefore, need adult supervision because you're too young to have responsibility. The definitions of what kinds of expression, how much you are able to take on and at what age seem to shift from program to program.

**ND:** I take art. I'm very grateful that I've had so many opportunities to learn from artists and instructors.

**KM:** Personally, I resist being grouped into a category like "youth." I find and develop my voice anywhere I can find an outlet — through the web, through writing for the campus paper, through writing my 'zine. If you look hard enough, many different opportunities are out there for youth to take advantage of; it's up to each person to find them and get them.

*Nico Dann is an eighteen-year-old art student in the Advanced Studio at the Art Gallery of Ontario who plays in a punk band called The Evil Plans.*

*Roxanne Elder is a twenty-three-year-old student at the University of Toronto who has participated in a variety of programs through the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation as well as other small, community-based youth organizations.*

*Danielle Allen: Youth qualifiers = nineteen-years-old; first-year student at York University. Additional qualifying information includes: member of the organizing collective for Reclaim the Streets, Toronto, summer 2001 and summer 2002; member of a local anarchist collective without a name (first publication forthcoming, May 2002); member of an attempted collective house.*

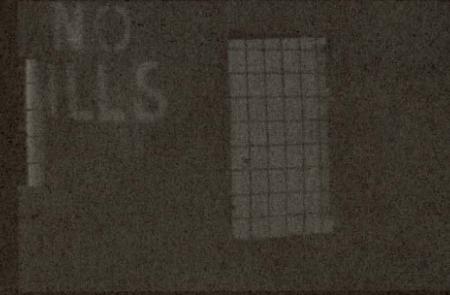
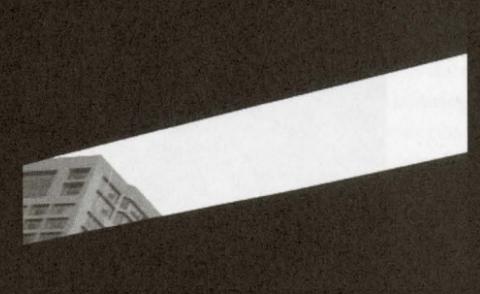
*Kitty Mak is in first year at McGill and has been a part of the Art Gallery of Ontario's Teen Council and is the creator of an online Sean Lennon fanzine.*



*Hot, Omar, 2001, mixed media, 7x7cm. From an AGO Studio Workshop with students of Fletcher Elementary. Instructor: Greg Seale.*



*Inhuman, Selina, 2001, mixed media, 7x7cm. From an AGO Studio Workshop with students of Fletcher Elementary. Instructor: Greg Seale.*



Stills of video footage incorporated into a live webcast of Bruce Mau's International Lecture Series presentation at The Power Plant on 9 May 2002. The culmination of Field & Streaming II, a youth programme organized by The Power Plant, InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Centre, Charles Street Video, Trinity Square Video and Trick Media. The webcast is archived at [www.thepowerplant.org](http://www.thepowerplant.org). The participants were Tatiana McIntosh, Alexander Cirka, Jessica Sarrazin, Michelle Joseph, Paddy Gallagher, Yvonne Ng, Morna Gamblin, Morris Johnston, Frank Gubitz, Andrew Gauthier, Carolyn Kane, Catherine Stinson, Ruth Silver, Anna Vorobieva, and Alice Ma.



## Three Short Essays on Growing

# Up

By Terence Dick

### 1. Teenage Boys

The media critic Robert McChesney has compared teenagers to the continent of Africa as it was craved by the imperial powers of the nineteenth century. They are largely half-understood, regarded as fairly primitive and worth a whole lot of money.

—Mark Crispin-Miller, professor of media ecology, NYU, interviewed on NextTV

There is no teen more primitive than the metalhead. As an adolescent subculture — defining itself like every other adolescent subculture, through rigorous codes of dress, behaviour and interests — metalheads qua metalheads (and not nu metal, rap rock, suburban, aggro-wiggers) have fallen off the map in terms of the cultural zeitgeist only to reappear as subjects of the contemporary artist's gaze. Like the corporations Robert McChesney describes as craving teenagers, certain artists exploit the dangerous otherness in the aesthetics and ontology of metal youth. The unstable, temporary and troubled teenage body, articulated in different ways within different subcultures, is most tragically dramatized in the coming of age of metalheads. That tragedy has been appropriated in a number of instances to great artistic effect.

By introducing a shiny black enamel axe into the plush and harmonized interior of a modular, octagonal lounge space, Steven Shearer's *Activity Cell with Warlock Bass Guitar* inserts a ready-made dread into the idealized world of teenage leisure. The symmetry and comfort of the self-enclosed leisure pod, all soft corners, plywood, colourful cushions and conscientiously groovy, is troubled by the quiet aggression of the bass guitar. Suggestive of paganism, black magic and all sorts of evil, this bass represents the low end, the debased, the bottom. The dark art of this dark heart is the sound of heavy metal. It could not play any other type of music. As a bass it is responsible for the bludgeoning rhythm of metal, the visceral throb of heavy music at high volume. The bass is experienced bodily.

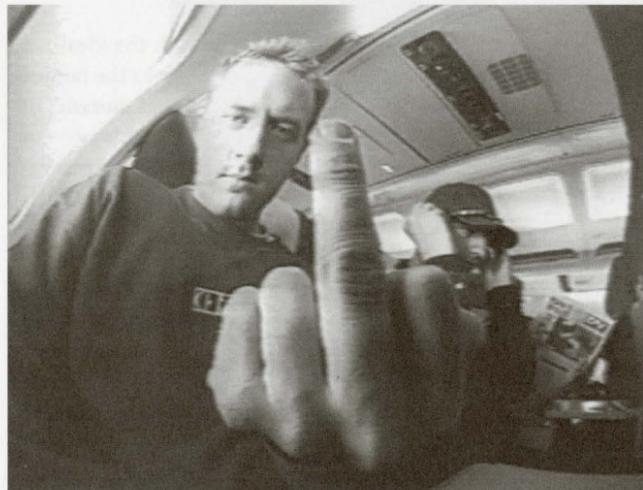


*Activity Cell with Warlock Bass Guitar*, Steven Shearer, 1997, mixed media, 145cm x 244cm Ø. Courtesy: American Fine Arts Co. (NYC).

This strange artifact, spreading bad vibes through the idealized space of the activity cell, signals adolescent disquiet. In the rarified atmosphere of the art gallery, Shearer's condensed diorama of teenage conflict relies on the dialectics of teenage ontology — in grossly simplified terms, order versus chaos — to power its generation of meaning. The implied, antisocial fury of heavy metal fuels the machine.

As shorthand for the primitive aspect of humanity, metal rears up again in Shearer's *Craftmonster* series. Here he has reproduced images of children's craft projects, taken from a museum-produced activity book for kids, with projects inspired by modernist and avant-garde works. Meant to encourage the free expression of children, the projects are intentionally raw and suggestive of what was once referred to as "primitive" culture. Shearer's metal-referencing titles establish an antagonistic as opposed to playful character for the primitive. With names like *Cradle of Filth* and *Hatework*, the innocence of these creative projects is replaced with a darker account of childhood. The futility of sublimating so-called primitive impulses through craft foreshadows the loss of innocence experienced in the teen years. The rage and confusion that manifests itself in subcultural alliances is once again exploited by the artist to signal a controlled outburst of discord that can be vicariously enjoyed.

