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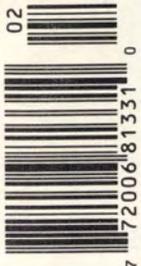
MAGAZINE

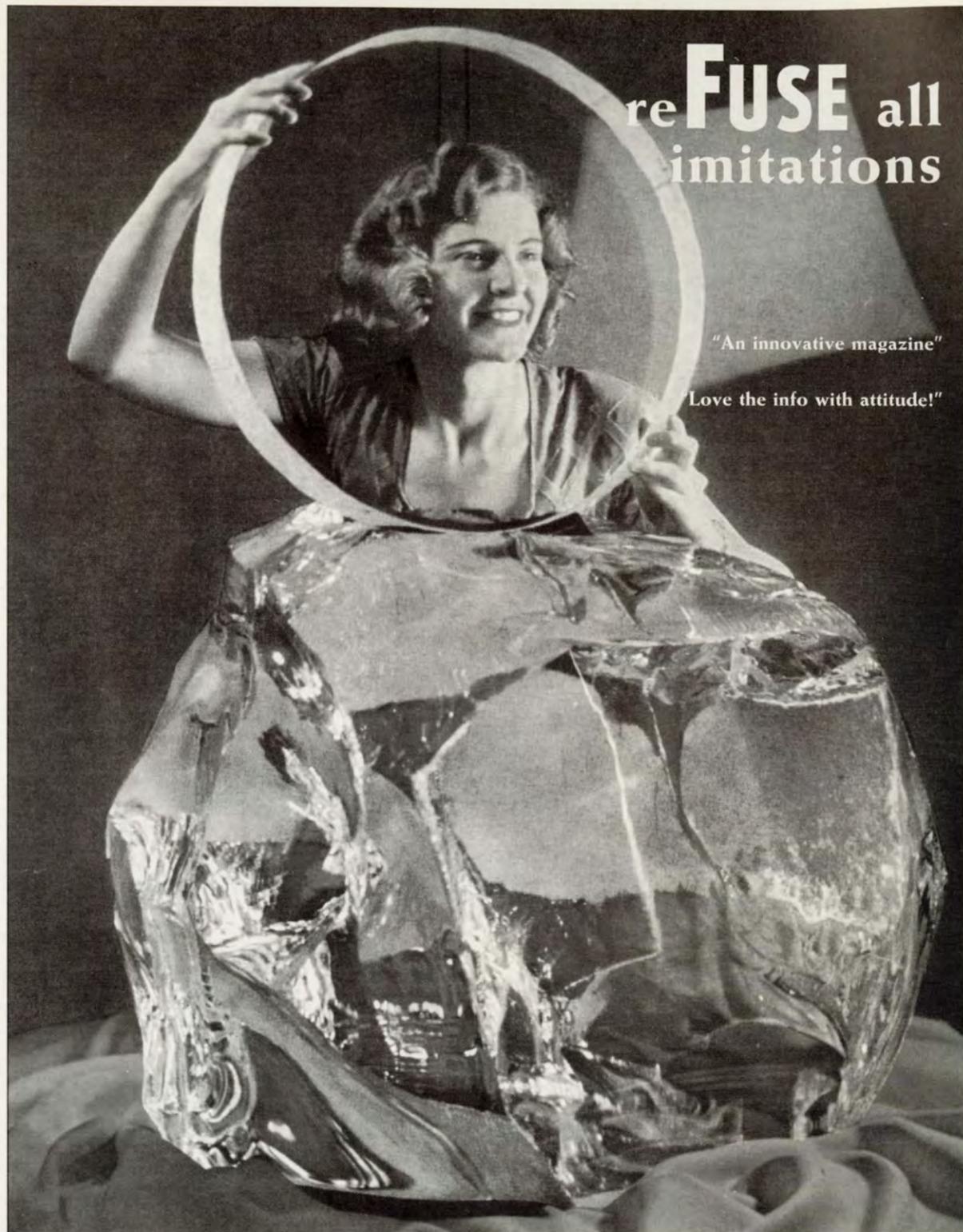
360° of Separation:
David McIntosh looks
at the Art of Referendum

Bruce Barber on the Art of Giving
Interviews with First Nations poet Chrystos
& photographer Jeffrey Thomas

Urban Design & "Public Art" on the Margins
Rereading Victim Art

plus reviews of "White Indians," Juicy Fruit, Wearable Environments





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Cover photo:
Loredana Sangiuliano & Petra Chevrier



Publicity still from
If Only I Were an Indian,
directed by John Paskievich,
16mm film, 1995, 80 min.
Review by Deborah Root on page 46.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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The Toronto Photographers Workshop is preparing a book on censorship and the visual arts, to be edited by Lorraine Johnson and published in 1996.

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EDITORIAL

The Canadian political-economic landscape assumes new dimensions of absurdity with each passing day. Corporations continue to post record high profits while every level of government focuses on slashing spending. The state seems intent on dismantling itself and abandoning the people of Canada to fend for ourselves in a hostile global marketplace. The short-sighted and self-interested ideology of debt and deficit reduction muscles ahead with autocratic disdain for the basic realities of survival. Canada's social safety net is in shreds and more and more people are falling through.

Funding cuts to Canada's cultural sector have been so relentless and severe that a collapse of the critical mass of artists and organizations required to produce cultural identity is feared by many. In the absence of any vision of the future beyond deficit reduction on the part of government, it falls to artists to re-invent ourselves and our organizations to ensure survival. As one of the key elements in Canada's cultural development for almost twenty years, *FUSE Magazine* has begun a process of redefinition and restructuring in order to continue to provide a focal point for urgent and thoughtful debates on art, culture and media.

We encourage our readers to take part in this process by continuing to support FUSE through your subscriptions and by informing us of your issues, ideas and experiences. With your support, FUSE will remain a vital, energetic and meaningful alternative site for cultural analysis and expression.

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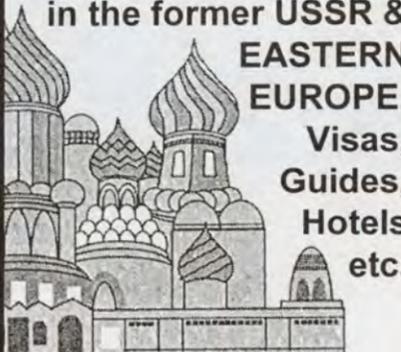
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Letters to the Editors

Leaky Boats, Battleships, Buddhism, Death Rays, Morphing, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Camelot

Robert Labossière's "A Newer Laocoön: Toward a Defense of Artists' Self-determination Through Public Arts Funding" (FUSE vol. 18, no. 5) seemed like a leaky rowboat welded to a battleship engine: sunk by its unwieldy power plant before it got anywhere. Just keeping the contraption moving for as long as it did seemed to entail sacrificing certain niceties—steering, for instance. While there is much to discuss in the piece, we'll concentrate on his treatment of the two articles we wrote, both in *Street*, October 1994. His reading of both seemed cursory, at best.

Labossière asserted that we "are less concerned about how artists connect with particular communities... than with the idea that artists are themselves a constituency with specific entitlements to public funding." But "Raze the Standard" called for reformatting visual art in a way that includes the public and keeps in mind artists' often erratic schedules. The piece emphatically did not demand that the Manitoba Arts Council pay some 400 artists \$27,000 a year. Instead, it proposed that the agency use its allotted funds more toward promoting the discipline, and suggested a visual art season, which would allow for a fruitful exchange between artists and public—rather than just maintaining a few artists. Labossière has us asking: "Why should artists not earn a self-respecting income?" Good question. By accident or design, prevailing practices drive a wedge between artists and a potentially sustaining public.

How we do business with government or the public needs to be reinvented from the ground up, starting with the premise that artists can earn a decent income from making art, not as government temps, but from the people around us. "Raze" suggested the first step: connecting artists with the broader community.

Similarly, Labossière glosses over key points in "Father Knows Art: Patronage and Its Discontents." He contends that the article

"avoid[s] theoretical issues," while ignoring its analysis of arts patronage as an ancient power relationship that remains unchanged by transient official ideologies. This is the crux of his problem: nowhere can he show that "symbolic discourse" and "legitimation" are any more than window-dressing for the old trade-off: scant support to keep artists mum about how the mechanism really works. Artists can be neo-Marxist, anarchist, Buddhist or anything else. It really doesn't matter so long as they rely on a system set up as a kind of state quarantine, governed by patronage appointees, run by officers with no clear obligation toward those whose careers they affect. "Discourse" is what people obsess on when they're too compromised and disheartened to say "structural change," a children's game played till the big people take over. Labossière's piece is an apologia for a *status quo* that hardly existed *ante*, is coming apart *nunc*, and extinct *futurus*.

Sincerely, Robert Mears & Scott Ellis

Robert Labossière Responds:

Robert Mears and Scott Ellis elaborate on, and correct, points of my article that referred to their writing in *Street Magazine*. I would apologize for misconstruing or giving short shrift to their work if that had been my intention but it was not. Rather, I hoped to show their critique of the Manitoba Arts Council as an example of the physical shift in the site of critical discourse away from the councils that I believe is essential if public funding is to be practically sustained. Moreover, I thought their emphasis on accountability and *real* economics was more concrete and practical than much current art discourse and hoped to convey that in my article.

Unfortunately, Ellis and Mears entirely missed my point that discourse must transcend the symbolic if it is to obtain greater efficacy, an oversight for which my steering cannot alone be blamed. They willfully

ignore the two examples I cited, at the Writers' Union and at the Artists' Run Network (ARN). Political control over the discourse about racism was seized, against the expectations and reservations of public funders, producing a not inconsiderable and certainly not a merely symbolic impact both within and beyond the communities those organizations represent. People would not have been so upset if the problems were merely discursive. Threats to withdraw funding from the Writing Thru Race conference and from the Arts Service Organizations programme that supports ARN, directly challenged the right of these organization to take effective actions to address racism.

I found in Ellis and Mears no willingness to critically examine the whole situation they and other artists find themselves in, instead focusing their discourse, like boys with a death ray, at the councils. What makes their discourse less "symbolic" than my own or others' is regrettably not explained by their letter.

I agree with Ellis and Mears that artists remain powerless to affect change in public funding and to legitimize their entitlement to it so long as they are dependent on a patronage system that is not accountable to them. I agree with them about the danger of funding structures that privilege dependency over difference—of gender, colour, race, nationality, language, politics or religion. Yet I find myself accused of making excuses for the *status quo*. I find it very disturbing, having spoken out on issues I thought Ellis and Mears were concerned about, to have been so sternly rebuked. Mears' and Ellis' unwillingness to recognize that their own disaffection is shared by other artists, including myself, does not bode well for the community they claim to represent or for their theory such as it is. A politic that will not acknowledge itself as such is a politic of style, small-minded but for its ability to instill fear. Such a discourse, though symbolically repugnant, becomes actually dangerous if it is allowed to silence others.

Where Have All the FILE's Gone?

As a past curator and critic of General Idea's work, it's hard to appreciate the presence of Robert W.G. Lee's "chocolate box" approach to art theory (AIDS Boogie Woogie, FUSE vol. 19, no. 1) although maybe it serves to stimulate a productive rejoinder?

Lee's piece was written as if we—as a specialized audience—know nothing about General Idea. Even if this working assumption was correct, why not then inform readers that G.I.'s first use of William Burroughs' "image virus" metaphor (from the '50s!)—also used by the image bank in Vancouver—appeared in their work a decade before the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic?

Why in this publication is it now acceptable to re-mythologise an artist's or an artwork's material strategy? Lee writes: "General Idea's formal technique of repetition speaks of magnitude. This serves to expand a reading of their AIDS work into a broader social and political context pointing to the magnitude of loss that makes AIDS a crisis."

Lee chooses both not to expand on closer meanings of "magnitude" (the "brightness of a star" and the General Idea "we want to be famous artists" fiction) or provide a more prosaic interpretation that would see G.I.'s use of their AIDS wallpaper in a gallery as a way of filling/occupying space. Lee's art reverence further disallows any allusion to G.I.'s understanding and deployment of cultural capital i.e. the circulation of visual art devices as upscale "knick knacks."

Similarly Lee's dilutions of Douglas Crimp's important writings on museums—there is no mention of General Idea's similar intervention with the conceptual construction and edifice burning of the Miss General Idea Pavilion—serves to exclude a necessary interrogation of the "good citizen" refuge of the commercial gallery and the museum permanent collection.

At the very least, would it have hurt to say if the museal strategy and activism of G.I.'s *One Year of AZT* was highly successful, then perhaps, the micro-"infected paintings" critique within the exhibit *Infections* finds the General Idea Project merely "going through the (pro)motions"?

Clive Robertson



Film & Video News

by Karen Tisch

BALSER AND FABO WIN AWARD

Congratulations are due to Toronto-based artists Michael Balser and Andy Fabo, who are the joint recipients of the first annual Margo Bindhardt Award, presented to the artists by Mayor Barbara Hall at a special ceremony on September 14 at Toronto's City Hall. Established by the Toronto Arts Council in honour of past president Margo Bindhardt, the award "recognizes Toronto artists and arts workers whose leadership and vision, whether through their creative work or cultural activism or both, have had a significant impact on the arts and arts awareness in Toronto."

Balser and Fabo are best known for their individual and collaborative works surrounding issues of gay identity, censorship and AIDS. They are founding members of Second Decade, an artist/activist collective devoted to producing and circulating information on AIDS. As a team they have produced a number of video projects, including *Survival of the*

Delirious (1988), *Blood Risk* (1989), *Beyond the Helms of the Sensors* (1991) and *Rough Cuts & Rough Treatments* (1994).

Individually, Balser has been involved in independent media production for over fifteen years, while Fabo rose to recognition in the early '80s as a painter and founding member of the Chromazone art collective. Balser's video projects have included *Voices of Positive Women* (1992) with Darien Taylor and *Positive Men* (1995). In 1991-92 he co-produced and coordinated a fourteen-part series on AIDS for Rogers and Maclean Hunter television. Fabo's drawings and installations have been exhibited internationally and are housed in the permanent collections of such galleries as the National Gallery of Art and the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Michael Balser's artistic contributions are also being celebrated in a recently published artist monograph, entitled *Michael Balser: Positive Practice*, a collaborative project of Reading Pictures and Second Decade.

Above: still from *Blood Risk*, Michael Balser and Andy Fabo, 1989, video, 22 min. Distributed by V Tape.

Errata

The article by Elaine Carol titled *The Chill Continues* (FUSE vol. 19, no. 1, p.17) contained the following errors: "live sex arts" should have read "live sex acts"; "appears to the visceral" should have read "appeals to the visceral"; in note 2, the name Clare Barclay was misspelled. FUSE apologizes for these errors.

What's In a Name?

CRITICAL MISREADINGS,
CONSERVATIVE VALUES AND
REREADING VICTIM ART

by Tom Folland

But *biopolitics* is anti-politics, a regression from politics to a new primitivism which promotes a self-identification through groups defined by categories like race or sex. Biopolitics has no time for humankind.¹

I'm forced to feel sorry... because of the way they present themselves: as dissed blacks, abused women, or disenfranchised homosexuals—as performers, in short, who make out of victimhood victim art.²

CONSERVATIVE COMPASSION

Conservatives are squeamish when it comes to culture. They are squeamish about the corporeality, sexuality and pain-proneness of the body that has figured so prominently in contemporary art. As long ago as 1990, then national revenue minister Otto Jelinek—in a bid to reduce Canada Council grants—declared that the theatre group *Buddies in Bad Times* made him want to throw up. More recently, artists like Ron Athey, whose performance last year at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis featured body piercing and blood-letting, have been denounced for "loathsomeness" and "moral decadence." The latter phrase is a favorite of Hilton Kramer, who devotes most of the pages of his magazine, *The New Criterion*, to denounce feminists, the "politically correct craze" in academia, and contemporary art that doesn't resign itself to easel painting and bronze casting. About Athey, Kramer certainly saw red and moreover saw reckless AIDS contamination in his lurid and hyperbolic description of "bloody towels zinging about overhead."³

The revulsion cultural conservatives feel about art is the physical component of the more cerebral

assaults upon affirmative action initiatives, public-funded art and social services; assaults that are always wrapped up in illogical moral arguments and directed at specific social groups. Affirmative action becomes "reverse discrimination," anti-hate legislation becomes "special status," and oppressed groups' attempts to organize are greeted with the label of "powerful special interest group." Collectivity is threatening to a social order that depends upon fragmentation, isolation and mechanical notions of individuality; it is therefore not surprising that issues of identity politics in art have raised the ire of conservatives.