The metalhead as out-of-control agent of chaos tells only half a story. Metal is a tragic aesthetic. It combines Apollonian rigour and order, not only in music but in dress and codes of behaviour, with Dionysian excess and fury, in spirit, musical content and modes of behaviour. In a project like Shearer's *Metal Archive*, the obsessive cataloguing of heavy metal paraphernalia reveals the disciplined side of the subculture, undercutting the image of wild primitive with that of anal librarian. The music itself requires a similar excessive adherence to self-control. Discipline and musical technique are fetishized. Even in the darkest and most nihilistic of subgenres, elegance, complexity of composition and skill in playing are significant, if not essential, qualities. This order and discipline is the quiet underbelly of metal. The artists who choose to bring it to light are not interested in appropriating artifacts and imagery for the sake of possessing their auratic power (à la *Warlock Bass*). Instead, they objectively document the culture in a detached and strategically



Bad Ideas for Paradise (video still), Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, 2001, video, 20:00. Courtesy: V Tape.

non-ironic way. As shown in the exhibition "Running With The Devil: Photographs of Metalheads" by Katia Taylor and Esther Choi at the Ryerson Gallery in Toronto (3 - 22 September 2001), these are regular people who might have long hair and stern countenances but are just like you and me. Taylor's photos of fans in the parking lots at heavy metal concerts emphasize the regular-ness of these outsiders. These are not Satanic Bible-inspired, ritual sacrificers; they are good-looking boys with long hair and Slayer t-shirts. Pictured amongst older metalheads, taking a break from day jobs and letting loose their tied-back hair, these kids are normalized in a way that emphasizes their humanity. Choi makes a similar anthropological gesture, taking pictures of metal youth in their living spaces. Keeping it real and making it safe. This non-judgmental objectivity makes metalheads seem like the balanced individuals they probably are. While this is a noble endeavour, it excludes much of the aesthetic by which they function in the world and which defines their difference. And it is that difference that makes them exotic and valued.

An adolescent is a dysfunctional adult, and art is dysfunctional reality, as far as I'm concerned.

(Mike Kelley in *Galleries Magazine* 45 (October/November 1991).)

The aesthetics of adolescence are chosen as a means to navigate that transitional zone from childhood security to adult authority. These, the best years of your life, feature regulated outbursts of thanato-erotic fury, alternating periods of fearlessness and anxiety, polymorphous fluid exchange and paranoid fluid control, overwhelming physical beauty and depths of corporeal revulsion and disgust. The teenage identity is constantly under attack, under scrutiny and under pressure to conform in ways that can't always be managed. The teenage body is a traitor to identity, hateful and unsightly, all the more so in light of the increasingly unrealizable depictions of the youthful body, held up as an ideal, in the mass media. Discipline, order and community are one response to the chaos of transformation. Rejection of ideals as a strategy to survive them is another and a popular one in the antisocial behaviour of teenage boys. Glaringly evident in the horror movie imagery of metal, the baroque depiction of death leads to a reevaluation of beauty once death, and its concomitant rotting body, become objects of beauty. With that standard set, the pale, spotty-faced, greasy-haired outcast finds comfort in the shadows.



Bad Ideas for Paradise (video still), Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, 2001, video, 20:00. Courtesy: V Tape.



Exhumed and Perfumed, Jennifer Murphy and Chris Rogers, 1999, ink on wall, dimensions variable, 1999.

This juvenile reevaluation of values is inscribed on any available surface. School binders and notebooks, knapsacks and t-shirts all become totemic symbols of the ugliness that is now beautiful. Toronto artists Jennifer Murphy and Chris Rogers allude to this arena of illustration in their work *Exhumed and Perfumed*. A wall work (also reproduced as a YYZ Artist's Outlet publication project) of drawn roses and skulls, these gothic images taken from throughout history are sketched in an unframed and continuous way like doodles filling up any available blank space. Black and white skulls and roses, lovingly rendered, paired off and floating free, they represent the romantic dualities of adolescence: beauty and death. Bringing them together serves some unspoken comfort. The worst possible state for the body, rotten and revolting, is reclaimed and made beautiful. The lost control of the teenage body is regained through a shifting of ideals. The teen develops some sort of authority over his own body and questions dominant aesthetics in an iconoclastic fashion. Be it through his celebration of the primitive, reclamation of the grotesque or in the discipline of his obsessions, there is no wonder that artists gravitate to the metalhead.

However, the metalhead is an outsider and his methods for dealing with a rapidly changing body are marginalized by the dominant strategies of the mass media. Wrestling with a similar quandary, the revolting adolescent body as it contradicts the idealized version of youthful beauty, popular culture represses, rather than reevaluates, morphological transformations. Whereas the metalhead goes to one extreme, that is, death, the mass media oftentimes moves in the opposite direction, resisting the encroachment of age and creating mutant teens whose incipient sexuality is temporarily halted. Less a symbolic castration, more a preemptive cosmetic surgery, this creates asexual teen pop singers who hide indicators of age and maturity in order to maintain a childlike innocence well beyond their years. What is being staved off are those exact threats of adolescence the metalhead reclaims.

Steven Shearer depicts such teen pop tarts from the seventies in his series *Puff Rock Shiteaters*. Trevor Mahovsky writes, "in Steven Shearer's silk-screened images of pathetic '70s teen idols ... childhood is colonized, arrested and emptied of delinquency" (online essay "Placed Upon the Horizon, Casting Shadows" at <http://www.apexart.org/mahovsky.htm>). These "safe" icons of

OH BLESSED ARE THE SICK  
 MORBID ANGELS OF DISEASE  
 RIDE THE WINDS OF HATRED  
 DAYS OF INFERNAL INSANITY  
 PERVERSION ENTHRONED  
 SPAWN OF AZAGTHOTH  
 DRINKING THE VOMIT OF  
 PRIESTS SWORN TO THE  
 BLACK OF HATE ETERNAL  
 ENTANGLED IN CHAOS  
 PURE HOLOCAUST  
 ALTARS OF MADNESS FLUSH  
 THIS WORLD OF SHIT INTO  
 SKULLFUCKING ARMAGEDDON

Poem #1, Steven Shearer, 2002,  
 charcoal on paper, 122 x 88 cm.  
 Courtesy: American Fine Arts Co. (NYC),  
 Mars Gallery (Tokyo)

teenage adulation are ambiguously sexual, ambiguously gendered and absolutely adored. Basically, they are mutants.

The subtle play between cuddly and sexy that characterized idols from the seventies has become far more crass in the present. Our teen pop stars are blatantly sexual, act out pornographic gestures and dress lewdly, yet they are still (or claim to be) teenagers and are marketed largely to prepubescents. The conflicting message inherent in such cultural content is something that demands constant negotiation. When you add to this the twenty-something (or older) adults who portray teens in movies and on TV, you are left with an unclear notion of who qualifies as a teenager. What is for certain is that teens should be idolized and that adolescence is a condition to which one aspires. The teenage body is perpetually idealized and from that follows a valourization of all that is adolescent.

I want to be a teenage boy.

I want to fuck pretty girls who look like flowers and love horses. Who have legs like stamens and glossy eyes like pistils. So soft and so eminently crushable they elicit the will to crush. I want to be a teenage boy so I forget to eat for hours, until I'm starving. Then I stuff myself with Ding-dongs and Ho-hos and pop. I groan, lowering my distended gut into a chair where I recline, flopped out, watching re-runs and getting horny. If no one's home, I masturbate lazily, slowly getting into it, thinking remorselessly about girls I've fucked or want to fuck who beg for it.

I want to be remorseless and thump my friends on the basketball court.

If I were a teenage boy I would insist on brand name clothes. My laundry would be done frequently and come back fleecy, golden, folded: heavy hooded sweatshirts, boxer shorts and socks that always ball their mates. My garments would hang just so on my snotty, lanky frame, uncontrived, brand new, tumbled dry.

If my mother does the wash while I am in the shower, I yelp and shout until she turns it off. Even if she's watching television, she eventually gets up, sighing, and stops the load. She thinks, "he's still my baby boy." I think, "fuck you, fuck you, fuck you," but only call out, "mum, turn off the water!"

I like to get in fights and punch out assholes who disrespect me. I love sensation without reserve. I don't even know reserve. What's reserve? I like to belch and piss and fuck. I have never felt ashamed yet, not once.

My life is not stingy. I am not stingy. There is no sting. Brain chemicals flood, orifices gape. I fart with vigour. It feels great. I hate homos. I like boobs, my dick, my friends, smoking dope and listening to music.

Unselfconsciousness and arrogance are the hallmarks of my personality. I am unconcerned by my ordinariness. I am unconcerned in general.

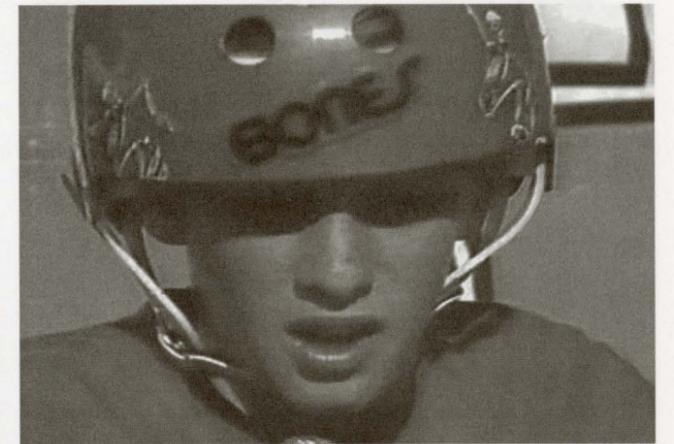
I like summer, winter, fall. Spring is too tentative and weepy. I hate things that are tentative and weepy.

(from *Bad Ideas for Paradise*, 2001, by  
 Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby)

Such is Vey Duke and Battersby's paean to the wonders of teenage boys. Quoted in full from a video compiling a number of short musings, musical interludes and video sketches, this section is accompanied by a collage of skateboarding footage. The skater boys in the video are shown doing the things they do, skateboarding, falling, doing tricks, lounging and so on. These suburban skater boys, gross examples of the worst sort of American excess and lethargy and narcissism, deserve nothing but spite and disdain for their careless and pointless existence. And yet, there is this fascination. Why is the eye drawn dreamily to these lanky boys? These are not teen idols, but teen idles, self-absorbed and narcissistic. Our fascination is played out in a vicarious narcissism. Not a



*Bad Ideas for Paradise* (video still), Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, 2001, video, 20:00. Courtesy: V Tape.



*Bad Ideas for Paradise* (video still), Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, 2001, video, 20:00. Courtesy: V Tape.

“loud  
 fast  
 rules”

mediated pleasure in the libidinal excess of metalheads who convert all stimulus into the equation, “loud fast rules,” but an envy and distanced appreciation for the spiritual focus of the blessed teen, untroubled by convention, expectation and reservation, only indebted to himself. The skater is admittedly an instance of disciplining the unruly body (with a touch of valourizing the grotesque, cf. farting with vigour), but they wrest power over their bodies with admirable selfishness. Vey Duke and Battersby's desire to be a teenage boy stems from his satisfied desires and unselfconscious egotism. The appeal is that he doesn't give a shit. Ironically empowering his vulgarity (and craftily erasing any of his doubts or anxieties), they honour this treasured person who disregards all that is around him. They might be making a joke by masking a critique of teenager delinquency in the guise of a desire for all that is horrible about them, but there is also a genuine appreciation for the self-absorbed in their words and work.

Metalheads are an obvious example of a means of acting out our id, of expressing our most primitive qualities in a control and distanced way. With skateboarders, we find a way to enjoy the untrammelled expression of our ego. To not give a fuck. The teen not only as primitive, but as outlaw. A pointless outlaw with nothing to rebel against, but that's the way it's been since teenagers were invented and James Dean asked, “Whatcha got?”



Untouchable (video still), Thirza Cuthand, 1998, video, 4:15. Courtesy: V tape.

## 2. Teenage Girls

You have to be an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine (oh, how you have to cringe and hide!), in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs — the slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb, and other indices which despair and shame and tears of tenderness forbid me to tabulate — the little deadly demon among the wholesome children; she stands unrecognized by them and unconscious herself of her fantastic power.

(from *Lolita*, 1955, by Vladimir Nabokov)

Requiring constant identity maintenance to manage an adolescence fraught with contradiction, she could be nothing but conscious of her fantastic power and her frustrating powerlessness.

At my best, I am a naïve, foolish girl with misguided crushes. At my worst, I am the psycho-sexual stalker ready to plunge you into a hellish vortex of warped desires because there's nothing more frightful than a teenage girl with a hard clit.

(from *Untouchable*, 1998, by Thirza Cuthand)

Never having been a teenage girl, I trust Thirza Cuthand's appraisal of her two-sided nature. She is caught between her reputation as a sexual icon and her inexperience as a sexual tyro. Inundated with images of physical beauty to aspire to while riding the roller coaster of pubescent growing pains, she must navigate constant corporeal conflicts. Balanced on the line between childhood and maturity, she must make sense of the adult desires that well up from her girlish veneer. Requiring constant identity maintenance to manage an adolescence fraught with contradiction, she could be nothing but conscious of her fantastic power and her frustrating powerlessness.

Made when Cuthand was just exiting her adolescence, *Untouchable* is a short video about teenagers with older lovers. She delineates

the socio-sexual power struggles inherent in relationships, aggravated in this case by a definitive cultural distinction (adult world versus teen scene), and gives voice to the desired and desiring teen, if not empowering her, at least, articulating her frustrations and opinions.

I think a lot of work made by adults about teenagers tends to go towards sensationalizing or introducing certain ethical and moral judgement which in real teen life don't necessarily apply.

(from correspondence from Cuthand to the author, 2002)

Real teen life is overloaded with ethical and moral judgements. Imposed arbitrarily by parents, teachers and those who police teenage behaviour (clergy, cops, counselors), the rules by which teens must make important decisions in life are not, despite what certain authority figures might contend, hard and fast. This is not only because ethical standards and guidelines in general have become ambiguous. The change that occurs in a person of teenage years happens so quickly and at such different rates for different kids that the application of laws is continually challenged by the moving field of constantly maturing subjects.

*Untouchable* was a moment in my life where I could truly identify with the desire to be a sexual person and the frustration at having a "pedophile" label placed on my own sexuality, with me as the victim!

(ibid.)

Cuthand's struggle takes place at the transformative stage that is adolescence and within its conflicted categories. By focusing on relationships that cross the ages of majority and minority, she implicates the adult lover who takes pleasure from a precocious teen but refuses to acknowledge her agency. The complex subjectivity of the sexually active youth is put in contrast by childish behaviour on the part of her elder.

She's older and treats me like a wide-eyed innocent who knows nothing and when she grabbed my ass she didn't ask permission because everybody knows it's okay to disrespect youth.

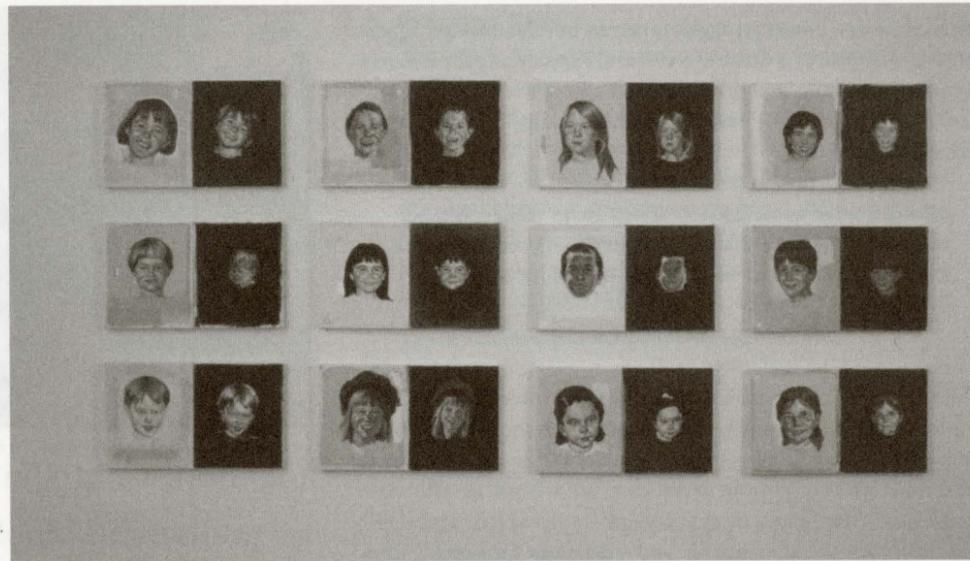
(from *Untouchable*)



Untouchable (video still), Thirza Cuthand, 1998, video, 4:15. Courtesy: V tape.