In the 1960s and '70s the cultural left set the terms for definitions of political and cultural change in an era of civil rights at the end of conventional modernism. Beginning in the '80s, conservative activists began to appropriate cultural and critical theory. It was a time in which a wholesale reorganization of society saw homelessness double, an AIDS epidemic reach epic proportions because no one cared about who it affected, the beginnings of the rolling back of gains for disenfranchised groups and vigilant surveillance of culture. Culture, of course, has been contentious since the inception of modernism and conservative hostility to culture is not new. What is new is the centrality culture holds for conservative visions of a new world order characterized by home-bound computer workers and isolated consumers. Because any other kind of self-identification undermines this kind of globalism, conservative forces have settled their sights upon the now unavoidable issue of identity politics—in art and in daily life—and have decided that the problem is victimhood. Victim Art is a neat way to sum up the specificity and collectivity of an entire range of cultural work being produced by gays and lesbians, First Nations people, Blacks, Asians, feminists.

To be labeled a victim by someone else—as opposed to your own nomination—is to be disempowered. Thus, the patronizing and loaded label of "AIDS victim" was vigorously contested in the early days of AIDS activism in a recognition of the discursive

power of language. For power is the power to name and situate the terms of debate. With the simple and defamatory label of victim that has entered the vernacular of popular culture, conservative forces are attempting to overturn the strides that feminist, anti-racist and anti-homophobic movements have made. In the movie *Dangerous Minds*, Michelle Pfeiffer, a white woman mouthing the lessons of corporate ideology, exclaims to her Black and Latino students, "There are no victims in this classroom." The implication is that seeing yourself as a victim infantilizes you, and blinds you to change—that is, the right kind of change. This is the extreme politics of individuality with which Margaret Thatcher ruled England in the '80s, when she declared the government not a benevolent parent figure while dismantling public services. It is also one that Ontario Premier Mike Harris has happily adopted in the '90s. For conservatives, there are no real victims; hard work and obedience to the right ideology will erase difference. Discrimination, in new-right lingo, is fast becoming nothing more than a myth, a fiction hoisted upon ordinary people by special interest groups who really just want power.

In a larger sense, the development of victim ideology has occurred in tandem with the so-called recovery movement—various twelve-step programs, therapy, abuse counselling et al., in which the first stage toward regaining a sense of self and effecting change is recognizing that one is a victim, a victim of parental, spousal or social abuse. But any progressive and empowering notions of victimhood have been appropriated as part of government speak. Mike Harris' rapid dismantling of any semblance of humane social policies in Ontario is a '90s version of "tough love," or, I'm doing this for your own good. For the first time a U.S. president can say "I feel your pain," as an indication of his position on domestic policy. Arianna Huffington, a conservative values spokesperson and, oddly enough, author of a book on Picasso, is a senior fellow at the Progress and Freedom Foundation (read right-wing think-tank) where she directs the Center for Effective Compassion, Effective being the operative term. For all three, empathy is the weapon, victimhood the hated target.

IS THERE A VICTIM IN THIS CLASSROOM?

Much like Kate Taylor's summary dismissal of last year's exhibition about breast cancer in *The Globe & Mail*, Arlene Croce, in her now infamous diatribe in *The New Yorker* against performer Bill T. Jones, crystallized the growing backlash against identity politics for popular discourse. Croce argued that Bill T. Jones' performance put itself beyond aesthetic

criticism because of his use of people with different kinds of illnesses. His work purportedly disempowered critics like herself. Not speaking to a fictive universal human condition, the defining character of traditional bourgeois aesthetics, Jones' performance spoke more to the specificity of identity in art and political culture, one that comes from localized and politicized experience. It is this concept of identity that Croce and others feel is destroying art. In the case of affirmative action and anti-discrimination, it is seen to be destroying liberal democracy and the freedom of market forces. In one sense, it's really that last battle cry of the old war horse of bourgeois idealism in which the universality of experience suppresses difference because it's really not that universal. It is the values of a ruling elite, globally re-constructed and needing empty signifiers now more than ever.

Croce shares company with John Fekete, author of *Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising*. Whereas Croce has popularized identity politics for liberals with her labelling of Jones' work as Victim Art, Fekete, the thinking man's "angry white male," places the conservative backlash within the context of critical theory, giving it a patina of respectability for left-leaning intellectuals uncomfortable with identity politics within the context of the classroom. With a veneer of progressive credentials, Fekete sets out to denounce the so-called politically correct craze that has been sweeping universities in a rather vitriolic attack upon women. Biofeminists have hijacked the women's movement, Fekete claims. He goes on to chide those feminists at variance with Biofeminists to "advertise their difference."⁴ Those who agree with his main contention—that Biofeminists are rewriting Canadian law to demonize men and provide women with special status and an ontological condition of victimhood—are urged to fan out and spread his word to stop this "pandemic of moral panic."⁵

For Fekete, like Michelle Pfeiffer's earnest school teacher in *Dangerous Minds*, there are no victims. The next step is to declare, as Dinesh D'Souza has in his recent book *The End of Racism*, that there are no racists. No racists, no homophobes, no misogynists. What we are left with is the paranoid projection of powerful individuals masquerading as victims in their bid for political power. Thus, William A. Henry in his recent book *In Defense of Elitism* can declare: "some of the most outrageous misstatements in textbooks are written in deliberately to placate pressure groups, ... most notably ardent feminists, whom [one] executive describes as 'the most relentless, overall the worst.' The person in question is sufficiently fearful of retaliation not to want to be identified by name, age, gender."⁶ Fekete concurs. In

his book, he tells how a young student, "became overwrought...[and] burst into tears, and disclosed to the class that she was herself lesbian.... [T]here was evidence before the arbitration that B had previously identified herself publicly as a lesbian.... Her story highlights the opportunism of powerful interests..."⁷ (emphasis added).

VICTIM CRITICS

There have been innumerable editorials, essays, and debates over the past year since Arlene Croce's "Discussing the Undiscussable" essay. Homi K. Babha, for instance, in an *Artforum* article in April, while acknowledging the ideological context, chose to battle over definitions with Croce; Jones' performance is a work about survival not victimhood, he chided. *Mix* magazine, in its inaugural issue, provided a rousing summary from critics and artists who addressed, among other things, a broader social and political context. There is, however, a dimension to the argument missing, one that is a more complex construction and pertains to the social power of art. The social forces that have wrought the ideology of victimhood—the recovery movement, various political movements, postmodernist theories of subjectivity and identity politics—are mirrored in the reaction of art and art criticism whereby one only needs to catalogue the appropriately ambiguous references to race, sexuality, "issues," et al. for the work to garner its appropriately critical credentials. In critical writing, the result is a kind of blindness whereby the work in question is never really engaged on its own terms, but slotted into an already existing paradigm of what may very well be an exhausted, or least a beleaguered critical language.

It is becoming increasingly hard to read art outside of a most profound and powerful binarism: victim art/not victim art. Postmodern cultural theories of identity, specifically feminist and later gay and racial politics, in which dominant representations have come to define subjectivity leaving an aphasia of self-representation, have insisted upon identity-inscribed readings that the cultural right now appropriates as a fiction of victimhood. In this context, Cindy Sherman is perhaps the first victim artist; her photographed images of herself have literally catalogued the various states of culturally inscribed femininity: passive, gazed-upon, masqueraded, always represented, never self-representing. Or think of Lisa Steele's 1973 video *Birthday Suit*, in which she documents for the camera the various imperfections of her body—never good enough, never ideal. But to have asserted the opposite would



Untitled, June Clark-Greenberg, photoetching, 1994.
Text: "Even then I knew that people mistook kindness for weakness."
Photo credit: Isaac Applebaum; photo courtesy the Koffler Gallery.

have been, in recovery-movement speak, the supreme act of denial. In delineating the status of patriarchal representations of femininity, these works were important cultural aspects of a representational intervention into the political arena. Similarly, much of the video and artwork by artists in response to the AIDS crisis has been about resisting, changing and deconstructing dominant media representations of gay men and AIDS.

Fekete, typically, lays the blame for a victim/not victim polarization at the feet of victims themselves, instead of situating it where it belongs: within the regressive and reductive language of right-wing politics. This polarization has had an effect upon the most well-meaning of art critics and curators, who find themselves addressing issues in art that might not even be there. In an exhibition catalogue last year for the Koffler Center, curator Carolyn Bell Farrell provided a critical but ultimately reductive reading of June Clark-Greenberg's work when she wrote that *Whispering City* "[b]ears specific connotations of class, race, and gender." Farrell went on to say that Clark-Greenberg's work "embod[ies] a

history of colonialist subjugation," and "subvert[s] the art historical conventions which silence the experience of women and those at the fringes of social power." She ascribes to the work the power to "defy closure," to "step outside of museological dictates," and to "expose the contradictions between the ideological systems our society upholds and the realities of lived experience."⁸ These are important claims—notwithstanding the fact that single works of art do not have the power to dismantle ideological systems with one fell swoop—however, they don't appear to really describe Clark-Greenberg's art. Instead they refer in a generalized way to the issues that critical art has engaged over the past two decades.

June Clark-Greenberg created a series of autobiographical narratives with photo-text and an array of boxed objects upon a table. It was a highly subjective and evocative series of work that drew upon autobiography, found objects, poetic text and narrative. Farrell essentially foreclosed upon any reading of her work, other than a predominantly racial one, with such force that mere objects in a box, childhood mementos, became emblems of "racist oppression and sexist domination."⁸ In an attempt to fit the exhibition into a more familiar

critical framework, Carolyn Bell Farrell had the artist performing the by now *de rigeur* critique of dominant discourses in an affirmation of otherness.⁹

The overused theoretical apparatus of the beleaguered term "representation," and a stale critical language that is nothing more than an aesthetics of victimhood determined by an engagement with "dominant representations," are by now standard fare for art reviewing. Particularly with art produced by gays, lesbians and people of colour, there is a critical blindness that reduces art to essentialist constructs of identity allowing no complexity or ambiguity to emerge. Most strikingly, in Farrell's appraisal of Clark-Greenberg, there is no real engagement with the work itself, only rote description of postmodern art in general.

Power is the power to name and discursively situate the terms of the debate. Farrell is but one of many examples of critics who appropriate the language of self-determination and unwittingly end up playing into the hands of the right. Rather than become fodder for conservative attacks upon culture by buying into the very polarized set of terms operating now around resistant and engaged cultural practices, cultural criticism needs to rethink and resist the limited terms with which the cultural war is being waged.

This essay was written with the financial support of the Ontario Arts Council's Grants to Arts Writers Program. I extend thanks for their support of my work.

Tom Folland is an independent art critic and curator, part-time instructor in art history at the Ontario College of Art and member of the editorial board at FUSE.

Notes

1. John Fekete, *Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising* (Toronto: Robert Davies Publishing, 1994), p. 22.
2. Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable," *The New Yorker*, 26 December 1994, 2 January 1995, p. 55.
3. Hilton Kramer, "Notes and Comments," *The New Criterion*, May 1994, p. 2.
4. Fekete, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
6. William A. Henry III, *In Defense of Elitism* (New York: Doubleday, 1994).
7. Fekete, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-228.
8. All quotes from Carolyn Bell Farrell, "At The Still Point," *June Clark-Greenberg: Whispering City* (The Koffler Gallery, 1994), p. 4.
9. See my review, "June Clark-Greenberg: Whispering City," *Parachute*, April/May/June 1995, pp. 57-58.

Public Art and Its Discontents

URBAN DESIGN

AND "PUBLIC" ART ON THE MARGINS

by Gordon Brent Ingram

Urban Revisions: Current Projects for the Public World
Centre canadien d'architecture, Montreal
October 19, 1994–January 15, 1995.
University Art Museum, Berkeley, California
March 15, 1995–July 16, 1995.

Urban Diary
Walter Hood
University Art Museum, Berkeley
March 4, 1995–May 7, 1995.

The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History
by Dolores Hayden
(Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995)

Why are there so few discussions on public and environmental art in contemporary journals like FUSE and *Border/Lines*? Why is so little of the new wave of public art concerned with making new statements? Why, with all the postmodern emphasis on "site-specificity"¹ and with so much talk of urban design being "art," is so little of it representative of marginalized communities and perspectives?

The short answer goes like this: for most of the last five hundred years much of western cultural expression has been about aggrandizing the rich and Eurocentric through architecture, design of public places, and monuments. The late twentieth century saw the direction of art deviate from that primary social function—but only so far. For a while, naked expressions of wealth and power were slightly uncool but this is now changing. Public art has emerged in this contradictory time with renewed pressures for control and *de facto* privatization of public spaces while being driven by various forces

for inclusion. But as the avant-garde is consumed by global capital's addiction to consumption of the new, public art's typical compromises around space and real estate have effectively defanged much of its radical and transformative potential. End of the short answer.

There is a longer answer to why so much of the art in contemporary urban design still only vaguely addresses new perspectives, marginality and democratic decision-making over public space. It comes out between the lines of *Urban Revisions*,² in the walk down to Walter Hood's *Urban Diary*, which in Berkeley was in the basement below, and in Dolores Hayden's important new book on relationships between local history and public art with its focus on women and communities of colour.³

In the very large exhibition, *Urban Revisions*, that should have been a milestone but is not, planning is architecture is art is the logic that suggests that urban design can be examined critically as culture. The twentieth century has seen destruction or privatization of much of the public space that spawned the democratic and collectivist revolutions of the past two centuries. Disturbingly, very little of the social and environmentalist activism of recent decades has translated into new designs or have been concretized into new "space," places, or recorded culture.

Urban Revisions, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles with the Canadian Centre for Architecture, ambitiously explores new ways to reconstruct public spaces and, indeed, to place this in a central position on the frontiers of the making of art. Unfortunately, much of the work in the exhibition still works safely within the confines of the various design "professions" and their various guilds, while more interesting cultural statements are thrown in as afterthoughts. There are many untapped possibilities in this rich cusp of "design," "environment," and "art" but in *Urban Revisions* we get dry technical exercises with a bit of colour splashed in at the last minute. At best, *Urban Revisions* is a recap of

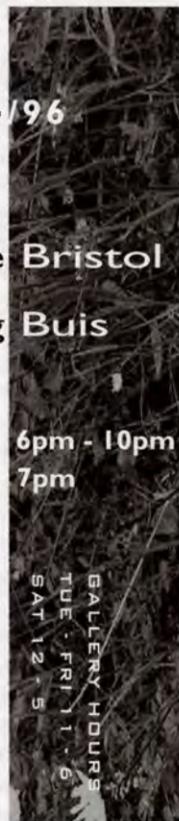
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"progressive," and that does not mean radical, environmental design over the last twenty years. We all know the canons. Cars are bad and public transportation is good. Public art is good especially when no group is offended. "Diversity" is good as long as it does not bite and stays in the *barrio*. But where are the edges of these landscapes of declining liberalism and intensifying contests over public space, its functions, representation and real estate values? What are the sources of new conflict? Little of this is clear in the descriptions and designs. And, sadly, the "public" is only vaguely differentiated through attempts at "revision" skirting confrontation in favour of the blandness of vaguely ecological decorum. The supposedly "new directions" of *Urban Revisions* call for the expansion of non-automobile corridors and pedestrian neighbourhoods and increased public participation in planning and design processes. But only a few of the works confront the power of economic groups and the role of the design practitioner and would-be artist as mediator of social conflict.

Fortunately, there are three projects that begin to address power in civic space and the role that contemporary art might play. There is one project on the (Black/Latino/Asian) Crenshaw neighborhood of south central Los Angeles, another on the Uhuru Gardens of the same area, and a "Site Plan for a Park for the New World" from Raleigh, North Carolina. The video installation, "Crenshaw Neighbourhood Plan/Cultural Explainers Project" most carefully deconstructs underlying power dynamics as they are played out in discussions around public art and, in particular, in questions of which groups are allocated the resources to remember which historical experiences. Early on an elderly Latino defines public art as "building...monuments to people's history" and later two Latino artists link public representation to strategies for countering gentrification.