Above: *Untouchable* (video still), Thirza Cuthand, 1998, video, 4:15. Courtesy: V tape.

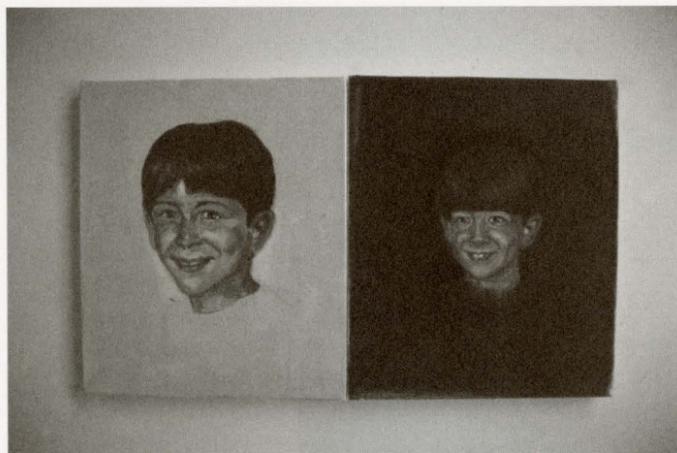


*Missing Children*, Sadko Hadzihasanovic, 2001-02, oil and pencil on canvas, detail. Photo: Cheryl O'Brien. Courtesy: Paul Petro.

In our correspondence, Cuthand brings up the notion of consent and its absence from adult relations with adolescents. She decries the assumed ownership of children and teens by adults. Cuthand's video dares to suggest that minors are willing sexual agents who have desires and act on them and seek out some sort of respect and understanding in those they desire, even if that person is significantly older and more experienced than them. And despite the overwhelmingly sexualized and prurient depiction of teens in the media, the popular acceptance of such a suggestion, one that transgresses law (the age of consent) and convention, remains distant.

### 3. Missing Children

When Sadko Hadzihasanovic first saw photographs of missing children paired with computer-aided, aged portraits of those missing children as they might now appear, he felt a great lack of emotion. He thought that he could be more successful than the machine and so began an ongoing series called *Missing Children*. Each part of this series consists of a diptych: two canvases, one black and one white. On the first canvas is a painting of a child from the year he or she went missing. On the second, Hadzihasanovic has created his own aged vision of the lost child, usually only a couple years



detail of *Missing Children*.

hence. Each pair combines a harsh reality and a hopeful fiction. Each records a period of loss and imagines that time of absence through bookend paintings.

These double portraits of missing children illustrate that which is lost in the passing of time. They are not functional. They are not meant to aid in the identification of abducted children. They are illustrative; proposing and animating the possible changes that happen as the child grows. Each missing child deserves a series of portraits as every year passes. If there was a foolproof science (or magic) to mapping the ever-changing appearance of a child, she could be pictured well into the future, even beyond her years. One could not only get an accurate current image of disappeared children from years ago, one could also prepare to look for adults years from now, as the search for a missing child remains unsolved.

Children are often abducted by one of their parents. Hadzihasanovic paints his portraits in the belief that they are alive and not necessarily unhappy. Raised by their kidnapper, there is always the possibility that abducted children grow up to lead normal lives accepting constructed identities as if they were their own and never knowing the truth of their circumstances. And, if a computer (or a painter) had a powerful enough imagination to age faces over dozens of years, there is the slight possibility that one day a once missing person would come to realize the crime that lies in their past, the crime they were victim to. They might happen upon a portrait of themselves in a post office or on the side of a milk carton. They would not feel sympathy for the loss of another. They would themselves feel lost. And their childhood would be missing.

Do you believe it, unlike most children, I hated to see the day come when I will be grown up. I never wanted to. I



detail of *Missing Children*.

wished to be young always. I am a grownup now and an old lame man, darn it.

(from *The History of My Life*, by Henry Darger)

In a sense, Henry Darger was a missing adult. A recluse and an outsider, his voluminous works, storybooks and watercolours were discovered only after his death. They comprised a world he created for himself, one he could lose himself in full of girlish heroes and adult monsters. When his fantastical children were found, they had not changed over decades. They were born and remained mutant hermaphrodites, eternal infants with inappropriate genitals. Expressions of an arrested intelligence that refused to acknowledge the passage of time, Darger's world refused to grow up. His stunted vision condensed maturation into strange children that could be ageless because they were unreal. The dread one feels when viewing his work, the common assumption that the artist could easily be a child molester or a serial killer, is inspired by his twisted vision of a childhood that is never lost.

Between Hadzihasanovic's speculative morphing and Darger's perverse refusal, Rineke Dijkstra's photographic portraits of teenagers on the beach document the transformation of age before our very eyes. Children disappear in adolescence. Childhood is lost, like innocence, with the coming of age. Adolescents embody the flux in passing from child to adult. Hadzihasanovic's diptychs illustrate this. Darger's imagination denies it. Dijkstra's photos capture that change, the movement between two stages as it takes place in a moment at the edge of land where land becomes sea and the sea rushes against the land. These half-children, half-adults flicker in our gaze, for a moment we see the adult they will become but then their childish features or awkward gestures betray them. Or what on first glance appears to be but a child, gains depth with examination, one boy's eyes seem older, if not wiser, and the twist of a young girl's lips, the position of her mouth, seems strangely mature. One draws in the mind's eye a picture of the child that is no longer there and one imagines the face of the adult to come. These temporary bodies, oozing possibility, morphing in real time, magically transforming in ways one can only imagine, fascinate and inspire and, as change also means loss, frighten.

Terence Dick is a writer who lives in Toronto.

# Brutally Honest:

Spencer Nakasako in Conversation with Kelly O'Brien

We came from a country where war was happening, civil war, and we escaped from all of that and we came to America and this is it for us and people treat us like shit.

—Sokly Ny

One of the most raw and honest documentaries I've seen in a long time, *a.k.a. Don Bonus*, is video diary about Sokly Ny, an eighteen-year-old Cambodian refugee living in one of San Francisco's poorest neighbourhoods. Armed with a camcorder for his senior year of high school, Ny (also known as "Don Bonus") turns the camera on himself and tells a bittersweet story about his struggle to survive in a place that is sometimes lonely, often hostile and never dull. Made in collaboration with veteran filmmaker Spencer Nakasako, *a.k.a. Don Bonus* premiered on PBS, traveled internationally on the festival circuit and won many awards.

As part of the OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) Centre for Media and Culture in Education series, the film and Nakasako came to the University of Toronto's Innis College in February. I met up with him in a cafe on College Street and we had the following conversation.

**Kelly O'Brien:** The film *a.k.a. Don Bonus* was a huge undertaking—three years from start to finish, over a year of shooting, sixty hours of footage, a year and a half of editing and no money to make it. Why and how did you end up doing it?

**Spencer Nakasako:** The simple story is that I had a long working relationship with Wayne Wang, we'd just finished a low-budget feature, and to be honest, the film didn't do that well and I didn't know what I wanted to do next. Then, out of the blue, this centre in San Francisco, the Vietnamese Youth Development Center, called me in 1991 and asked me to do a video residency.

I'd imagined a museum-like residency program with facilities and equipment, but when I got there I realized otherwise. The center is in the Tenderloin district, which is a poor, beat-up neighbourhood. They put me in a small room with fifteen kids (mostly Chinese, Cambodian and Laotian) and told me to teach them video. There was no gear. There was one TV. There was no VCR. There was no money for equipment. At first, I had no idea what I was doing, and when I approached the director of the center for guidance she said, "You're the artist, just do whatever."

My wife worked at San Francisco State University and she was able to get us some cameras and editing decks. I called friends, borrowed all kinds of stuff, sound people, camera people ... The center eventually chipped in. The program ran all day for eight weeks. I taught video, another artist worked on a mural project and a theatre director staged a play. They were jam-packed days and the kids were completely into it and totally alive. I spent most of my time trying to get the kids to talk about their lives. You can get kids to talk about music, to talk about sports, stuff like that, but to get them to talk about who they are and what they're about, that's hard.

It was really interesting what the kids eventually came up with. We did these monologues where I asked them to talk about themselves for at least ten minutes. Most of them ran way longer, and I remember how surprised I was when they were screened. Everyone was riveted.

For one of the first exercises, Don drew stick figures and then shot the drawings and inter-cut them with a fight between these guys playing basketball. The stick figure was Don, sad and at home, and the basketball player was this tough streetwise macho guy who Don wanted to be, but was nothing like. He was trying to say something about loneliness and how people cover it up, and I remember being struck by his honesty and vulnerability. But Don wasn't necessarily special. I'm not saying anyone could have done *a.k.a. Don Bonus*, but in some ways, in that neighbourhood, his was anybody's story.

**KO:** So why did you choose to work with Don?

**SN:** I thought his work was really strong. There are also just certain people within the group that you develop more of a connection with.

I also found out that most of the kids were in summer school and that Don was struggling more than the others, so I thought it would be interesting to follow him his whole senior year to see whether he'd make it. There was a built-in conflict right from the start.

And up until then, it was the early '90s, I couldn't think of many documentaries about a young Asian guy, other than something made by a film student, so I was also interested in exploring that. The idea of using the camcorder came from my work with Wayne Wang. When we were working together in Hong Kong, his wife bought a Hi8 camcorder. She shot a lot of stuff and we thought it looked great. People laugh now, but at the time, Hi8 was fancy new technology.

I also hated the media-savvy sound-bite culture that was pervading America, so part of the appeal of the camcorder was that it was small, somewhat innocuous and portable, so you could shoot a lot, bring it with you everywhere, and hope that the people you were shooting would forget it was there. The camera also made it possible for Don to shoot everything himself, which meant that he could capture intimate details about his life in a way that I never could've done by myself with a crew.

I miss my [older] brother a lot. I haven't seen him for a long time. He just ignores me. Right now I'm crying. I think about how I miss him and the tears start dropping and then he saw me and asked, "What's wrong?" and I said, "Nothing's wrong." And he said that we should talk so ... we start talking and I start crying some more and I tell him

that I miss him a lot and ask him why he stays away from the family for so long. He said that he's taking care of his own thing, he's been working hard and studying. He said that he's got to take care of his wife, that his family comes first. And then I said, "What about me? I'm your family. I'm your brother. Isn't that important?" Sometimes I wish that we had a normal family. You know I've never seen my father before ... now I'm afraid of losing my brother who's like a father to me.

— an excerpt from one of Don's monologues after seeing his brother at a Cambodian New Year's Party

**KO:** Did you and Don have a process, a script, a vision of the movie you wanted to make or did it evolve organically?

**SN:** The basic rules that we came up with were: get yourself in the frame and shoot, make sure that everything else you're shooting is in the frame, and make sure that you can hear it. To me that was enough. It was Don's decision about what to shoot and what to say. But, in the end, all we really had was hours of footage of Don talking. We had no cutaways. We had no broll [images to cut away to]. We had nothing really except honesty, which I've learned is actually a good thing to gamble on.

I didn't think about style or aesthetics that much. There were so many scenes that were completely overshot that I had to slog through. And the more I saw, the more overwhelmed I became. From a filmmaking standpoint, it was a completely inefficient process. However, I came to appreciate the fact that there were no shortcuts. I'd log the tapes, and then afterwards screen sections with Don. Most of the time, I didn't know where I was going with it. I relied mainly on instinct and common sense.

**KO:** How do you inspire the kids that you work with? How did you inspire Don to make such an honest story about his life?

**SN:** I think the kids sense that I take them seriously. One of the biggest challenges of working with young people is knowing when to let loose the reins and when to pull on them. And without being a policeman, you have to develop this relationship of mutual respect. I look for kids that want to be pushed and I think you can tell when someone is ready to learn and when it will be good for



*a.k.a. Don Bonus* (film still), Spencer Nakasako and Sokly Ny, 1995, 55:00. Courtesy: National Asian American Telecommunications Association.



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## The kids that I work with are stereotyped as almost black, because black is always associated with poverty and tough neighbourhoods.

them. You're always treading a dangerous line, but when it happens you develop real relationships. Kid's antennas are sharp. They can tell when you connect.

Don and I went through a lot. He quit at least twice during the project. The first time he did a monologue about it. It's hilarious. It goes something like this "... this fucking camera is heavy, and I'm always shooting, and I'm sick of it, I'm tired of it. People are always telling me to shut if off, and don't do this and don't do that ..." When he finally told me that he couldn't do it anymore I said that I couldn't force him to stay, and that, ultimately, it was his decision. So he quit for a while, and then he called me and said he wanted to try again. The next time he quit for family reasons. His fourteen-year-old brother, Touch, brought a gun to school in self-defense and was arrested for attempted murder. Obviously, his family had concerns about the way this crisis would be represented in the film. At that point, I talked to them and tried to appease their concerns. I think Don realized that I cared about his family, and he trusted me more and felt like going on. But I think more than anything, Don stuck with the project because he found something comforting about talking to the camera; he was able to get a lot of stuff out. I wouldn't say that this is true for all kids. Don had a unique relationship with the camera, which made the process particularly interesting and rewarding.

I failed my composition test. I didn't pay any attention to teachers and I'm lazy. I don't do my homework. I feel like I kind of regret it because I should read. I should pay attention. I should ask questions. I should ask someone to help me. I should do all those things. I have a feeling that I might not be able to finish high school. Sometimes I feel like what's the use of going to school ...

- excerpt from *a.k.a. Don Bonus*

**KO:** Films about teens usually devote a lot of time to sex, drugs and music. In *a.k.a. Don Bonus*, you rarely refer to them. Did you and Don purposely avoid those issues?

**SN:** I'm not a big advocate of sex, drugs and rock n' roll. I don't know whether Don did drugs. He probably experimented. Maybe he was afraid to talk to me about it because he thought of me as an authority figure. Maybe he was afraid of embarrassing his family. For whatever reason, it didn't come up and so I assumed it was a subject he wasn't interested in. Music didn't come up that much either. Sex was a bigger issue for Don. One of the only arguments we got into was about girls, about never seeing him with girls, about never seeing him on a date. He talks about girls in the monologues, he'll say things like. "There's this girl Maria, and I've known her since the ninth grade and I really like her but I'm scared to talk to her." That kind of stuff. But Don was shy and he didn't ask a lot of girls out. We shot one date that a friend had set-up — from Don phoning, to them meeting and hanging out. It's a great little scene and I really wanted to include it, but Don didn't want to because he felt too self-conscious. In the end, Don pulled it.

**KO:** *a.k.a. Don Bonus* not only documents the personal struggle of an immigrant kid living in America, but it also speaks to bigger more systemic issues of poverty and racism and injustices of all kinds. Were there any issues that you were particularly interested in addressing in the film?