[H]ow do you control something that gave birth to itself?... [N]ow you have...developers who come in to dictate what is happening...it's now an us-against-them mentality and it sucks.... They just came in and said we really like this bohemian-type atmosphere but we don't like people kissing in the back alley...*Barrio* art...is outdoor...is out there...but sometimes we use murals as methods for putting a band aid on a sore essentially to colonize or gentrify.... What is problematic is that these same strategies are used to avoid assimilation.... We must resist becoming decorative.⁴

The Crenshaw video is particularly exciting because of its recognition of the power of language

and the disparities in articulations between Spanish and English.

As for accessibility of the "design process," the project on Uhuru Gardens is the clearest and most authentically articulates a community based approach to creative exchange and decision-making—even if the final design looks oddly like that of a theme park. Jenny Holzer's vision for a park for the New World⁵ begins to explore power dynamics but falls short of biting the (public agency) hand that feeds. There is her standard wall of sloganeering but little sense of its relationship to the users of the park. *Urban Revisions* certainly poses some interesting questions about the possibilities of linking public art with grassroots environmental activism but, because of its attempt to enhance the traditional roles of the design practitioner, most of the radical implications are pointedly ignored. The catalogue for *Urban Revisions* is more accessible than the exhibition itself but unfortunately it omits the texts and most of the images from the videos in the exhibition. There are a number of very useful written pieces, not actually presented in the exhibition itself, such one by urban theorist Mike Davis on public art and the "cannibal ecology" of Los Angeles.

In contrast to the subtle re-enforcements of power in public spaces, and the insecure positions of planners and designers in those mediations, Walter Hood's *Urban Diary* begins to strip away the hype about people and place. Hood is a Berkeley-trained, African-American landscape architect. He lives and has his professional practice in a poor Black neighbourhood of Oakland that is the focus of *Urban Diary*. Hood grapples with and sometimes celebrates various layers of Black culture in the landscape of home. He relates design responses to his position as (privileged) insider, and is careful to listen and watch before proposing his own solutions. While his design statements are understated, there is an honesty and integrity that lays the basis for more authentic linkages between "community," narratives of place, and activist design response. Here, the urban design response as art is very much about celebrating the weave of the culture that already exists and that is surviving on its own terms.

Urban Diary sustains a thin thread of positions that examine and deconstruct notions of power and aesthetic responses to inevitably contested neighbourhood spaces. Given the twin spectres of degradation of poor inner city environments and their *de facto* privatization by the privileged, many more careful looks at home and "place" as sites of marginality and resistance are needed. Such new environmental

art will need to begin, much more, with the studied respect of insider/outsider Hood than the slightly modified reproduction of the same old urban power relations seen in *Urban Revisions*. In all of these new and authentically democratic urban visions, art is often tied to a reclamation of memory that is both personal and collective. The public outdoor site becomes a counter-point to the distortion of history and portrayal of minority cultures. Hence, the importance of Dolores Hayden's new book, *The Power of Place*.

In *The Power of Place*, Hayden's defines one function for public art as to "rebuild public memory"⁶ Further, she relates "restoring significant shared memory"⁷ to the more inclusive use of public space through "connecting the history of struggle over urban space with the poetics of occupying particular place."⁸ She sees the actual locating of histories and events, through mapping, and the revitalized use of public space as central to new urban political agendas. Her tools for delving into local memory are both mental sketches, called "cognitive maps,"⁹ and the more personalized processes of individual artists. But while *The Power of Place* has a lot of theory woven into its discussions, Hayden's specific descriptions of the long-term efforts to redevelop public memory in Los Angeles and to work it into art practices are far more compelling and inspiring. *The Power of Place* will probably become the single most important text on public art in the 1990s.

The long answer to why so much "public" art is still not very public? Much of the design processes, with their inevitably political aspects, that lead up to site-based art and even site design as art have been less about listening to the power of place and more about reworking modernist power relationships, especially those associated with the corporations and the government bureaucracies. There is a resulting negation in collective memory that makes it difficult to produce designs that are compelling or authentic—even in proposals that have a veneer of being democratic, feminist, "multicultural," or pro-labour. Given the growing importance of public pedestrian spaces, as alternatives to car-bound suburban isolation, art on these sites which "works" must take into account local memory while "coming clean" on the particular "take," "design response," and political position of the public arts bureaucrats and artist(s). Delving into the editing and *de facto* censorship processes that go on in such design processes will lay the basis for vital new links between urban design and public art. Truly public art is inevitable but it will take a lot more listening, over longer periods, to the many dissonant voices that make up the real power of place.

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Gordon Brent Ingram is an environmental planner in Vancouver and first editor for the 1996 anthology, *Queers in Space: Landscapes of Marginalized Sexualities and Communities*.

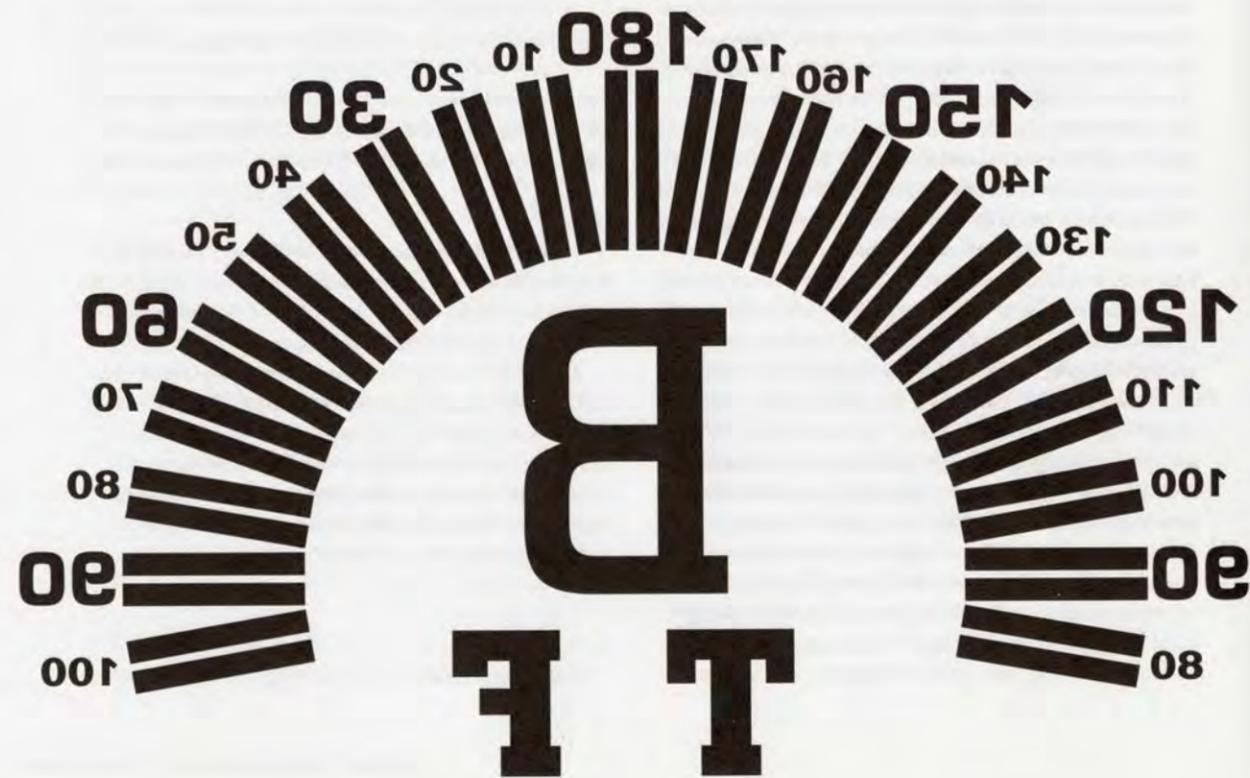
Notes

1. Nina Felshin, "Introduction," *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*. Nina Felshin, ed., (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), p. 20.
2. *Urban Revisions: Current Projects for the Public Realm*, Russell Ferguson ed., (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994).
3. Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995).
4. *Crenshaw Neighborhood Plan Cultural Explainers Project* (edited by Glen Kaino), video, 1994, 20 min. Produced through the Social and Public Art Resource Center of Los Angeles and Andale, Andale, and ADOBE, Los Angeles.
5. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-45.
6. Hayden, *op. cit.*, p. xv.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.

360 DEGREES

There is a price to pay for victory or defeat.
—Pierre Falardeau¹

On October 30, 1995, the people of Quebec went to the polls in unprecedented numbers to perform the nearly impossible task of distilling the chaos and conflict of the referendum campaign's many passions and promises, threats and dreams, heroes and villains into an unequivocal "yes" or "no." In the days leading up to the vote, the complexity of this decision-making process was compounded by a series of partisan manipulations of the implication of each option, whereby the respective meanings of "yes" and "no" votes were shifted and emptied; "yes" was contorted to mean "maybe" and nobody really knew what "no" meant. In Montreal the pre-vote atmosphere was electric and elusive, with individual sentiments ranging from elation and hope to fear and confusion. The city itself took on a curious carnivalesque appearance. With the vote scheduled for the day preceding Hallowe'en, lurid images of witches, ghosts and pumpkins sprung up randomly among the partisan displays of "Oui" and "Non" campaign signs.



OF SEPARATION

NOTES ON FACTS AND FICTIONS OF SELF AND NATION IN THE RECURRING QUEBEC REFERENDUM

by David McIntosh

In this context of widespread instability and disorientation, a series of political spectacles were staged to enact fundamental mythologies in order to re-assert authority, order and power. By far the most significant of these spectacles was the October 27 Crusade for Canada demonstration in Place du Canada, the centre of Montreal's financial district formerly known as Dominion Square. Place du Canada is ruled by Quebec's Conrad Black, Paul Desmarais, a rabid federalist press baron and president of the aptly named Power Corporation. For weeks the "no" forces and English media had been stirring up "I love Quebec" sentiment among "ordinary" Canadians, especially in the West. A low point in this effort was reached when CBC National News aired the views of a hairdresser from Saskatchewan who urged Quebec to stay in the country because Canada is like a potato, which rots when a piece is cut off. On the day of the Crusade for Canada rally, Western Canadian phone companies offered free phone lines for calls to Quebec; many Montrealers, seemingly picked out of phone books by utter strangers for having French-looking last names, received the political equivalent of obscene phone calls pleading with them to feel the "love" and vote "no."

The Crusade for Canada, capitalizing on this sincere but misguided and artificially induced sentiment, summoned the faithful to Montreal on free or reduced rate planes, trains and buses. Two days before the referendum vote, an invasionary army of pilgrims anywhere from 35,000 to 150,000 strong trekked across the country to evoke the power of the most potent Canadian victor/victim mythology—the heroic image of Terry Fox binding Canada from sea to shining sea. The Canadian collective subconscious seems ruled by an almost mediaeval drive to mortify the flesh by walking, crawling, running, cycling or slithering across the vast landscape in order to dominate and claim it as "nation." The spectacle of the ecstatic pilgrims also provided temporary release and distraction from an infinitely more noxious competing myth—that of government debt and deficit, which manifests itself in the reduction and withdrawal of the state from every form of collective action. This destruction myth is propagated by an unholy alliance between right wing political ideology and corporate financial interests, the very same

forces which underwrote the Crusade for Canada. For these forces, the prospect of a self-determining nation being built by Quebecers interferes with the interests of their own emerging "nation" of transnational wealth, ruled by a corporate oligarchy dedicated to the sole principle of profit and unallied to any identity, language, culture, history or memory. And so we are left with the ludicrous sight of tens of thousands of naive voices chanting in the streets of Montreal for the survival of the Canadian nation while the nation is being dismantled.

Another deluded power myth of the Canadian nation that was put into high relief in the days leading up to the referendum is that of "two founding nations," the official creation myth that erroneously re-orders several hundred years of history to insist that Canada is a collaborative construction of French and English nations. The Eeyouch (Cree) and the Inuit nations, which together lay claim to two-thirds of Quebec territory (the Mohawk nation lays claim to the other third), held their own referenda to decide on their relationship to a sovereign Quebec. Both First Nations overwhelmingly rejected participation in any form of Quebec independence. Eeyouch Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, Inuit Chief Zeebeedee Nungak and Mohawk Chief Billy Two Rivers asserted their peoples' right to self-determination and territorial integrity. The "two founding nations" myth crumbled in the face of this aboriginal challenge. The government of Quebec rejected First Nations claims for self-determination and territorial sovereignty, even though it was engaged in its

own version of the same project. The government of Canada insisted on the primacy and indivisibility of its sovereign authority by rejecting the legitimacy of both Quebec and First Nations aspirations. The Eeyouch and Inuit referenda emptied "two nations" of power and relevance, insisting on a new topography of territories that sets the notion of "one nation" in dynamic opposition to the emergence of "many nations."

In an attenuated atmosphere of crisis and against a convoluted field of intentions and meanings, Quebecers chose between "yes" and "no" on October 30. After the polls closed in Montreal, the streets were uncharacteristically quiet, as people gathered around television sets in their homes or in bars to watch the returns. The "yes" campaign's early lead prompted speculation about a repeat of the 1970 October Crisis and "Trudeau's Tantrum" should the *sovereignists* win. Would Chrétien follow suit and send in the army again? Such justifiable fears were not born out. The final indecisive 50/50 split between "yes" and "no" signified neither victory or defeat, but rather a frustrating perpetuation of tenacious duality. The fault lines in the collective conscious and subconscious revealed during the referendum campaign cracked wide open after the vote, and a schizophrenic frenzy of acrimonious self-mutilation ensued. The love professed just days earlier turned quickly into hate as inept politicians clawed viciously at each other for any shred of authority and advantage. The patrician media response to the stalemate was suitably oblique; Globe and Mail neo-con ideologues mouthed flatulent editorial platitudes about Canada's nationalism as "modern, liberal, decent, tolerant and colour-blind."² The overwrought patriot games of the preceding weeks degenerated into the cruelest of tautologies. To paraphrase Pierre Falardeau, there is a price to pay for a stalemate.

My idea of self was everything but simple. I realized I was two in the same body. I started to say "we" to talk about "me." *C'était un cauchemar.* Fuck off! It was a dream come true.

—Earl Tremblay/Robert Morin³

History, Imagination and Action:

Video Artists for Independence

[The nation] is an imagined political community.... Communities are distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.⁴

The richly woven cultural and social fabric of Quebec's self-determination movement is immune to the impoverished imagination and dysfunctional mythologies of Canada's official nationalism, official in that it is "conscious, self-protective... emanating from the state and serving the interests of the state first and foremost."⁵ Quebec nationalism is deep, dynamic and persistent. It is rooted in a fertile interaction of history, memory, imagination and imagery, or, in the terms elaborated by anthropologist Michael Taussig, it is an "intricately construed, long-standing, unconscious cultural formations of meaning—modes of feeling—whose social network of tacit conventions and imagery lies in a symbolic world."⁶ It is this powerful construction of Quebec's collective consciousness that has consistently been resisted, ignored or denied by Canada's official nationalism, but that houses the implicit knowledge and imagery required to reconceive and move beyond the "yes/no," "we/me," "50/50" impasse.

One of the most innovative and inspiring socio-cultural traditions in Quebec is that of the moving image. From its first flowering as direct cinema in the early 1950's to contemporary video by artists, the moving image has been one of the primary carriers of national identity, action and imagination. A recent instance of this tradition's dynamic intimacy with the struggle for a self-determining nation is the collective video project *1837 secondes pour l'indépendance (1837 Seconds for Independence)*. Coordinated by the Montreal artists' centre Coop Vidéo, this tape brings together sixty-eight self-financed artists' promotional videos, most around sixty seconds in length, all supporting the "yes" option in the referendum. Some of the pieces are by established film and video artists, such as Pierre Falardeau, Jeanne Crepeau, Denis Chouinard, Bernard Emond and Robert Morin, while most are by developing and first-time artists. Every submission was included in the final compilation.

The breadth of participation in the project ensures that every film and television style and genre, from horror and romance to evening news and video games, is appropriated, reworked and deployed in support of independence. The organizing imagery of these works is equally diverse, including divorce, birth, bodily functions, family relations, sex, hockey and wrestling, while the sentiments expressed range from humour to anger. Some pieces evoke separation with elegant parody, such as Roch Lapierre's simple coverage of a man combing a centre part in his hair. Others are more analytically constructed, for example Denis Chouinard's burning mini-history of anti-Quebec actions by the KKK, the Heritage Front and the RCMP. This boisterous participatory project is engaging and provocative, demonstrating a broad-based commitment to self-determination that is so deeply intertwined with the framework of production of cultural and media artifacts as to be

inseparable. This compilation tape was also distributed in an unconventional manner established by Pierre Falardeau for the circulation of his 1993 short film *Le Temps des bouffons*, a searing indictment of the colonialist behaviours of Quebec federalists. Falardeau released his film on tape directly into the public domain, renouncing his copyright and explicitly encouraging viewers to copy and disseminate the tape as widely as possible. The same underground distribution strategy was applied to *1837 secondes pour l'indépendance*. While it may not be possible to quantify its impact, its contents have been subversively circulated through public consciousness.

It is also important that the significance of the title of this project not be overlooked. The number "1837" may reflect the length of the tape in seconds but, more importantly, it refers to the Rebellion of 1837, when nationalist and democrat Joseph Papineau led his "patriote" forces in the first armed revolt against British colonial rule by Quebecers. Papineau was defeated but he is still remembered in Quebec as the first hero of self-determination. In referring to Papineau's Rebellion, *1837 secondes pour l'indépendance* stands as a clearly articulated point of intersection between history, memory and contemporary imagination. History is not simply an objectively ordered unfolding of events over time in Quebec, but rather a subjectively produced experience of the nation's past. A skeletal overview of some of the fundamental historical events of nation and identity which resonate through and inform contemporary cultural practices and social relations includes: André Laurendeau's electoral success with the nationalist Bloc Populaire (precursor of the Bloc Québécois) in federal Parliament in the 1940s, the formation of the Parti Québécois in 1968; the FLQ kidnappings and the retaliatory suspension of civil liberties and army occupation ordered by Pierre Trudeau under the War Measures Act in 1970; the election victory of René Lévesque and the Parti Québécois in 1978; and the first sovereignty referendum in 1980 where the independence option gathered forty percent of the vote. It is no coincidence that Quebec's national motto is "Je me souviens."

The Politics of Fact and Fiction:

The Films of Gilles Groulx

Experiential appropriation of the past...incorporates historical and social fantasy sensitive to the underground existence of forbidden images. In turning to such images, people are reflecting on their symbolic potential to fulfill hopes for release from suffering.⁷

The "1837" project is firmly rooted in Quebec's rich tradition of imagination and imagery that stretches back to the visionary, liberationist work of one of the pioneers of cinema in Quebec, Gilles Groulx. A prolific master of spectacle, an inspired formal experimenter and a committed Marxist and Quebec nationalist, Groulx effected enormous shifts in the symbolic order that reigned in Quebec with such vital works as *Les Raquetteurs* (1958) and *Le chat dans le sac* (1964). Since his death in 1994, many of his fourteen films left

linguishing in archives have begun to be screened again; the majority of Groulx's films have never been released in an English version, and so have remained largely inaccessible outside of Quebec. Two of these works bear special significance to representations of experiential subjectivities of self and nation in Quebec.

Shot in the winter of 1971, hard on the heels of the War Measures Act army siege of Quebec, *24 heures ou plus (24 Hours or More)* is an encyclopedic two-hour document of the lives of fifty-six different subjects, including farm workers, union leaders, newspaper editors, elected officials, housewives, hippies, garment workers, music students, bank robbers, food coop organizers, police attack dog trainers, zoo keepers, Cree land claims activists, a man who murdered his boss and his supportive wife who claims "we all do what he did every day, just with words and thoughts". For Groulx, as he states in direct address from a location inside his own film and alongside his subjects, reality is not a product of chance but of clear political rules in which structures and patterns of oppression emerge over the course of filming daily life and editing the stories together. A dangerously inclusive project that was repressed for over five years by the National Film Board, *24 heures ou plus* shook the foundations of consciousness of self and nation by daring to imagine and conjure the insidious rhythms of power which order the experience of everyday life.

Ten years later Groulx undertook a diametrically opposed project, at least in aesthetic terms, zeroing in on the psychic and moral bankruptcy of Quebec's recently emerged francophone bourgeoisie through the fictional construct of a cut-throat industrial overlord and financier named Zom. A grandiosely recited and sung opera staged in the real sites of economic power (stock market floors, stately mansions, sleek penthouse board rooms), *Au pays de Zom (In the Land of Zom, 1982)* is an impeccably visualized space, reminiscent of the cinematic architectures of Jacques Tati. Monsieur Zom is a tragic figure of Bill Gates proportions who talks to no one but himself, even though he considers himself a citizen of the

world. Experiencing an ersatz crisis of conscience because he has no conscience, he sees himself as facing the future alone since only he can perceive and control the true order of things. The empire he has created can give him nothing more than what he programmed it for—subservience. Zom dies a pompously baroque costumed death on a theatre stage leaving his audience unmoved. Groulx's unique contribution to the national symbology of Quebec lies in his engaged imagination's capacity for contradiction; he excavated the truth of power through the illusionary fable of *Au pays de Zom* at the same time as he built a healing mythology from the experiential reality of *24 heures ou plus*.

An Autobiographical Fable of Self and Nation: Robert Morin's *Yes Sir! Madame...*

I woke up to face my responsibilities but I faced us, and there were a lot of them. *On s'est fait peur. On one side all the pea-soupers, puis tous les têtes carrés de l'autre bord. The fight would have been a massacre. La bataille aurait été mortelle. The only reasonable thing to do was split. Ça fait qu'on a décidé de se séparer. For good. Pour de bon. Good luck. Bonne chance. Yes Sir! Madame....*
—Earl Tremblay/Robert Morin⁸

One of the most revealing and original recent works to be produced in Quebec is Robert Morin's *Yes Sir! Madame...*, a feature length piece shot on film and distributed on video, which recombines inherited traditions of history, memory and imagination with contemporary constructions of autobiography, language, translation and performance. *Yes Sir! Madame...* reformulates the 50/50 national stalemate as an expression of the fundamental duality of the individual bilingual psyche, weaving a tale of explicitly subjective experience in the form of an autobiographical fable. A project almost twenty years in the making, *Yes Sir! Madame...* is constructed from footage filmed by Morin from the time he received his first Bolex



Still from *24 heures ou plus*, Gilles Groulx, 1973, 16mm, 113 min. Courtesy the National Film Board of Canada.

camera as a teenager. The footage is all shot from Morin's point of view and in a style approximating natural eye movement, operating as documentary and subjective expression simultaneously. Morin has shaped and transformed this material collected over the years into a narrative bed where his mirrored self and projected alter-ego named Earl Tremblay sees through Morin's eyes and speaks with Morin's voice. In addition to speaking the entire voice-over narration for this idiosyncratic diary of personal history, overlaying his current collaborative construction of identity on visual documents from the past, Tremblay/Morin performs a ludicrous non-verbal mimicking of sound track elements—sputtering lips for a motorboat effect, nasal throat rumbling for a snowmobile, humming a stripper's dance music, changing pitch to lip synch other characters' voices. The most significant feature of Morin's home-made soundtrack, however, is the doubling of language; every phrase Tremblay utters is spoken in both French and English. For viewers who speak both, the interleaving of languages establishes a comforting rhythm which renders concrete the duality of existence in two symbolic systems and the attendant processes of equivalency and translation. Tremblay's meticulous verbal translation between parallel subjectivities positions language as the primary site of conflict for this multiply identified self, and as the embodying medium of history and memory. For viewers who speak only one of the two languages, there is a sense of frustration and mistrust regarding what is being said in the language not understood.

Morin's power to orchestrate this nested series of dualities and dialogic relationships—English/French, self/other, me/we, experience/imagination, autobiography/fable—is dependent on maintaining the elasticity of the boundaries between them. However, this equilibrium degenerates

progressively into schizophrenic oppositions as it is run through the narrative mill of Tremblay's fabricated history. Born in a small lobster fishing village on the Lower St. Lawrence, Tremblay was raised speaking both French and English. After the untimely death of his mother due to clam poisoning, Earl inherited her Bolex camera and nineteen rolls of film, a legacy which his mother hoped would help him find himself. The first image he shot was his mother's grave and he was hooked; he became "the kid with the camera glued to his forehead", filming everything, experimenting with every function of the camera—slow motion, pixillation, superimpositions. Eventually he escapes to Montreal with just his camera to seek his fortune. His bilingualism gets him a job as a night watchman at a used car lot and a home in the hut on the lot. After losing his job to a German shepherd, Earl moves into an abandoned warehouse, surviving by panhandling and eating in soup kitchens. Pushed to the limit by this crisis of alienation and poverty, his personality begins to disintegrate, and the relationship of exact equivalence between his English and French selves begins to shift. Multiple identity becomes multiple personalities and the two Earls begin fighting with each other. He distracts his two selves first with gambling, then as personal home movie-maker to Montreal's king of the cement industry, then as an aspiring Member of Parliament in Mulroney's "big blue machine." On reaching Ottawa and the bureaucratic stagnation of government and party politics, the level of animosity grows to such proportions that his two selves decide to go their separate ways. English Earl wanders the endless halls of government buildings aimlessly, tormented by a ghost speaking to him through the hum of the air conditioning. The ghost is none other than French Earl, taunting him and making him say things he doesn't want to say. His two selves might have separated but they can't let each other go. Finally English Earl succumbs to the impossibility of either living with or without his other self and rises in the House of Commons to announce "I can't go on any longer pretending to be myself. I'm an impostor. Today I have to show you the monster." English Earl collapses into a dementia of incessant swearing, roaming Ottawa's museums in search of a diorama to call home. Meanwhile French Earl has embarked on his own journey of self-destruction, frequenting down-and-out bars and grim day work employment offices with a bunch of people sitting around waiting—just like Parliament—and experimenting with kinky sex and heroin. French Earl cannot escape his English self either, and their schizophrenic animosity escalates into an out-and-out war of violent self-mutilation; they burn their hands on red hot electric stoves, shove fingers into wall sockets and drive staple after staple into themselves.

Both Earls regain consciousness in a lush remote woods on a beach overlooking a pristine lake, asking each other "Where are we?" and getting the response "*Je sais pas.*" Earl's two selves have both survived and they are no longer talking in parallel or in sequence, but to each other in their respective languages. A flock of naked humans swims to sun themselves on the beach, running back into the water with fright and swimming away when Earl startles them with the questions "Do you speak English? *Parlez-vous français?*" Earl realizes he has arrived in the utopian non-verbal land of the Frog People, strips naked and swims off to join them, never to be seen again. His camera is



Stills from *Yes Sir! Madame...*, Robert Morin, video, 1994, 73 min. Distributed by Vidéographe, Montreal.



Still from *Yes Sir! Madame...*, Robert Morin, video, 1994, 73 min. Distributed by Vidéographe, Montreal.

left running on the beach and the film ends when the roll runs out. Despite the fact that Earl Tremblay disappeared over a year ago, he turns up now and then to make his own peculiar brand of intervention, often in locations where Robert Morin has just been. Most recently, Earl was spotted in a Syrian bar on Jean-Talon the night of the referendum vote, laughing demonically and knowingly at the TV screen when the tally reached the 50/50 stalemate point.

A seductive work of dangerous humour, *Yes Sir! Madame...* accomplishes the magical feat of constructing an imaginary subject on a heroic journey of self-discovery who takes up dual residence in the realms of mythology and reality. Speaking in a sensual vernacular distilled from a potent brew of subjective experiences and symbolic structures, Morin opens fields of vision where schizophrenic and self-mutilated identities of self and nation are deconstructed and reassembled to assume new dimensions of meaning beyond prosaic and untenable notions of the indivisible purity of unity.

The Next Referendum: Imagination and Nations

[Fabulation's] truly crucial feature lies in the way it creates an uncertain reality out of fiction, giving shape and voice to the formless form of reality in which an unstable interplay of truth and illusion becomes a phantasmic social force. All societies live by fictions taken as real.⁹

The complex interplay of history, memory, experience, imagination and language embodied in the work of Robert Morin, Gilles Groulx, the sixty-eight contributors to *1837 secondes pour l'indépendance* and many other cultural producers, constitutes a phantasmic force that fuels the process of self-determination in Quebec, standing in stark contrast to the duality of competing official nationalisms being played out by the political and corporate classes. This gap between self-produced and official nationalisms was indelibly staked out in the October 30 referendum and its aftermath. On one hand, Jacques Parizeau's technocratic official nationalism, based on a regressive typology of identity as francophone, anglophone, allophone, ethnic, neo-Quebecer or proto-Quebecer, exploded in his face, forcing him to resign in a state of disgrace. On the other hand, the rhetorical official nationalism of the federalists collapsed under the weight of the absurdity of their call for the preservation of the nation while they disembowel the state to appease debt mongers and ease corporate profit-taking. From this chronically dysfunctional and self-destructive stalemate of propagandized nationalisms, no sustainable nation can emerge. The prospect of another referendum in Quebec within the next year being staged on anything remotely resembling the same terms as the last one provokes gut churning horror. Radical reconceptualization and renegotiation of the territories of self, of the maps of identity and of the boundaries of nation is essential if any vestige of a self-determining collectivity is to survive the global homogenization of difference. The new unifying mythologies that will empower the diversity of peoples of the country soon to be formerly known as Canada can best be built on the experiential subjectivities of engaged cultural imagination.

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Notes

1. Dialogue from *1837 secondes pour l'indépendance*, 1995, distributed by Coop Vidéo.
2. *The Globe and Mail* Editorial, 4 November 1995, p. D6.
3. Dialogue from *Yes Sir! Madame...*, Robert Morin, 1994, distributed by Vidéographe.
4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1983), p. 6.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
6. Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 9.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
8. Dialogue from *Yes Sir! Madame...*, Robert Morin, 1994, distributed by Vidéographe.
9. Taussig, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

THE ART OF GIVING¹

by Bruce Barber

The theme of the gift, of freedom and obligation in the gift, of generosity and selfless-interest in giving, reappear in our own society like the resurrection of a dominant motif long forgotten.²

Within the politically progressive arts of the postmodern era, strategies of taking, quoting and appropriating often assume greater currency than giving, donating and providing. However, within the past few years the practice of giving seems to have become more readily appreciated as a *modus operandi* for producing ethical, socially responsive and politically committed art.

I will discuss five recent examples of what I will call the art of giving, produced in Halifax during the past twelve months, interpolating the discussion of these examples with some points on the conditions of giving, and the relationships between these examples and social commitment, engaged art practice and *tendency*. These terms have an extensive legacy that has challenged many modernist artists, art theorists and critics, beginning with Marx and Engel's famous critiques of Ferdinand de Lasalle's historical drama *Franz von Sickingen* (1859) and Eugene Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* in *The Holy Family* (1845). In their individual letters to Lasalle regarding his drama, Marx and Engels criticized him for *schillem*, a propensity in his text to "avoid... the real material issues (content) of the Revolution, which was its subject," in other words to focus on the aesthetic form of the work.³ *Schillem* is both a pun on the German word for describing, and the name of the writer Friedrich von Schiller, who tended to privilege aesthetic form and the plight of a tragic individual over collective tragedy. Marx and Engels both suggested that Lasalle's

FREE

20 MARCH 1995 AT NOON

NEAR THE PARAMOUNT THEATRE ON BARRINGTON ST.

MONEY GIVEN AWAY

MADE POSSIBLE WITH THE HELP FROM THESE GENEROUS SUPPORTERS OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION:




00 GALLERY CANADA COUNCIL COOPERATION AGREEMENT ON CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

HALIFAX NOVA SCOTIA

Poster for the performance piece *Free money*, Stephen Ellwood, 1995.

tragedy would have been more realistic and therefore more politically efficacious had he taken Shakespeare as his model and not Schiller.⁴

My first example is an exhibition entitled, appropriately enough for these economically depressed times, *Food Bank*. The exhibition, by Nova Scotia artist Kelly Lycan, was installed during the first two weeks of December 1994 at the newly founded artist run Khyber Arts Centre in Halifax. As the title suggests, *Food Bank* was "an exhibition with the function of gathering and offering food."⁵ Several weeks before the exhibit a notice was sent out to members of the Halifax community with instructions on how to participate in the exhibition and a number of blank card tags. Participants were requested to write a favourite recipe on two of the cards and to describe their occupation in the space provided. The artist offered to pick up the recipe tags and participants' donations for the Metro Halifax *Food Bank*. The announcement stated that the recipes would be placed on the gallery wall for others to see and exchange. People were invited to bring food to the exhibition and to choose a recipe from the rear wall display to take home with them. Lycan's intention was to initiate what she called "a circular gift." People who took the recipes could cook them for friends, thus passing on what the artist referred to as "the gift of food." At the gallery the packaged food items were arranged in a square on the floor, bounded by an elegant gold line. On an adjacent wall the recipe cards were hung on hooks and, on another wall, a service line control ticket tape machine, such as those found in supermarkets or government agencies, provided numbers for the participants. A notice informed the participants that the number that they received from the ticket tape machine corresponded with a recipe card that they could take home. At the conclusion of the exhibit the collected food was delivered to the Metro Food Bank and distributed to its users.