**SN:** I feel like I have leanings rather than missions. I feel that people in America see the world as black and white. In my world, it ain't black or white. There's a little more pop culture out there for Latinos now, but if you're Asian, there's not that much. I'm not saying that we have it any tougher day to day, but no one talks enough about what it feels like to be neither. The kids that I work with are stereotyped as almost black, because black is always associated with poverty and tough neighbourhoods. They have a little bit of everything, they take from black culture in terms of how they talk, I mean they use the word "nigger" all the time when they talk to each other. And they speak Chinese or Vietnamese and musically they identify with hip hop. But at the same time, they'll listen to Cambodian music. I'll hear some kid listening to

hardcore rap, Wu Tang Clan, and then next thing I know, he's singing N'Sync. They're adopting and challenging traditional and American values, and it's complicated and contradictory, and I find that fascinating. I don't know if I'll ever be able to capture it on video but it's become a little bit of an obsession!

**KO:** Do you think more kids need to pick up video cameras and



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ancer Nakasako and Sokly Ny, 1995, 55:00. Courtesy: National  
tions Association.

know how to do.

**KO:** What makes for a good working relationship with kids?

**SN:** I think kids have to give as much to you as you give to them, or forget it. I need energy. I need people who have ideas. I don't always want to be the guy that comes up with everything. Also, I don't necessarily think that it's even kids that I'm drawn to, I think it's this community, this neighbourhood, that I work in.

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KO: Do you think more kids need to pick up video cameras and tell their stories? Is there something inherently special about the medium?

SN: I'm not a big advocate that everybody needs to take up this approach, or start video programs or do an *a.k.a. Don Bonus*. I get a lot of calls about that and people assume that's what motivates me. I'm a filmmaker. It's not like I'm this social worker that's using video to get at them or some artist that's dying to get their story.

KO: But you obviously believe that video helps kids express themselves in a transformative way?

SN: It's important that kids have a way to express themselves in any way, shape or form. There's this guy who loves coming to the center. He's fun, he's a great kid, he doesn't have any interest in video, but he loves hanging around. He's a hardcore jock, he's one of the first Cambodian guys to make the all-city football team. Sports are his expression, not video. Now, I'm not going to force him to do video. I'll send him to a football game with some of the other kids and they'll shoot it with two or three cameras, come back, edit it, and all sit around and watch it. Now, that's not taking the camera home and expressing yourself, but I feel like it's serving some purpose that's really immediate. It keeps them busy, it makes them do something, and it gives them pleasure. And it's what I can offer them. I don't know how to dance; I'm not a musician. I'm not a great artist. You can only offer what you know how to do.

KO: What makes for a good working relationship with kids?

SN: I think kids have to give as much to you as you give to them, or forget it. I need energy. I need people who have ideas. I don't always want to be the guy that comes up with everything. Also, I don't necessarily think that it's even kids that I'm drawn to, I think it's this community, this neighbourhood, that I work in.



*a.k.a. Don Bonus* (film still), Spencer Nakasako and Sokly Ny, 1995, 55:00. Courtesy: National Asian American Telecommunications Association.

I worked on this film called *TL Christmas*, which is a great little film about Christmas in the Tenderloin district. I worked on it with five kids. We filmed the neighbourhood and these give-away gift programs, and then the kids took cameras home and filmed Christmas with their families. One of the kids, Charles was shy and didn't talk much, he mostly mumbled, and we weren't sure if he could actually contribute in the same way. But, in the end, we worked hard to encourage and include him. A traditional producer would've just cut him out entirely. It's easier. But as a group we felt obligated. A lot of times it's not about the end product, the process is much more important, and I'm really proud of those pieces.

**KO:** You've worked with kids at the center for over ten years. Do you think it's harder to be a kid right now?

**SN:** I don't pretend to know a lot about kids in general, but I definitely feel sorry for kids nowadays. I have a twelve-year-old son and I can see that it's tough. When I was a kid, I don't remember rigorous testing in schools. There's so much emphasis on testing that they start studying how to test well. If the only thing you have to look forward to for the next two weeks is how to do a language-arts reading-comprehension test, that can be pretty fucking boring. I can see how my kid, who's middle class, can get depressed, and I can see why a lot of these kids in the Tenderloin drop out. My son has a certain background, and people read to him at night, and he's probably too scared to stray anyway. But the kids who come to the center, they get away with more and their lives are harder, and I can see how they get frustrated.

Both classes of kids have a difficult time. The rich are busy saving money, moving into good neighbourhoods to go to good schools, doing whatever they can for the future for their kids, which is incredible pressure to put on kids who are five-, six-, or seven-years-old. The other kids just get dumped. For them, eventually working at Starbucks is a big deal. I don't mean to disrespect upper-middle-class parents who are trying to help their kids, but a lot of these kids have problems that they don't even know how to begin to deal with. I've done video programs with them and they're terrified of failure. In fact, they don't even know what failure means other than a grade. The kids in the Tenderloin are used to failure, and I think it makes them a little

looser, more open to new ideas, and ultimately, more interesting to work with.

**KO:** Why do you do what you do?

**SN:** If I were only a filmmaker I'd be bored. When I first started in the business I hung out with a lot of filmmakers. My wife and I had a party recently and I realized that no filmmakers were coming and I was kind of relieved. After a while it's boring and kind of depressing — filmmakers talking to other filmmakers, hanging out with other filmmakers, talking about funding, and people are either doing really well and don't want to admit it or doing really badly and want to tell the whole world, and if someone's got something really big you don't see them around because they entered a whole new level.

After having a kid, and working in the Tenderloin, that world seems trite and self-involved and I have less and less patience for it. This might sound obvious but work should be fun, it should make you happy. I laugh and joke around a lot with the kids. It's a live-action neighbourhood, and it's not like everything is all good or everything is all bad, but all the elements of life are there and it's super-condensed, and you never have to wait very long for drama or tragedy to strike. And yeah, it can get tiring and I don't know how long I can keep it up for, and I don't know how I'm going to continue to make a living at it, because we're sort of year to year, and you just hope that money keeps coming in and that people donate stuff. But, for now, it's good.

Now the kids are pushing me to make a "real movie." As if documentary isn't real! But they see feature films with young Asians and it's not their world, it's not their story and they say, "Let's tell the real story." And I hear that, and I get excited.

*Spencer Nakasako is a filmmaker based in San Francisco. His works include School Colors (1994), a.k.a. Don Bonus (1995) and Kelly Loves Tony (1994). For the past ten years he has worked at the Southeast Asian community center training at-risk refugee teenagers in video production.*

*Kelly O'Brien makes super-8 movies and TV documentaries in Toronto. Over the years she has organized various art projects around town by, for and about youth.*

## "Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art"

Art Gallery of Ontario  
30 January, 2002—28 April, 2002

### visual art

Review by Daniel Baird

Upon entering "Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art," one first encounters Colombian sculptor María Fernanda Cardoso's *Cemetery — Vertical Garden* (1992-1999), clusters of funereal white artificial flowers jutting out from the wall, and then the clots of nude baby dolls and bright flowers burned onto a sheath of orange silk in Brazilian artist Lia Menna Barreto's *Melted Dolls with Flowers* (1999). Sensuous and lyrical, neither of these pieces has the stylistic melodrama and excess associated with the baroque. Finely curated by Elizabeth Armstrong for the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, and accompanied by an exhibition catalogue, the fifteen artists in "Ultra Baroque" approach the baroque variously: as a heritage tainted by invasion, genocide and enslavement, as emblem of the exotic stereotypes through which Latin America has often been viewed, and, most important, as a promiscuously impure, fractal tone with which to explore the hybrid, transcultural identity and history that, in our chaotic, global culture, is increasingly everyone's. Scentless and undecaying, Cardoso's floral arrangements are floating acts of mourning for her country's chronic violence, and Barreto's molten dolls, flowers and reptiles embody the mutilated innocence of both childhood and nature.

Mexican brothers Einar and Jamex De La Torre's wall-length *The Source: Virgins and Crosses* (1999) are garish and jubilant. Nailed to a length of fake white fur are bright, hand-blown glass vaginas and crucifixes embellished with beads, eyes, winged monkeys, snakes and flowers. *The Source* is an impromptu urban shrine,



Works from the "Perfect Vehicles" series, José Antonio Hernández-Díez, 1993-96, mixed media.