Lycan's *Food Bank* engages a number of critical issues relating to the value of art, productive labour, the politics of reciprocity, and what we can term the political economy of giving. Many of the participants identified with the needs of food bank users by providing cheap and easy-to-produce recipes. The reciprocal form of the work, which obliged gallery goers to give food and take a ticket in order to collect a recipe, encouraged the donors' identification of themselves as potential food bank users. They were not encouraged to choose any recipe they wanted, but had to donate food and then take a ticket and line up as they would at the food bank itself. Some donors recognized that their privileged status as food donor rather than food-bank recipient (or "client" as some agencies euphemistically call them) was provisional, thus reinforcing sociological studies that reveal that the majority of givers are often barely able to make ends meet and have occasionally been aid recipients themselves. Many donors took the opportunity to produce their best recipe for exhibition, which they decorated artfully on the card. Others presented their favourite creative alterations of famous staple foods for the impoverished, such as macaroni dinner and tomato soup. Many realized upon entering the exhibit that they had engaged in a collaborative process in which they became exhibitors, donors became recipients, and exhibition value was transformed into use value.

The end result of Lycan's exhibition was not simply the donation of food to the local food bank, although this to be sure was one important aim, but also the critical engagement of the *Food Bank* participants into various aspects of the labour process, including the acknowledgement of the important ideological relationships between social class (here indicated by occupation) and



Installation view,
Food Bank,
Kelly Lycan, 1994.

cultural consumption. *Food Bank* encouraged the negotiation of the conditions of the purchase of food items, of cooking, creating recipes, exchanging and consuming food as forms of cultural capital.⁶ Lycan's project questioned the terms of market value, exchange versus giving, altruism and giving as a necessary and obligatory component of receiving.

Lycan's exhibition reinforced the reciprocal nature of giving and the critique of capitalism so eloquently expressed in French sociologist Marcel Mauss' seminal 1924 study *The Gift*, which has become the foundation for many subsequent studies on the socio-cultural characteristics of giving. Mauss's followers and critics include Claude Levi-Strauss and more recently, Pierre Bourdieu. There are, of course, many problems with anthropological models, not the least of which is their relation to ideologies of colonialism. Mauss nevertheless raised some important points about the limitations of Western culture. As Mauss wrote,

It is only our Western societies that quite recently turned man into an economic animal. But we are not yet all animals of the same species. In both lower and upper classes pure irrational expenditure is in current practice. *Homo oeconomicus* is not behind us, but before (us), like the moral man, the man of duty, the scientific man and the reasonable man. For a long time man was something quite different, and it is not so long now since he became a machine—a calculating machine.⁷

In her discussion of *Food Bank*, Lycan refers to Mauss and one of his more recent disciples, Lewis Hyde, whose book *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* has provided some of the key theoretical underpinnings of her work, such as her negotiation of the complex relationships between the gift and capital.⁸ Lycan agrees with Mauss and Hyde's assertion that the "gift should move," and moreover that givers should not capitalise upon their giving. Hyde interprets the "spirit" of gift exchange as an erotic commerce. In this he acknowledges the influence of anthropologist Marshall Sahlins' *Stone*



This page and opposite:
Food Bank,
detail of recipes,
Kelly Lycan, 1994.

Age Economics (1972), a rereading and insertion of Mauss's interpretation of reciprocal giving and exchange into the context of a political philosophy of humanism. Hyde argues that various models of creative giving, and the gift itself, are not only a means toward critically renegotiating property and capital, but also of formally renouncing profit motive, acquisitiveness and selfishness as primary motors of social life within capitalist society.⁹

My second example initiates a similar negotiation of the political economy of giving, the cultural significance and politics of food distribution and by implication international aid. The *Empty Bowls* project, initiated by ceramists Lisa Blackburn and John Hartom of Franklin, Michigan, began in 1990 with a simple idea: ceramic artists, teachers, students and others would make some bowls, then invite some friends for a meal of soup and bread (or rice or ice cream). In exchange for the bowl and the meal, the guest was asked to donate ten dollars or more to a hunger organization chosen by the sponsors of the meal. Their promotional material provides details on three primary objectives for the *Empty Bowls* project: "to raise as much money as possible to feed hungry people in the U.S. and abroad"; to engage people in hunger awareness and education, and art education. The "language of art," they suggest in a romantic passage, "circumvents the boundaries of all other languages to touch our souls. We feel through creativity we can create positive social change."¹⁰

According to their literature, the original *Empty Bowl* project was timed to coincide with International Food Day, October 16, 1991, an annual event based upon the founding on that date in 1945 of FAO, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. Blackburn and Hartom encouraged what they called "a high level of integrity for the project." In order to achieve this ideal, they wrote, "*Empty Bowls* is a project of inclusion, cutting across social, political, racial, religious, age and any other perceived boundaries to join us all in working towards a common goal."¹¹ Since their project began, many groups throughout the United States and further afield have used this model to successfully plan and undertake fundraisers for local food banks and world hunger relief organisations.

Using the successful model established by Hartom and Blackburn, a group in Halifax recently established their own initiative, renaming it the *Hungry Bowls Project*. Members of a ceramics tableware class at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, led by instructor Walter Ostrom, negotiated with several restaurants in the Halifax metropolitan area to donate tureens of soup to the NSCAD cafeteria. Participants purchased tickets for twelve dollars each and two days before the event they were sold out. A ticket provided the bearer with a bowl of gourmet soup and several helpings of bread. In addition they could take home the hand-crafted bowl that had been created for this purpose by students and faculty of the ceramics department. The event raised over \$2,400 for the local Metro Food Bank and garnered much media attention. With this success, the organizers plan to make this an annual event.

Hungry Bowls is more of a feel-good project than the Lycan example discussed earlier, yet its aim is similar, extending the language of the altruistic gift into a more politically committed education programme of the type endorsed by Blackburn and Hartom. Only upscale restaurants, where a bowl of soup would typically cost in the five-to ten-dollar range, were requested to donate. The event was promoted in the press and on air as a focus for food bank donations from the general public and at the conclusion of the event,

money rather than food was sent to the food bank, thus assisting its bulk purchasing capacity.

The third example is an international relief aid project developed by NSCAD Design Communications professor Michael LeBlanc, student Sara-Marie Loupe and TUNS (Technical University of Nova Scotia) Professor Michael Smedley. The three recently developed a proposal to use digital photography to construct a computer database to reunite refugee families in Bosnia and Rwanda, both countries devastated by their recent and continuing conflicts.

Loosely titled the *Refugee Family Relocation Project*, it began with Loupe's concern about the plight of approximately 100,000 Rwandan refugee children separated from their families. After some preliminary work, the Halifax group began collaborating with individuals at the California State Polytech at Pomona and a few non-governmental organizations in the United States. Loupe pioneered the concept to develop a database which can be used in the field by those working directly with refugee populations. With the assistance of LeBlanc she developed the interface and graphics while Smedley used the designs for implementation on a Macintosh Powerbook. Sara-Marie Loupe was subsequently invited to Washington D.C. to meet with Joseph Mutabuba, the Rwandan Ambassador to the U.S., and was offered the opportunity of showing the team's demonstration models to non-government aid agencies. Mutabuba reportedly said "If I had a database sitting on my desk right now, I could be getting families back together... I have people calling me every day looking for their families."¹² A Salt Lake City organization dedicated to tracking unaccompanied children recently gave the group a grant to continue their research. The project organizers expect the system to be fully in place within two years.

The fourth example is titled simply *Giving*, part of an end-of-year Intermedia Area exhibition (Intermedia General December 13-17, 1995) that final-year BFA students arranged for NSCAD's Anna Leonowens Gallery III. Gallery window posters and other promotion tools informed gallery goers that during the duration of the exhibition at certain times of the day, they could take advantage of the following free services: bicycle repairs, button sewing, telephone calls, letter writing, kids' crafts, hair cuts, Alice's thoughts, and a reading. During the week of the exhibit many individuals took advantage of the free services, particularly the haircuts and bicycle repairs. The haircutting service provided by Leah Miller, a graduating student specializing in tattoo art, was a major hit among the many cash-strapped students who attended the exhibition. Toward the conclusion of the *Giving* exhibit, Andrew McLaren, a professional cycle smith, a local competitive cyclist as well as a full-time art student, repaired Leah's bicycle in exchange for a haircut. Similar deals were struck throughout the week with non-exhibitors, thus mirroring the informal student economy as well as the extensive labour and services exchange (bartering) that characterize the informal economy in Cape Breton, the poorest section of the province of Nova Scotia and with one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada. While it is not unusual for students to exchange services as part of a "common culture"¹³ it is somewhat unusual for them to provide services freely to anyone in a public gallery context as a performed art. This exhibition circumscribed the process of giving as an informal service economy, one which can benefit both giver and recipient.

The final example, by young Halifax-based artist Stephen Ellwood, bypassed the obligation/reciprocity problem altogether to give money





directly to the recipients. As part of an OO Gallery-sponsored project, Ellwood sought and received donations from various individuals and sponsor groups and exchanged this money into nickels, some three hundred dollars worth. At an appointed time he threw these into an awaiting crowd from the top of a building on Barrington Street, one of the main thoroughfares of downtown Halifax. This work encouraged a great deal of media attention (thus underlining the press' voracious appetite for spectacle) and Ellwood even received criticism from a Reform Member of Parliament who feared that government ("taxpayer's") money used to subsidize OO Gallery and other artist-run centres was being used irresponsibly.

Kelly Lycan's *Food Bank*, the *Hungry Bowls Project* and *Giving* all encourage critical reflection upon the nature of the underground or informal economy, the commodity status of the work of art, the market economy, giving, obligation and reciprocity. Ellwood's action could be described in conventional European avant-garde terms as a *blague*, or more charitably perhaps as a type of a Scrooge action with its object being the public renunciation of miserly guilt. Ellwood could also be the exemplary Robin Hood who extracts alms from the rich to distribute to the poor. Like Lycan's example, this work tests the meaning of altruism and questions the limits of both giving and taking.

There are many strategic and theoretical implications for an engaged cultural practice in each of these works. In a sense it is strange to nominate them as "art works" when each engages some form of performed, participatory activity and there are no final objects to place in a gallery context, save the documentation of the event. In four of the examples at least, and on one of more levels, labour is freely given and no compensation is received, except perhaps for cynical, art-world cultural capital. It could be argued that two of the "works"—the Ellwood money performance and the Refugee project—exist outside of art-legitimizing contexts altogether, and each example would have some difficulty assuming any conventional art label. The *Rwandan Family Relief Project* is a computer design and international relief project rather than an artwork, even recognizing the fact that two of its producers are designer/artists. To different degrees, each of the examples exist as cultural services. Within art-world discourse they could be framed within the so-called live art and performance art genres, but they are better appreciated and understood as artist produced examples of co-operative, engaged or interventionist cultural practice.

I will shift register here to discuss further the theoretical and critical implications of giving in these projects. Giving is never a neutral or value-free activity. There are always conditions, expectations, obligations attached, for both the giver and the recipient. To the most cynical among us, philanthropy, self-less giving or altruism—the regard for others as the precondition for action—does not exist. There are, it is presumed, always benefits which can be conferred upon the giver. The Christian axiom, "it is better to give than receive," suggests that more benefits accrue to the giver than to the recipient of the gift. The gift implies that the giver has engaged in some virtuous activity that has some sort of redemptive value. In more secular terms, the gift promotes the elevation of self-esteem; sub-consciously, the giver thinks, "I want you to think better of me, to love and respect me for what I have bestowed upon you."

The Christian gift—the offering—encourages members of a congregation to offer money to propitiate God or to expiate sin. Like Karl Weber's arguments concerning labour itself, this public act of atonement secures

redemption for the faithful. In Marxian terms, altruism and philanthropy within a capitalist economy reproduce the moral superiority of those who have the power to give. Giving becomes a means toward assuming or reinforcing social power and existent hierarchies. However, there also exists within Marxism the contradictory nature of the gift, which conflates needs and desires into a politically acceptable form. In Marx's writings the gift is subsumed materialistically under the acceptable maxim "from each according to his/her ability ... to each according to his/her need."

Conservatives are likely to argue that various types of giving, including welfare and foreign aid, keep the poor impoverished, reaffirming poverty by sapping the recipients' initiative and will to develop. Giving promotes dependency and subordination. The whole business of giving as a form of foreign aid has come under criticism in recent years. Most foreign aid is in fact "tied aid," which requires the recipient nations to use aid dollars to purchase goods from the donor nations. Critics argue that aid to Third World countries reinforces underdevelopment and that aid responds merely to the symptoms of poverty and not the underlying cause. Aid to Third World countries does not encourage the establishment of the necessary infrastructure to develop indigenous industries and neither does it promote community or national self-sufficiency. Development workers are cautioned with the examples of aid agency giving that has gone wrong—the water pump that was sent to irrigate the arid plain without the necessary back-ups for repair; the rubber thong factory that managed at full capacity to put cheap shoes on everyone's feet while it put the local shoemakers and repairers out of business.

Conservatives and even some leftists argue that without the altruistic concerns of liberal do-gooders, philanthropists, Christians, the Welfare State itself, members of the underclass, the lumpen proletariat, and whole populations of Third World countries would be at the throats of their bourgeois and first world oppressors.

There are many ways in which the art of giving can be said to represent politically engaged practice, that is, socially responsive, ethically responsible activities, which achieve in small measure, their largely unstated claim to effect real change. I would argue that the target groups for each of the giving exhibits are different, that for the student exhibition *Giving*, giving was a service rendered implicitly for a service in kind: telephone someone and they may return your call, write someone a letter and they may reply, repair someone's bicycle and they may be able to give you a haircut in return. Ironically the student's giving and exchanging demonstrated the actual survival strategies that they may have to adopt upon graduation, particularly in this era of diminished expectations. Their giving strategies may have their corollary in the arenas of international aid. Despite many problems relating to the neocolonial and imperialistic adventures of donor governments, the history of international aid projects demonstrates how the work of various agencies and institutions can provide the basic requirements for the building of international trust and co-operation which are the cornerstones of development and self-sufficiency.

On a microcosmic scale, Ellwood's act of tossing money into a downtown crowd argues for the redistribution of wealth in society, but warns also of the feeding frenzy when the containers of wealth are opened. His view of human nature is somewhat Hobbesian: given the right opportunity greed will always assert itself. The money he threw disappeared in a matter of minutes, even

Opposite page: coins used in the performance piece
Free money, Stephen Ellwood, 1995.

Notes

1. A version of this paper was delivered as a keynote address at the recent Chimera: New Zones for Critical Art Practice Symposium (part of a Littoral symposium series) held at the Goethe Institute in Sydney, Australia, 21–27 February 1995.

2. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 66.

3. Rose A. Margaret, *Marx's Lost Aesthetic: Karl Marx and the Visual Arts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 94.

4. Marx's critique of Eugene Sue was more pointed: comparing Sue to a bad painter who must label his painting to say what it represents, Marx accused him of producing the "most wretched offal of socialist literature." See Karl Marx, *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art*, Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski, eds., (St. Louis and Milwaukee: Telos Press, 1973), p. 119.

5. Statement from exhibition brochure. An earlier Lycan exhibition employed a similar participation process, this time used to gather house plant cuttings from London, Ontario, residents for exhibition in a local gallery.

6. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Richard Nice, trans., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 79.

7. Marcel Mauss, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

8. Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, (New York: Random House, 1983).

9. He acknowledges also the implicit refutation of his humanism and suggests as a possible antidote to his positive pronouncements on the social panacea of giving the somewhat more pessimistic essays by Garrett Hardin (1968) and Millard Schumaker (1980), who discuss the limits of altruism and the problematics of giving, obligation and reciprocity in an increasingly secular, individualistic and technological society. See Garrett Hardin, *The Limits of Altruism: An Ecologist's View of Survival*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977).

10. Lisa Blackburn and John Hartom, *Empty Bowls Project Pamphlet*, (Franklin, Michigan: self-published, 1990), p. 2.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

12. *The Mail Star*, Halifax, 4 February 1995.