*Sinners/Pecadores*, Valeska Soares, 1995, cast beeswax, hair, and metal, each 20x24x28cm.

Christian and pagan symbols freely mixed, the crosses lamenting the sacrifice of Chicano youth, the vaginas mocking the cult of virginity and reveling in pleasure and fertility. Like the De La Torre brothers, tejano artist Franco Mondini Ruiz works in a borderland style that waivers between the kitschy and refined, but Mondini Ruiz is both a fussy collector of objects and an aesthete geometrician. For the AGO incarnation of "Ultra Baroque," Mondini Ruiz rummaged through Toronto's second-hand shops, selecting objects around a fantasy wedding feast for Pauline Johnson, the legendary turn-of-the-century Canadian poet and performer whose father was a Mohawk chief and mother a British colonial. Forming a sleek, wedding-cake pyramid of white and candy lemon yellow objects, *Infinito Botanica, Toronto: The Wedding Feast of Pauline Johnson* is an idiosyncratic cabinet of ephemera, a queer marriage of fugitive elements, rife with wit and irony: there is a nude Greek bust festooned with flowers, a discus thrower wearing a paper Indian head-dress, old bottles of pineapple soda. Compared with the subtleties of the De La Torres and Mondini Ruiz, Mexican artist Rubén Ortiz Torres' line of altered baseball caps with names like "L.A. Rodney Kings" and "Objibwe Blackhawks"

stitched on their fronts, while offering a politically pointed riff on urban youth street fashion, are clever one-liners.

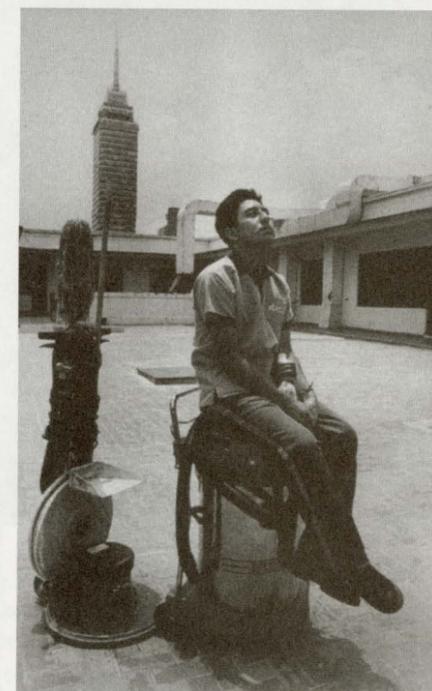
What painting there is in "Ultra Baroque" presses the boundary between painting and sculpture. In Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão's *Carpet-Style Tilework in Live Flesh* (1999), illusionistically rendered blue Portuguese tile is ripped open, revealing a grisly mass of ripped flesh and viscera fashioned out of painted foam. Varejão's at times overly literal metaphor of the ravaged body just beneath the decorous surfaces of the colonizer's culture turns parodic in *Meat à la Taunay*, where meaty chunks are hacked from a replica of a 17<sup>th</sup> century painting of Brazil and served on porcelain dishes arranged on the wall around the painting. The cannibalism here is richly ambiguous, for it both points to the barbarity of the invaders, and suggests the artist's own ambivalent devouring and transformation of European culture. Of all the artists in "Ultra Baroque," Mexican conceptual painter Yishai Jusidman remains closest to the traditions of the Spanish baroque. In his series of anamorphic clown faces painted on laminated wooden orbs, the palette is the dull brown of Ribera and

Velazquez, and the distorted faces, stretched all the way around the orbs, are sinister and mocking. The wooden orbs, and Jusidman's slyly academic use of an obscure optical device, alludes to the scientific advances that coincided with the conquest of the Americas: the tortured faces of Jusidman's spooky clowns envelop the world and mock European rationality.

Born in 1971, versatile Mexican artist Miguel Calderón is the show's youngest artist. For his *Employee of the Month* (1998) series, Calderón photographed guards and janitors at the National Museum of Art in Mexico City in poses taken from academic paintings in the museum's collection. In one photograph, a young man dressed in his janitor's uniform sits atop a vacuum cleaner on the museum's bleak rooftop, gazing beatifically into the beyond, and in another a woman pulls down her work shirt as though to reveal her left breast, looking away with stormy, heroic melodrama, while a man kisses her hand. *Employee of the Month* drips the class ironies that surround museums and their collections, but the tone of photographs is festive and irreverent: the guards and janitors breath life back into what are no doubt stultifying relics. In the dazzling two-channel video *Male Prostitute* (1999), a Mexican street band performs a chaotic cover of the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the UK." Dressed in tuxedos, playing their traditional acoustic guitars and horns, these musicians seem to be drunkenly laughing at the Sex Pistols' alienated rage: they, after all, are far more deeply trapped in an exploited underclass than the members of the Sex Pistols ever were. Like Calderón, Venezuelan artist José Antonio Hernández-Diez's work is rooted in youth culture and style. In his *Perfect Vehicles* series, he painted the bandana-covered faces of protesters at Caracas Central University on the bottoms of skateboards in the graphic style of wall murals and graffiti. *Perfect Vehicles* is, however, too static and literal to evoke restlessness and revolt, and is tamer and less complex than related work not included in the show. In the 1995 installation *Brotherhood*, for example, there are skateboards made of pork rinds melting under heat lamps, and a video of pork skateboards being devoured by packs of wild dogs.



*Rooms-São Paulo/Cuartos-São Paulo*, 1998, c-print, 183x230 cm.



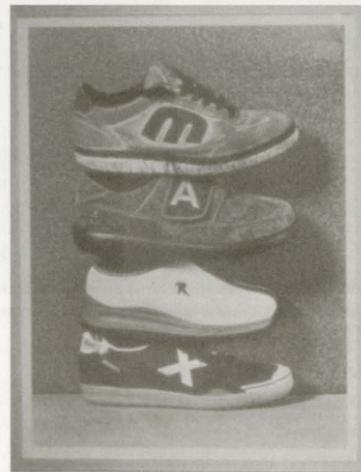
*Employee of the Month #7/Empleado del Mes #7* (detail), Miguel Calderón, 1998, c-print, 203x127 cm.



Bart Sánchez, Rubén Ortiz Torres, 1991, oil on particle board, 50x40x5.5 cm.

The strengths of "Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art" rest in work like that of Miguel Calderón, Einar and James De La Torre, Franco Mondini Ruiz, and perhaps also in Rochelle Costi's beautiful photographs of bedrooms in São Paolo, which occupy a zone of indeterminacy and flux and resist reduction to categories like history, style, nation or ethnicity. The show contains several curatorial missteps, however. Brazilian sculptor Valeska Soares' *Sinners* (1995), benches cast in bees' wax with hair-encrusted knee-prints, remains too derivative of both minimalist sculpture and the work of Robert Gober. Spanish/Colombian artist Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's haunting c-prints of an analysis of his subjects' DNA address issues of abstraction and the politics of technology remote from the work of the other artists in the show. In addition, the essays in the exhibition catalogue, as well as the appended sourcebook of texts relevant to the Latin American baroque, while providing useful historical context, are congested with academic neologisms like "trans-cultural," "post national," "post Latino" and "post identity" without anything resembling critical analysis. The result of such lazy verbal habits is that the writing fails to engage what is nuanced and idiosyncratic — "post national," "post identity" — about the art itself.

Daniel Baird is a writer based in Toronto and New York. He is Arts Editor of *The Brooklyn Rail*.



Marx (left); Kant (right); José Antonio Hernández-Díez, 2000, C-prints, each 210x160 cm.

# The National Day of Action for tuition freeze rally

Toronto  
6 February, 2002

## intervention

Review by Jason van Horne



Photo: Redmond.

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.

— Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1967

How do I go about positioning myself within the global revolution when I can't even manage to get out of bed before 11am? I'm always putting off until tomorrow what I should have

done yesterday, but even as a perpetual slacker, there does come occasion when I see cause to rouse myself into action. As a post-secondary education student, I see attending events to protest the rising costs of education as my extracurricular duty. Like the growing numbers of college and university students who are dependent on government loans to pay for schooling, I'm sobering up to the fact that my student debt is quickly becoming a financial reality. It's no longer just a bunch of abstract

numbers floating around on government forms and bank statements.

Only now, four years after beginning my post-secondary education, am I finally beginning to consider the words of warning of my family members, concerned over my decision to enroll in art school. "What are you going to do once you're done? How are you going to make money from that?" I've mumbled unconvincing answers to these questions countless times. I was determined not to let the idea of looming student debt keep me from choosing art school. Accumulating a debt was always a given, so why should I let it interfere in what educational direction I'd choose to take? The costs now are high and at this point I have yet to realize how manageable my debt will be, but too much

higher and I know for certain that I would not have been able to handle it.

On 6 February 2002, the Canadian Federation of Students called a day of action to draw attention to the ever-increasing costs of post-secondary education and to demand a halt to spiraling tuition fees. Events took place in over seventy communities. Once again I found myself standing out in the cold, in front of the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD), waiting for the pre-march that would eventually connect us, approximately 400 college and high school students, to perhaps another 4,000 students en route to Queen's Park.

A marching band, formed by a group of OCAD students who had been practicing their syn-



Photo: Redmond.

chronized drumming during the weeks leading up to the rally assembled in front of the school and worked the crowd. They had outfitted themselves, like any organized musical ensemble should, with matching attire (silk-screened coveralls and flags emblazoned with an image of a sunflower). They created a focal point for us to gather around. The drumming successfully pulled the crowd together and kept them riled up during the hour or so spent waiting for students to amass before the march began. I even began to regret not joining the band. Then I remembered that I keep a beat like someone who can't keep a beat.

Some classmates and I had decided to capture some footage of the rally for a short video that we were working on. The central idea of the video was to place our characters into surroundings that they were completely oblivious to, so the spectacle of the protest seemed like too good an opportunity to pass up. We grabbed our props and audio-visual equipment and hit the pavement. Using the crowd of protesters and the streets of Hogtown as our own impromptu movie set, we set ourselves up as "outsiders" amongst our peers. The afternoon was spent walking against the crowd of protesters. While they formed human chains of solidarity and sold copies of the Socialist Worker, we spewed off-the-cuff remarks about Banana Republic clearance sales and inane relationship advice into prop cell phones.

Our "day of action" footage acts as a telling document of our time spent navigating the crowds of excited youth and enthusiastic activists, amassing a video archive of dirty looks and the occasional middle finger directed toward us. It was revealing to experience the rally from the perspective of an outsider. Who were the protestors speaking to, though, if we, in our roles as individuals with philosophies contrary to theirs, inspired them to react with antagonism rather than with a desire to share their ideas?

Our experience of the event through the mediation of the video camera was an interesting one, and one that is becoming a larger part of protest culture. The growing presence of record-

ing and documenting devices at protests and rallies is happening for any number of reasons. One is simply the growing availability, affordability and ease of using the technologies. There is also an increased desire to record these events for future posterity. The "Big Ones," i.e., protests in Seattle, Washington and Quebec City, become historic happenings, social and cultural as well as political events that we want to document for ourselves, both to capture our own experiences and to serve as a kind of proof of having "been there."

Another reason, of course, is that with increased concerns over breaches in personal rights during heightened situations, the camera becomes a witness and potentially a line of defense, and therefore can function as something of a protective shield. There is the ever-present anticipation surrounding the unknown directions that any of these events could take. While nobody really wants a protest to spiral out of control, when personal and collective safety are on the line, one has to stay attuned to the potential for things to get out of hand. The resulting feeling is one of heightened anxiety, which can be an addictive high for protest participants. These events are inarguably exhilarating and even when one is completely committed to the cause, it can be hard to move beyond the detached feeling of being inside a video game.

Do the documents of these events as recorded by participants serve to communicate concerns to a wider audience? Do these events have a meaningful impact on anyone other than those participating in them? We made a lot of noise on February 6, but who was the performance for? No matter what the answers are to these questions, ultimately, we have to speak up in opposition to these mounting injustices. Perhaps we only do so for our own sakes, but one can hope that, eventually, the cumulative weight of the ongoing parade of rallies and marches will tip the scales in our favour.

*Jason van Horne is a student in the sculpture/installation program at the Ontario College Art and Design.*

short  
fuse

# VS. ART ADS

by Domenic Tomas



untitled, Recka, n.d., intervention.

Economics are determining what is a valid form of public expression, it seems corporations have as much access to public space as they want, while independent expression is repressed.

— Dave Meslin, Toronto Public Space Committee

The vision of the Graffiti Eradication program is for urban beautification, graffiti sub-culture erosion, stakeholder collaboration, reduction in crime, fear and disorder, increased property values, employment opportunities and tourism.

— Toronto Police Service Graffiti Eradication Program  
<http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/graffiti/index.htm>

During the course of a day, you are bombarded by more than 600 independent pieces of visual communication. Most of this clutter falls prey to the in-one-eye, out-the-other syndrome, but how is it effecting you subconsciously and should there be a price to pay?

While graffiti is shunned and criminalized, billboards are well funded and coveted venues of visual marketing that often go unquestioned and uncriticized. Why should their messages, fueled by the generation of profit and materialistic emotionally exploitative brain washing, reach a wider audience?

Seen as the illegitimate child of the beautiful graffiti murals for which Toronto is world renowned, tagging has been a way that people make the city belong to them, rather than vice versa; to see a piece of themselves in a sea of oversized, glossy pin-ups and eyesore advertising. Vandalism and hate crime are one thing, but blaming graffiti for social corrosion? If anything, the latter actions are symptoms of social and civic decay in the macro-organism that is the city. Perhaps, if more were done to improve the feel of the city for the humans that live in it rather than appeasing the interests of big business, we would see a lot less vandalism.

Enter the Visual Pollution Tax. This is a new tactic initiated by Toronto's T.H.E.M, flagship of the Foundation for the Advancement of Young Urban Artists. In the battle against rampant consumerism and redundant visual noise, the Visual Pollution Tax would see the City of Toronto collect funds from the businesses responsible for advertising on billboards, and use these funds to counteract visual pollution by increasing funding to public art initiatives such as murals and green projects. The Visual Pollution Tax would be collected through existing property-tax structures, thereby minimizing the cost of implementation.

When presented to the culture division of the City of Toronto for inclusion in their culture plan, this project was met with positive feedback. This may seem surprising, given the decidedly uncommercial nature of the project, but perhaps lately we are all feeling more and more like products of our visually oppressive environment.

The specific details of the Visual Pollution Tax would be decided through consultation with Toronto's citizens and public planning committees. Issues to be solved include the treatment of well-meaning non-profit billboards, the response of the advertising industry and the effect of such a tax on the consumer economy. "We are not saying that [commercial] billboards cannot exist - that would be wrong - or that vandalism is okay; a compromise must be reached," says Devon Ostrom, co-founder of T.H.E.M.

T.H.E.M. — the flagship division of the Foundation for the Advancement of Young Urban Artists — is composed of twenty emerging visual artists from Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Pittsburgh. They continue the Visual Pollution Tax initiative by asking for a show of public support and input for this experiment in democracy by clicking the petition button on their website at <http://www.them-art.com>.



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André Masson, *Les masses vives*, 1954, etching and aquatint on white paper. Edition of 30. Art Gallery of Ontario, gift of Beverly and Alan Gottlieb, 1999.  
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Meret Oppenheim, *The Spoon*, 1960, assemblage (glass, foam, and squirrel). © PRO LITTELS / SODART 2002