13. See Paul Willis, *Common Culture*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990).

14. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 53.

15. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, F. Baker, trans., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, French Edition, 1950), p. 43.

16. Pierre Bourdieu, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

when he pre-empted his own noon deadline by some thirty minutes. Enraged members of the media who gathered at the appointed time to capitalize on the spectacle of people groveling for money added another layer of meaning to his public intervention.

Like Marx and Engel's critiques of Ferdinand Lasalle, each giving example could be criticized for evidencing the right political tendency but lacking the correct engagement with its object of concern, which would necessitate an adoption of the appropriate (time-honoured) political strategies for social change. However, I believe that the most important strategic element of each project is the artists' insistence upon working with social reality itself rather than indirectly through various forms of representation, and this mitigates against a reductive *tendenzkunst* conclusion.

Lycan's *Food Bank* is not simply another form of compassionate victim art masquerading empathetically with the disenfranchised proletariat. On the contrary, Lycan problematizes the very conditions of giving as a reciprocal process within a structured economy which privileges taking, individual ownership, the profit motive and conspicuous consumption. Lycan understands that the political economy of altruistic giving, like the corporate identity of some national and international aid organizations, churches and food banks, conforms to a "logic of practice," to use Pierre Bourdieu's description of the social habitus, which is "a system of structured (and) structuring dispositions, the habitus which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions."¹⁴ Her *Food Bank* example insists that giving can be used strategically to further a number of identifiable humanitarian goals, as well as provide some critical intervention into the ideological fabric of our culture.

Claude Levi-Strauss has argued: "The automatic laws of the cycle of reciprocity are the unconscious principle of the obligation to give, the obligation to return a gift and the obligation to receive."¹⁵ However, as Bourdieu argues in his critique of Levi-Strauss' structural logic of the (Maussian) law of reciprocity, in reality "the gift may remain unreciprocated."¹⁶ Lycan's *Food Bank*, *Giving* and Ellwood's *Free Money* insist upon a logic of practice that permits an infinite variety of exchanges, or gifts, challenges and reciprocations to occur. These examples of the art of giving are exemplary in the manner in which they creatively engage their public in conscientization and provide service of some social and cultural value. And like Bourdieu these examples acknowledge

The simple possibility that things might proceed otherwise than as laid down by the 'mechanical laws' of the "cycle of reciprocity" (and that this) is sufficient to change the whole experience of practice and, by the same token its logic.¹⁷

In contrast to Mauss and Levi-Strauss' insistence on laws and structure in the cycle of reciprocity, of obligation and exchange, Bourdieu's logic of practice privileges individual agency, in all its unpredictability and contrariness, as the primary component of a generative model of giving. Without this acknowledgment of individual agency, of potential for contrariety, giving, the gift of labour, the gift of blood, of life itself would seem valueless.

Bruce Barber is an artist and cultural historian who teaches studio and art history at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Out on a Limb

Chrystos Interviewed

by Karen X. Tulchinsky

Chrystos, a Native American lesbian poet was born November 7, 1946, off reservation to a Menominee father and a Lithuanian/Alsace-Lorraine mother. Raised in San Francisco and now living in the Pacific Northwest, she is a self-educated artist and writer, and an activist for numerous Native rights and prisoners' causes. She is the author of *Not Vanishing* (1988), *Dream On* (1991) and *In Her I Am* (1993). She won the 1994 Audre Lorde Prize for Poetry from Cleveland State University, for her book, *Fugitive Colors*. Her most recent volume of poems, *Fire Power*, is now in print (Press Gang Publishers, Vancouver).

KAREN TULCHINSKY: To be a writer of lesbian fiction or poetry is not going to make you rich and famous—poor and famous maybe. So anyone who writes and publishes for a dyke audience is doing it for reasons other than money. Why do you write?

CHRYSTOS: I started writing because I like to read. I was very lucky. My father taught me to read at a very young age. He's an avid reader. I didn't have any friends when I was a kid in school and writing became my friend. I started writing when I was nine. To some extent, writing has become my best friend. It is the place where I feel freedom and where I have a place in the world, because I don't feel like I have a place. When I became more politicized as a person, my writing changed and became more politicized, and I guess, one of the things I'm struggling with as a writer now is the limitations of the English language. The structure is very colonial.

TULCHINSKY: Back in 1990, you were awarded a writer's grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) fund, and there was some controversy. Can you talk about what happened?

CHRYSTOS: Senator Jesse Helms got the NEA to agree to put a rider in the grants that were made to artists. In this rider we had to sign under penalty of perjury that we would not write, disseminate and a bunch of other things, homoerotic art. At the time that Audre Lorde, myself and Minnie Bruce Pratt won the NEA grants we had to sign that statement. We all talked on the telephone before we signed. Audre and I had a quite a number of conversations about whether we should sign or not sign and we finally realized that we wanted the money. It was the first time, as far as I know, in the history of the United States that three out lesbians had won NEA's. And the fact that two of us were women of colour, that was a really big deal. So we went ahead and signed the papers, and what I decided is that I wouldn't write erotica for that year. I would just store it in my mind or something. Well, at the time, I was going around the country doing my readings as usual and I was still reading erotica. I didn't think that counted because I had already written it, and somebody said to me, "well Chrystos, don't you know what disseminate means?" I don't like that word—it reminds me of semen, so I didn't pay any attention to it. They said: "disseminate means reading erotic poetry." So, it was very problematic. Mostly what happened was a lot of media noise and there were no real consequences. None of us got our works confiscated. It was actually important to me as a writer to be challenged in that way.

Here's the Ruthless Edge

of Poetry who pushes delight demanding wide spaces
for herself with disregard for cocktail parties
conventions & the feelings of family and friends
who consumes our lives & hopes
leaving nothing sacred
She's a private pirate looting & burning
with not a polite bone to obscure
her desire to flaunt herself
fanning her metaphors
lively as the smell of dead fish
She'll tear your skin open with brambles called words
she's a fever that will break your dreams
she's full of lines you can't escape
She'll get you
in the end

Honor Dance for the Four Winds

Because we are sacred to each other
you create a feast for us to share
placed carefully on newspaper
Each grain of rice
a memory of freedom
Each bean a song of respect
I am giving you all the stars I've seen
I am bringing you the moon in my voice
I am dancing you old mountains
Wind riding wild ponies
through canyons of our pain
I am covering each of you in a shawl
with long silky fringe & deeply colored roses
I am folding blankets for you
in blazing patterns
I carry you carefully in my eyes
on all my journeys
I dream nightly of the keys I will forge
of your loneliness, cradled smooth
Trapped in walls of hatred that I so rarely breach
listening for the birds who fly over razor wire coils
your spirits rise before me
I am burning sweet grass
sage & cedar
as each dawn I call your names

TULCHINSKY: Some women see your erotic poetry as pornographic and oppressive to women. What do you think of that view of your work?

CHRYSTOS: The problem with the lesbian anti-pornography movement is that it does not distinguish between the pornography industry, which is men profiting from the use of women's bodies, and lesbian women creating pornography for each other, which are two different political statements. When I did an erotica reading in Australia I was scared because they had told me that they had made up stickers that said, "this is pornographic and it's bad for women" and they were putting them on my book in the bookstore. After I did the reading, they had a mike so you could go up and ask questions. This woman said, "Why do you think your work is not pornographic?" I was floored. I said well, in my opinion in order to have pornography you have to have exploitation of women, and since all of the women who are in my book are really excited and happy to be in this book, and in fact, flattered, who is being exploited? And she couldn't answer me. I know some of these women would say that I am exploiting myself, that in order for me to write about sex I have to have a degraded sense of myself. But that's the opposite from what I feel is actually happening. I've written love poems for a long time. I didn't start writing about sex in a more concrete way until after Jesse Helms. It occurred to me, that if Jesse Helms was seeking to censor me then I must be censoring myself. There must be ways in which I participated in censorship because I had been intimidated by the society. When I started examining all the ways that I censored myself, I realized that when I was writing love poems I had a grid on my head of romance, and I couldn't comfortably imagine writing about sex without imposing this grid of romance on top of the sexual feelings, because the culture had trained me that sex had to have romance in order to legitimize it. So I started trying to write from that steaminess, that rawness that you really feel, and in some ways I don't feel like I've really accomplished it yet. It's a start. I want to be even more wet and steamy and sticky and I actually want to write some love poems that are not polished, that have that quality of collision that happens when you have really hot sex with someone. It's kind of like your psyches get shocked. I'm trying to figure out how to write about that.

TULCHINSKY: So you're saying that Jesse Helms and the feminists are attacking you in similar ways for the same stuff?

CHRYSTOS: They use the exact same words, which is really strange. I have nothing against women who want to fight the porn industry, which does exploit women. The crucial part for me is that they are blurring the difference between lesbian-made porn and male-made porn. They are two different things.

TULCHINSKY: You talk in the introduction to *In Her I Am* about targeting each other, not having compassion for each other's differences, when really it's Jesse Helms and the homophobic and racist right-wing Christian fundamentalists that we should be fighting, instead of other dykes.

CHRYSTOS: One of the difficulties that feminist liberation still has not solved is that women are the moral police of the world. It's like women are supposed to be the ones who are in charge of how everybody behaves and making everybody look nice for church and all that kind of stuff. Women are the moral police and as lesbians we have not examined that role to see whether or not we want it, or whether it's even necessary. That moral police stance comes from straight culture, because when I first came out as a lesbian, it was into a world that was very different than the world that exists now. There were no moral police. We were all queers together. We were all in danger of being beaten up, of being arrested, of being raped.

TULCHINSKY: I love the last paragraph in your introduction to *In Her I Am*. You really summed it up great when you said, "It has taken me many years in failed relationships, bitterness & recriminations to understand my sexuality and to be honest with my lovers. I pray that all Lesbians find an honest understanding & enjoyment of their sexuality." I think that's really well put. This is who I am and I hope that you find out who you are.

CHRYSTOS: I think that one of the things that happens is because women have been defined as sexual beings under colonization, many women divorce themselves from their sexuality in order to be intelligent. They feel that in order to be taken seriously as a person they must not be a sexual being, which is part of the split that men enforce upon us. It's either/or. There's no place to be a sex maniac who is also a brilliant writer. So

much of the time in reviews of my work, it's quite common for reviewers to talk about how angry I am. What I am frustrated about is that they are not acknowledging my craft. The alliteration and the rhythm and the music and all the things that I put into it don't get seen. If I'm saying something political then I don't get to have craft. I think the only review that ever talked about my craft is one that Jewelle Gomez wrote. She talked about how she could hear the rhythm of the drum in my work and that was really moving for me. I think that *In Her I Am*, while it is a sexual book there is also craft in it. I was trying to force the English language to be sensuous in a way it doesn't really go into. There's a lot of interesting places for me in that book in terms of forcing the language to do things it's not supposed to do. There are a lot of puns in my work. No one seems to have picked that up. There's internal rhyme. There are very profound philosophical statements and ideas and I get frustrated because I feel like I'm read in a very tokenized way and I don't get to be a real poet. I'm just an activist poet. Or I'm just a street poet, and that's about class and race too.

TULCHINSKY: You said to me once, that you thought a writer's job is to go out on a limb, and even though it's dangerous, you go out there anyway and see where it takes you.

CHRYSTOS: Yes, that's what I think good writing is. That's what great writing is. I tell people that I think of Shakespeare as a great writer, not because of what other people say, but because he's the first person in Western literature who included a Jew and a Black man as characters in his literature. He did not make them positive characters, but he let them exist.

TULCHINSKY: You also say in the introduction, "I will comment that Indian Country is becoming less homophobic faster than lesbianism is coming to understand, rather than appropriate, Native Spirituality and culture." Can you comment on that?

CHRYSTOS: Straight Indian people don't write erotica. As a general rule, straight Indian people don't even hold hands in public. Sexuality is a very private thing in Indian Country period. So, as far as I know I'm the first Indian person who has written erotica that's published. That's one case of me being way out on a limb. I had a lot of hesitations about doing that because I don't want

to be alienated from my own community, but I realized that this is the book that I needed to find when I was seventeen. I think of this book as a spring board, like you can go off from here and find your own way. When I thought about all this, I thought if they have to cut me off in order to feel safe, I still know who I am and I'll still fight for First Nations rights and I'll still do all the things that I do now and somehow we'll come to terms with it. There's never been any direct overt criticism from Indian community and actually several straight Indian women have quietly told me on the side how much they liked the book and how they couldn't put it down.

TULCHINSKY: That puts you in such a hard place though, that you even have to make those kind of decisions. You have to cut yourself off from various parts of yourself. That takes a lot of courage to just do it and know that you might take flack from people that you want as your allies.

CHRYSTOS: I guess what I'm understanding is that the whole concept of allies is so troublesome because I'm a part of so many different minority groups, none of whom get along with each other. What happens is you realize allies is a fluid concept and it can't sustain you. I don't do the political work I do because it makes me a nice person, or because I want approval or because I expect anything. I'm doing that work because of the moral imperative to do it. What I'm coming to understand is that true morality is not something that is swallowed by you from somebody else without any thought. Morality is looking upon an issue or a situation and coming to terms with it, making decisions based on your own spirit, your own understanding. Since I'm from so many minority places, my spirit has really difficult decisions to make and part of what my being a writer is about is that there are so many silences. As far as I know in the U.S. there are only three out Indian lesbian writers, the other two being Beth Brant and Janice Gould. The problem is if there's only three of you in the U.S., at this point you have to be really out on a limb because you have to create a whole lot of room for anyone who can come after you. Part of why I think so much white writing in the U.S. is what I call soulless, is because white culture in this country is based on a very thick tissue of lies. Even if I was a white person, I would still say that race is the central issue to the history of the United States, because of what has been

constructed around race. I mean, this is where they invented white people. People used to be Russians and Poles and Danes and Scots and Italians. It was a political move to solidify workers. Everybody should learn English and everybody should be white. So this concept of whiteness is founded on all these terrible lies and genocide and brutality towards all kinds of people, not even just brown people. For instance for a time in the feminist movement there was all this writing about the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in 1910 in New York, in which all of these women were killed and none of those people ever said these were Jewish women. People appropriate the speech of Sojourner Truth. The speech "Ain't I a woman" is about racism. It's not a feminist speech. In a large way I feel myself not at home in the feminist movement anymore. I'm never going to deny that I'm a lesbian, but I'm sick of being ghettoized. I want to be a writer. I don't want my race or my sexuality to be the reason that I'm in an anthology any more. I want to know that I'm in an anthology because I'm a really good writer. It's very clear to me that most of the time when people want me to be in an anthology, they're calling me up to be the little token princess and so I'm trying to reassess what all that means, because if you participate in your own tokenization then you're helping carry forward the work of racism.

TULCHINSKY: One of the things I love about your book is that it's about my life too, or it sounds like women I've known or been with, or things that I've done.

CHRYSTOS: That's part of my focus as a writer — to reclaim writing for the people and reclaim it from the academics. When you look at the history of poetry, poetry has always been the word of the people. All of the old English ballads are political if you listen to them closely. They're about "I gave the judge thirty pieces of silver and I slept with him to free my brother and he hung my brother the next day anyway." All of them are very political pieces of work. They need to be decoded sometimes because they had to be written in code to survive, but when you look back at the history of the world, you can see that poetry is the voice of the people. It's not the voice of academic people. It's about daily life.

TULCHINSKY: You travel all over the continent doing readings. Is that a part of being a writer that you enjoy?

Four Hours Later

when you finally
let me come
screaming so loudly
the upstairs neighbors
pound the floor
my body is your leaf
shivering with each wind
of your tongue
Your hand inside me pulls apart sense
I speak in tongues weep
Across the room you beckon my belly contracts
Your smile of satisfaction makes my knees Marcybutter
Sheet-burns on your elbows glow red & tender as my need
You want a poem to make all the clits listening
hard
sliding down in their chairs drooling
I want to keep you all to myself
in the best blues sense
All wet
I want you to keep me that way

Reprinted from *In Her I Am*, by Chrystos (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993).

CHRYSTOS: I'm frustrated with how immoral the written language is and how dead it is. It kind of thunks. There's a way in which written language goes thunkety thunkety thunkety, whereas there's more of a singing in oral language. I love to do readings. Part of why I'm not as published as some other people is that if you call me up and say, "will you send me a piece?" I'll say yeah, just to be nice, but I probably won't do it. If you call me up and ask me to read for a benefit I'll say yes, because I love to do readings. For me, public readings are magic. The words really come alive with other people. They aren't alive on a piece of paper that's a dead tree. In a room filled with people, the language is alive. The poems are alive.

Karen X. Tulchinsky is from Vancouver and writes fiction about relationships, sex, love and death.

New World Landscape: Urban First Nations Photography

Interview with Jeffrey Thomas

by Carol Podedworny

Introduction

Over the past few years several "anniversaries" have been celebrated. On a grand scale, North America celebrated its sesquicentennial (1992), photography turned 150 (1989), and—in a parallel practice—the work of North American indigenous photographers passed the ten-year mark (1993). On a national scale, the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers Association (1994) as well as Onondaga artist Jeffrey Thomas (1990) reflected upon a full decade's worth of development and productivity.

Independent curator Carol Podedworny met with Jeffrey Thomas on the eve of his upcoming exhibition, *Portraits from the Dancing Grounds*, at the Ottawa Art Gallery, (summer 1996). During their discussions, the artist took time to reflect upon what has transpired in the arena of the First Nations photographer in a Canadian context, as well as to portend future directions.

Historical Foundations: First Nations Photographers in a Canadian Context

CAROL PODEDWORNY: The first NIIPA (Native Indian/Inuit Photographers Association) conference was held in 1984/85, I believe, and your exhibition, *POW WOW IMAGES*, jointly curated by Tom Hill and Elizabeth McLuhan was in 1984. In thinking about what NIIPA was trying to initiate (you spoke at that first conference) and what they said their agenda was to be—"Indians taking images of themselves"—and what Rick Hill articulated in his catalogue essay

for *POW WOW IMAGES*, "defying stereotypes," seemed to suggest that it was a beginning. Was there very much happening prior to that mid-1980s period with contemporary First Nations photography?

JEFFREY THOMAS: No. There wasn't anything in the public exhibition spaces. The exposure of Native photography began in 1983 in Oklahoma with the first Native American Photographers Show curated by Juane Quick-To-See-Smith. That led, one year later, to NIIPA. So the genesis of all this began back then. It's interesting now to think how far we have come since the inception of NIIPA in a Canadian context. I think we have spent that ten-year time period trying to figure out what we are going to do with this new photographic power that we have.

PODEDWORNY: A power? For whom? The artists, the curators, organizations like NIIPA?

THOMAS: Yes, a power, and for all of those aspects. It all leads to one thing, identifying who we are and our relationship to contemporary society, to a responsibility for our own image. We need to be able to see and place ourselves in relation to an environment, not only on the reserves, but in an urban context as well. We are (I am) fighting assimilation, the loss of a cultural identity and a history in the face of a Canadian or nationalistic imperative.

When NIIPA had that first exhibition they wanted to promote it and they asked me to go on TV and speak about the exhibition. I told them

that I was going to say that there would be a range of different styles and that there would be a lot of work that wouldn't be comparable to what's going on in the larger (non-Native) photographic community. There are three things to consider in terms of the differences. First of all, the time frame during which we've been practising photography—it hasn't been that long. Secondly, there are a few talented Native photographers around, but a lot of Native photographers. I think the medium has become very popular. Finally, I think that the history of exhibitions for Native photographers—to be included in and exposed to—has been very brief and the level of curatorial integrity with regard to these exhibitions, very low. I concluded my TV interview for NIIPA by stating that viewers needed to come to the exhibition and just look at the work, recognizing that the perspective and context are not always the same as for the mainstream.

PODEDWORNY: What kind of works were Native photographers producing during this period? Hill intimated what was happening in his essay for *POW WOW IMAGES*, but how did you see the movement unfold?

THOMAS: What is interesting to me about the early 1980s is that the first Native photographic exhibitions pointed out that there were other photographers who were aboriginal who were out there working. Up to that point, we didn't know—we thought that we were all working in isolation. We began to see each other and our work, and that's what was great about coming together in these shows. You realized the immensity of North America and that there were little pockets of Indian people taking photographs across the nation. It was interesting to see that we were all at similar points in our careers. It was also important to see that we were all exploring our own lives with the camera.

NIIPA's first exhibition and conference, kind of set the tone for the next ten years—of people just going off into their own worlds and pursuing photography with a renewed sense of community. I think that for a lot of us—I know for myself—having that information gave me a kind of freedom to say, "Okay, I can go out and go full blast into my world and explore what I want to say." Today, I think we are beginning to come back around, to speak as a community.

The past ten or twelve years have been a process of figuring out what we're going to do

with photography. Now we have the capability of using it and we have access to galleries. I think that as a consequence of that long period of introspection we are now thinking about what we have done and about where we are going to go from here—that we are beginning to define a direction for the future.

Edward S. Curtis et al. Reconsidered

PODEDWORNY: In terms of your own work, has your approach to defining yourself through photography changed significantly in response to what you've seen and experienced since the movement began?

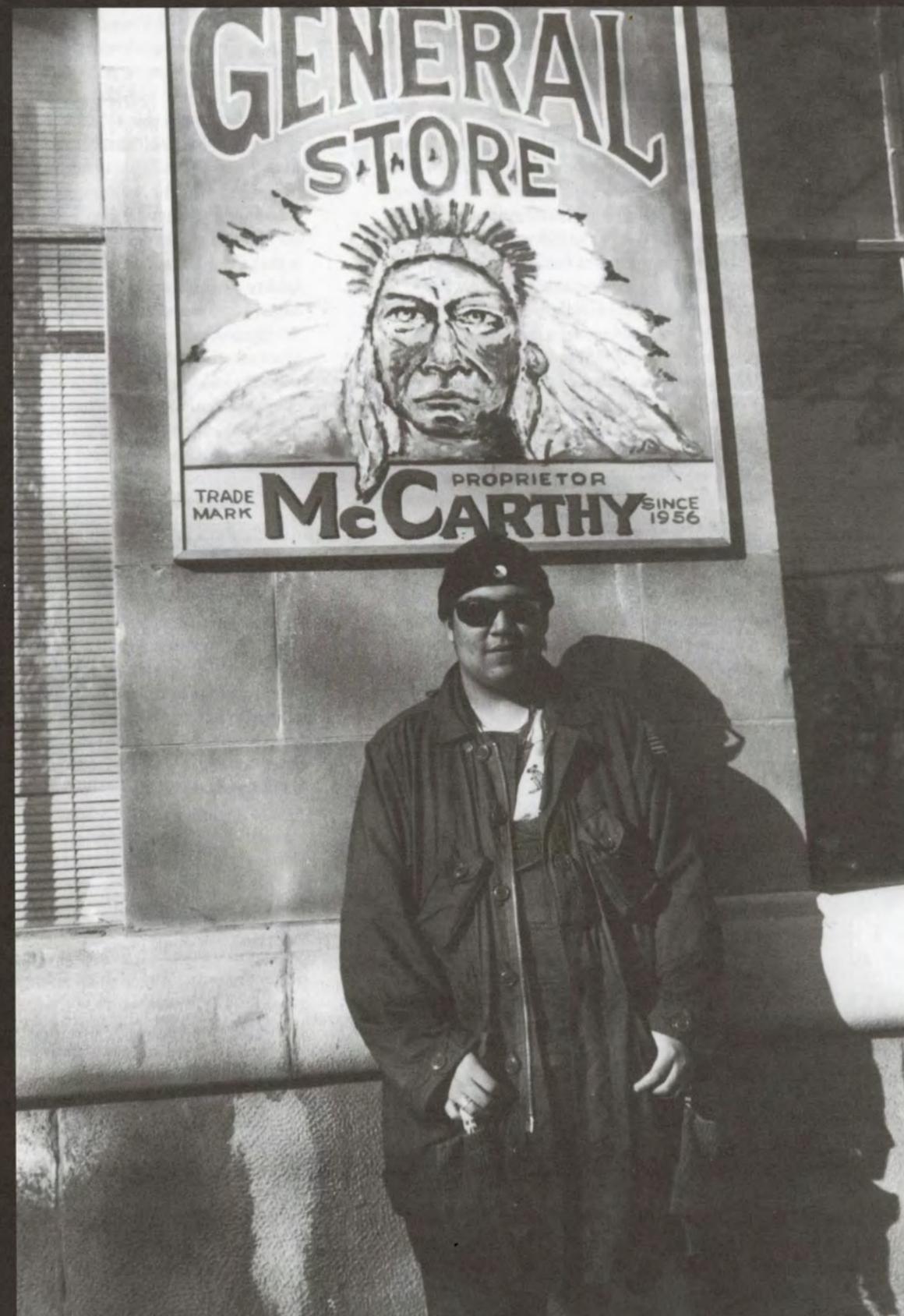
THOMAS: Well, I didn't start out wanting to be a photographer. I was curious, however, about the way Native people were depicted in pop culture. I found it very frustrating to see these depictions—on the Saturday afternoon westerns, for example. I wanted to investigate the history behind the stereotypes. I came across a book during my research produced by the Smithsonian Institution in 1976; it was the first book of historical photographs of aboriginal people that I had ever seen. I continued to search out other such publications. I was curious about what historical photographs I might find that had been produced by aboriginal people. Eventually, I found that of course, there were no works by aboriginal people from that period. Too, I began to understand why the non-Native-produced historical photographs didn't work for me. There was a very limited amount of information that I could get from these photographs, and I felt guilty about staring at them.

PODEDWORNY: Why?

THOMAS: Because I felt that I was on a field trip, staring at Indians. The structure of the photographs produced this response in me. On the one hand, there is the way in which the people were pictured—a glorified image that didn't speak to the reality of the time. I wondered, "What do I want to know that Curtis isn't telling me?" These people were living in poverty—they had no control over what was going on, over how the images were constructed. The results were very stylized images, tourist snapshots. On the other hand, there was a lack of environment revealed in the photographs, and this created a claustrophobic feeling for me



Detail from monument to Samuel Champlain, Plattsburg, New York.



Questionable Topography, diptych from the exhibition *Portraits from the Dancing Grounds* (series: *Exploring Metropolis*).
Bear Thomas, "General Store," Wellington St. W., Toronto, Ontario.

because I was searching for information about that environment and these people. I felt that the photographs, therefore, were created for a non-Native society.

PODEDWORN: What difference would seeing the environment have made?

THOMAS: I think that photographs have the power to map out the world you live in. Historical photographs can give you an understanding of where you came from, of what a world looked like, of the realities of the moment. They can reveal a larger mythological expanse. I thought that in looking at historical photographs I could understand how the people pictured there had lived, what their experiences were—like when they went to the cities, how they felt about being stared at by non-Native people, the hardships they endured when they moved into an urban environment. In viewing these photographs, I might understand my own world. There isn't any information like that around—dealing with issues of identity and survival—it has been stripped away. The historic photographs, by Curtis and others like him, seemed to be an extension of that stripping away because they didn't provide a sense of place, time or history. If you are trying to take away someone's identity and impose a new one, of course you take the history away, the sense of place.

I also remember thinking, however, about what if we had no record at all from the past? Although the images were lacking in many ways, they were nevertheless a record: the faces couldn't be changed. It occurred to me that there is no way that I can add a history to those early photographs. I can't make more than there already is, so, what can you do? For me, you become a photographer, and you become responsible for the time in which you are living.

What I want to be able to do is set up a historical continuum that illustrates what was done in the past but which also talks about how different contemporary pow wow images are from those early images produced by non-Native photographers. This is a chance to move away from the theory of looking or gazing at aboriginal society and have the opportunity to define a praxis and shift from "the gaze" to expressing a lived reality—someone with an opinion based upon fact.

PODEDWORN: Do you plan to do this by juxtaposing your work with Curtis' work in an exhibition format?

THOMAS: Yes. I think that there has been a lot of criticism for photographic work that was done in the past. When I was reviewing Curtis photographs at the archives, I realized that there was another story going on in these images, one not yet told. I think thus far what has happened is that the images which project a commercial quality—which are exotic—are the ones which have been most often reproduced.

No one talks about the fact that Curtis probably worked with very good intentions. He preserved an important element of aboriginal culture during his time. What he preserved were men and women who had grown up being part of a society that knew the freedom of being Lakota, being Blackfoot, being Cree. They knew what it was like to have their own institutions in place without imposition from Western civilization.

PODEDWORN: What do you see in those images that would suggest that Curtis had good intentions?

THOMAS: In coming across different photographs that Curtis produced, there are several in which he photographed families together, without the traditional vestments. They appear to be a man, a woman, and their children, a family informally without the symbolic cultural markers attached. I have learned that those photographs are not popular. What I believe is that Curtis was very atypical of the era he worked in. I believe that Curtis was typical of his era in that he saw an aspect of aboriginal culture disappearing, but rather than watching from a distance, he was moved into very close proximity with his subjects. This is what I feel is atypical of his era. Although many of his images exhibit romanticism, they also reflect humanity—something that cannot be viewed from a distance.

When you look at the text which accompanied his photographic work—Curtis actually worked as an artist, a photographer and an ethnographer—he collected stories of the people he was photographing. When Curtis photographed warriors or old men, he put them into a perspective that was consistent with the way in which they saw themselves...as respected people in their communities. When you consider the structure of his portraits, they are consistent

with the way that Curtis would have photographed important non-Native people in recognition of their position within their society—as doctor, lawyer, whatever. I see the problem as being directly related to the way in which broader mainstream culture has chosen to deal with the images that Curtis produced.

PODEDWORN: Can you expand a little on your interpretation of the structure of Curtis' photographs and its symbolic associations?

THOMAS: He was prone to leave a lot of negative space—whether through cropping or dark-room manipulation. The photographs are often set up such that you have a central image in the photograph, for example, a War Party, which forms a "horizon" image. Above and below that central image is blank space. Curtis set up the photograph to picture the people and then he left a blank, as if to say, "I can only give you part of the story—the remainder you have to interpret for yourself. How are you going to use this information?"

What I found interesting is that if Curtis was so emotional, so dedicated to preserving a certain segment of aboriginal culture and history, then he must have been affected by the people he was photographing. If he was, he must have realized that he couldn't record everything, that there was a certain amount of symbolism that would come into play. The negative space in these photographs opens up the door for interpretation. To me the negative space says these photographs need to be reinterpreted with a non-popular culture perspective. I think that's where I come in.

PODEDWORN: Considering the period in which Curtis worked, it seems generous on your part to suspect that he had good intentions.

THOMAS: Yeah, I'm being generous because I believe that these are photographs that we should be able to use in some form or other. They don't exist out there simply as entertainment. I think that people let him take their photograph because they felt it could have an important effect on future generations. I want to be able to incorporate that work into what I am saying as part of our visual history in terms of photographs. They produced a certain kind of imagery that shouldn't slip away.

The Dancing Grounds: An Aboriginal Praxis

PODEDWORN: In relation to your recent revelations regarding the work of early non-Native photographers... which seems to be a breakthrough... certainly a challenge to the prevailing tendencies of the past several years, how do you propose to articulate this finding within your own practice?

THOMAS: What I'm hoping to do is mount an exhibition that culminates the past ten years of my search by incorporating historical photographs—because that is where my interest in photography began—with my current practice. That recent work looks at the urban environment and the lack of symbolism that exists in that environment for aboriginal people. The bottom line for me is, living in an urban world as a Native person, how do you identify and maintain your identity as such in a world that doesn't accommodate that? When you walk through the city, there aren't visible signs of Native identity in the urban world. My fear is of what will happen to Native children who grow up in the city without the connection to the reserve that I had. What will happen to them with regard to who they are in relation to this environment? My work will incorporate relevant symbols into the urban 'scape.

PODEDWORN: This work is similar then to the series you exhibited at Gallery 44 in the fall of 1992?

THOMAS: Yes, but expanded. It now includes work that I have been producing over the past three years, as well as historical photographs, but it carries on with the work I started in the *Moving Towards a Reasonable Symbolism* series. By incorporating historical photographs, I am saying that I want to illustrate a movement from the icon or stereotype of the past to a response to it. People criticize stereotypes, but often do not offer any solutions in return. Like the exhibition, *Fluffs and Feathers*, you mount a gallery full of all kinds of negative stereotyping, but where is the viewer led from there? While the exhibition illustrated the types of stereotypes I feel compelled to confront with my own photographic practice, people I talked to afterwards felt that there was no way out of the exhibit—that is, as a structured response to the stereotypes. Maybe it was too much to expect the curator to be able to

provide a response. Yet, with my work, I want to be able to provide that response.

PODEDWORN: How do you intend to elicit this "reasonable" response from viewers in the design of the exhibition?

THOMAS: I've thought of a variety of ways. One of my first ideas was to construct a wall that would resemble those used at construction sites. I wanted a wall in the installation in order to suggest passage from one space to another. I decided on a construction site wall because it is something that people are familiar with and because people can stand on one side of it look through the mesh-covered windows and see what is on the other side. When you first come into the viewing space, you will be exposed to historical photographs. You will be thinking about the "Noble Savage," *Dances with Wolves*, all of the things we have been taught by pop culture about Native Americans. The Curtis prints that I want to use in my exhibition are portraits that do not rely on the exotic dress. I found several portraits that record "men" rather than ethnographic examples of Indians. Consequently, they haven't been reproduced very much.

The next series of photographs in the exhibition will be placed behind the construction wall. Viewers will be confronted with the wall, and like at a construction site, will wonder what is going on on the other side of the wall. Through the mesh will be large colour photographs of the Pow Wow Dancer suspended from the ceiling. Each one will be confrontational in pose, each dancer will stare directly back at the viewer. You will not be able to escape their gaze.

PODEDWORN: In a sense, then, you are still addressing issues of identity, but in broader terms than a defining capacity gives. You have identified that over the past ten years First Nations photographers have been preoccupied with "defining themselves," with creating images of Native peoples and communities. You have also talked about the fact that the time has come to "end the experimentation" and move on to the next stage....

THOMAS: I think that there are a lot of non-Native and some Native photographers who still feel they must conform to the idea of having to expose a certain type of Indian image in order to gain attention. I think that many of us give into the idea of photographing our chiefs and elders,

images like that. I think that this is a tourist industry kind of image, imagery that will sell, as opposed to imagery that confronts on a street level what is going on today. My problem with the "chiefs and elders" kind of image is the relationship which is constructed between mainstream institutions and their viewers, and the Native community when images such as these—romantic and non-threatening—are confirmed through their production by Native photographers.

Identity is a core issue for my work. I get so tired of seeing Indians continually projected in a "beads and feathers" light. It seems that the only way to get any recognition in society is to "dress up" as an Indian. I want to project a balanced view. Sure, the beads and feathers are important, otherwise, I wouldn't continue the Pow Wow Project. But I also feel the urban reality is so different from those antiquated perceptions that pushing the two stories together will raise Native photographic practice to a humanistic level. I don't see the urban work I have done (now entitled *Exploring Metropolis*) as negative or cultural. I find the city environment to be a very fascinating place. I'm intrigued by architecture and the way people (in power) continually alter space. And how unaccommodating the use of space is, not only to aboriginal people, but to all people who are not a part of the capitalist circle.

All of my life I've been fed a history and nationalism I can't accept. I'm not American or Canadian, I'm Iroquoian. I would much rather speak—as a first language—my own Onondaga. Unfortunately, that is not practical for me now. So I'm caught in a time and place where nothing quite fits right. What am I left with? The process of assimilation is meant to leave aboriginal people in this space—a space where there are no answers. The camera and the exhibition space give me the opportunity to figure these things out, to search for answers. Is it asking too much that when the history of photography is reviewed in, say, fifty years, my work will not be put into the section described as "other" or "alternative" voices? My first exhibition in Buffalo in 1980 was titled *In Search of Visions*. I didn't completely understand the title then, but I knew it was the beginning of a scary journey.

Carol Podedworn is an independent curator and writer living in Hamilton, Ontario.

WASH AND WEAR

BILL BURNS AND MARIE-PAULE MACDONALD

Wearable Environments: Garments to Inhabit, Affordable Harrishomes to Wear

IN TWO WINDOWS ON 471 RICHMOND STREET, TORONTO, 22 JULY–26 AUGUST, 1995

DESIGN CONSULTANT: PAULA BOWLEY; FABRICATOR: JACKIE DEMCHUK

REVIEW BY ELIZABETH ANDERSON

While driving out of Chicago on my way to Toronto this August, I passed miles and miles of the notorious Robert Taylor Homes, the failed public housing project on the south side. Toronto is a stark contrast: the 401 is free of potholes, cars keep their chevron distance, and instead of dilapidated projects, I passed miles and miles of slick new buildings housing various high-tech industries. Very different versions of capitalism, I concluded.

Having preserved a notion of Canada as a haven for socially responsible thinkers and doers, a place where the aim is to bolster existing social welfare programs and create new ones, I was disheartened to learn that Mike Harris and the Progressive Conservatives had ousted the Ontario NDP in June and that one of the first things on their docket was to slash funding for innovative housing projects in Toronto.

The recent collaboration between artist Bill Burns and architect Marie-Paule Macdonald, *Wearable Environments: Garments to Inhabit, Affordable Harrishomes to Wear* is, in part, a response to this housing crisis.¹ The project's subtitle refers to prior resourceful responses to crises in the capitalist economy of North America. "Harrishomes" recalls both "Bennett Buggies," the horse-drawn cars of Canada's 1930s oil shortage, and "Hooverilles," the ubiquitous squatter communities of Depression-era America. The phrase "Affordable harrishomes to wear" seems to promise a corrective, however minor, to current economically

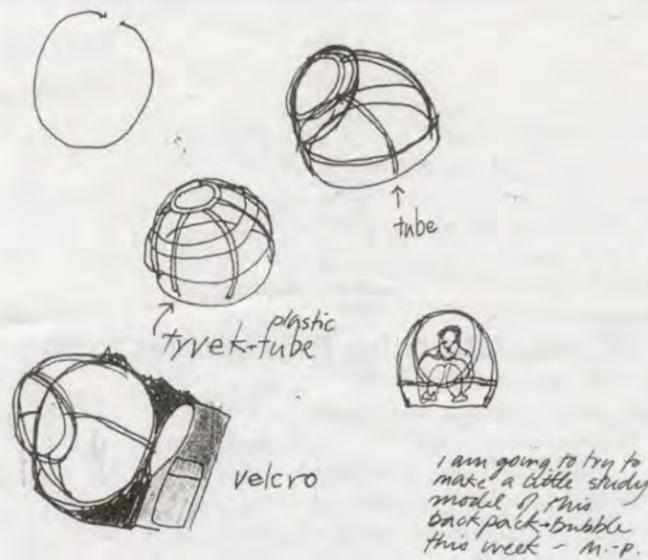
driven and mean-spirited social policies.

In an attempt to break down the barrier between art and everyday life, and to attract an audience of passersby, Burns and Macdonald dressed two windows of a small architecture firm in Toronto's fashion district with prototypes, drawings, and sketches depicting their historically-based, yet novel design ideas for affordable housing.² For example, in the display in the front window, mostly engineered by Burns, hangs a small prototype for a "transparent living pod," a self-contained plant-like structure that takes what's in nature and adapts it for human use. This pod, as a nearby paper model shows, can be worn in a pack on a jacket and, once unfurled, can hang from bridges, buildings, or trees so that the inhabitant avoids paying rent and property taxes. Various paper models accompanied by sketches attest to the versatility of these alternative mobile homes. Mylar, the shiny material used to make space suits and emergency blankets, serves as a backdrop for the pieces in both windows.

Other objects in Burns' window transform camping materials into sartorial habitats. A clear plastic zipper pouch, inspired by oversized hip-hop fashions and fabricated by Jackie Demchuk, sits atop a small blue and red plastic child's jacket. Unzip the pouch and you have a clear-domed tent with the jacket as ground-sheet. Another prototype, the "dome tent jacket," includes a mini-Bivouac tent (formerly used in camping supply store displays) that is attached to a child's size yellow

"fire coat" with bright red lining. When the tent is erected, the fire coat becomes the door to the tent, and the hood of the coat, with the aid of a pole, serves as an awning. For those who doubt the efficacy of this design, in the program for the show Burns explains that "heat would be provided by wind generated electricity which would plug directly into either a hot-wired ground sheet, the user's clothes or sleeping bag."³

As with other recent examples of Burns' work, such as last summer's New York show in which he outfitted taxidermied animals with safety goggles, dust masks, and respirators to protect them from damaged habitats, here there is also a deliberate (con)fusion of nature and culture. This confusion, much touted in discourse about the relation between technology and the body, has the potential for disrupting the way most people see themselves in relation to nature. Influenced by both the Russian constructivists and the "anti-architects" of the 1960s, Burns' work, based in a critique of capitalism, invents solutions to an overdeveloped, overstocked human world that clings to abusive patterns of consumerism. Instead of escaping from that world, Burns suggests that familiar commodities, when used creatively and sparingly, can change the way we view our natural and constructed surroundings and our role within those surroundings. Who knows, he seems to suggest, we may just be challenged to initiate changes that hitherto seemed impossible.



Sketches for "back pack bubble," Bill Burns and Marie-Paule Macdonald, 1995.

The second window on the west side of the building, which leans toward Macdonald's design conceptions, contains models and sketches of complex structures that are essentially survival kits for the coming age. Inspired by space station designs, Buckminster Fuller's Biosphere, and the work of "anti-architects" of the 1960s such as Michael Webb, whose futuristic "Cushicle" and "Suitaloon" attempted to wed high-tech materials and basic housing needs, Macdonald's *transparent mobile inhabitable cell with magnifying lenses* is a compressed, self-sufficient living space made of multi-layered synthetic fabrics.

This globe-shaped cell, a small version of which hangs high in the window, provides both privacy and protection for the inhabitant. Through sketches that reveal her research process and in the short project description, Macdonald explains how the cell works. We learn that the cell comes fully equipped with a pivoting mirror-reflector that provides shade and acts as an energy source. At the center of the structure is a multi-functional module with kitchen, toilet and shower. Below the "floor," which takes up the lower third of the cell, lie all the necessary physical plant services.⁴

The *babybubblepack mylar vest with integrated backpack and inhabitable baby micro-environment*, inspired by astronaut suits, is

made of lightweight synthetic mesh and mylar and contains zippers and pockets that hold items necessary for survival. In its folded position the vest/bubble is worn by a not quite life-size, appropriately cardboard Keanu Reeves. The globe-home pulls out of the vest, making nomadism, chosen or not, more convenient. The unpacked version of the bubble/vest holds a small paper baby in its interior and dangles above the head of Reeves. This babybubble, like the mobile inhabitable cell, is a custom-made, high-tech dwelling, made for the "individual in capitalist society divested of all but a survival kit of commodities."⁵

Referencing the work of the "anti-architects" of the '60s, taking inspiration from hip-hop fashions, space suits, and pop culture icons like Jack Kerouac, Burns and Macdonald challenge tired ideas about what house, home and housing can mean in the '90s. With an eye to urban realities and the rise in "degraded habitats," they focus on housing mobility and "socially responsible form." Both conceptual and pragmatic, their project intelligently imagines structural solutions to structural injustices.

They have another goal also. Frustrated with the way in which the production and display of art have become more privatized and commodified, Burns and Macdonald want to see art returned to a

more public, popular, and democratic space. By putting their objects in a storefront window in the fashion district, they have tried to counteract the anti-art sentiments that prevent people from venturing into museums and galleries. In my case, this mixture of anti-architecture ideas with an anti-art establishment orientation proved to be a highly provocative critical formula.

Elizabeth Anderson, a writer and doctoral candidate, lives in Chicago. She plans to move to Canada if and when one of the Republican candidates wins the presidential election in 1996.

Notes

1. Paula Bowley, the design consultant for "Wearable Environments," is an architect who was very involved in the now-defunct Toronto housing projects. Inhabitants of these projects collaborated on their design.
2. The window display fooled some viewers. Over the course of the show, Burns received a request from a child's clothing manufacturer to produce and market the tent jackets. Burns welcomes such requests because it means that his wish to move art into a more public, popular, space has achieved a certain degree of success.
3. Other recent artists have also extended the work of the constructivists and the futurists by making portable structures that transform from clothing into homes. British-born Lucie Orta, for example, makes her "*vêtements refugés*" in the Parisian atelier she shares with her husband. In a recent profile in *Paris Vogue* she discusses the socialist impulse behind her work and is shown wearing very elaborate pieces that each sell for thousands of dollars.
4. In her description of the cell's attributes, Macdonald underlines the dual function of the magnifying lenses, which are placed at the bottom and on some sides of the cell: from the outside, "the lenses distort visual perception to allow privacy to the inhabitant. From the inside, the occupant can see...insects, flowers, bees and hummingbirds hovering outside, magnified to marvelous new scales that reveal detail." From artists' project program.
5. From artists' project program.

Shawna Dempsey & Lorri Millan
A day in the life of a bull dyke
and other works
January 10 - February 3

Janice Kerbel
Jams and Preserves
January 10 - February 3

Nelson Henricks
Je vais vous raconter une histoire de fantômes
February 7 - March 9

Cheryl Sourkes
Genes and Genesis/Inexact Shadows
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October 26, 1995 to February 7, 1996

STORYLAND Narrative Vision and Social Space

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Katherine Knight
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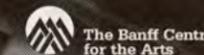
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WHERE'S THE FRUIT?

JOHN ARMSTRONG, JERRY CAMPBELL, NICOLE COLLINS, FASTWÜRMS™, OLIVER GIRLING, ERIC GLAVIN, SADKO HADZIHASANOVIC, ANDA KUBIS, PAT McDERMOTT, LORNA MILLS, DUANE NICKERSON, GRETCHEN SANKEY

Juicy Fruit

CURATED BY JOHN MASSIER
THE KOFFLER GALLERY, NORTH YORK, AUGUST 10–SEPTEMBER 22, 1995

REVIEW BY ANDREW HARWOOD

Varying degrees of accomplishment by artists could not save curator John Massier's stale "attempts to reaffirm painting itself as a juicy fruit." This challenging task is nonetheless a tired one addressed by artists, historians and theorists throughout the twentieth century. This questioning of painting by painting itself as a valid form of art in this century is as antagonistic as it is stubborn, responding, perhaps, to a continuing sense of marginalization.

Massier proposes to investigate whether "the seemingly banal image, one of thousands we are accustomed to in our exploding visual environment, contains any trace of the beautiful, the intellectually rigorous or the sublime." Well Cheez Wiz® John, don't you remember Andy Warhol, and all the other Pop artists from the '50s and since then?! What we really have in Juicy Fruit is Revisionist Pop Art. It is like a revisionist Western movie — somehow it never contains the same essence as the original.

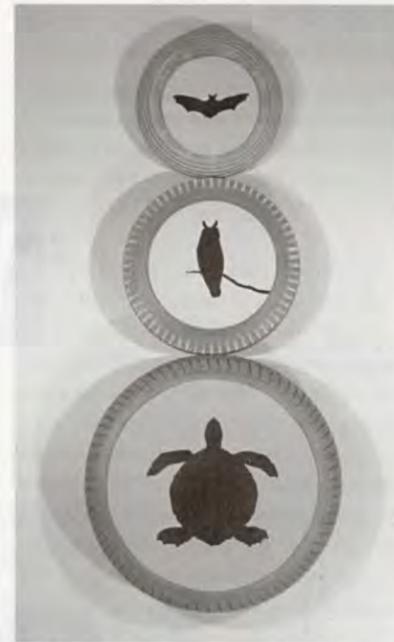
Massier didn't curate the show, he rather "selected" artists from a "particular group of emerging and mid-career artists." Several of the artists in this show are members of the MUD Collective, perhaps this is the "particular group." This sort of non-curating by curators of "emerging" artists, whose works have little in common with each other, seems to be a current trend in Toronto: this summer's "Beauty 2" at the Power Plant and YYZ's "DYS" dip into the "emerging" talent/

gene pool of gen-X and dull mid-careerists while merging forces with the old guard culture brokers.

The Koffler Centre is also lending validity to the middle ground of young artists in this city. But how is it possible to have a show called Juicy Fruit and not have any visible gays or lesbians in the show? Koffler Centre perhaps doesn't want to expose itself to the kind of scandal surrounding an untitled exhibition, which was to feature a collaboration between Michelle Gay and Robert Windrum. Windrum's *Born to Be Bad/Fag* piece, has possibly left aftershocks in terms of the safeness of material shown at the Centre. Windrum was asked — by Massier on behalf of the Centre — not to exhibit the work because of the children's activity centre inside the gallery.

Overall there was a general malaise of ideas of exploring painting and other media. Fastwürms' *Flavour Sno-man* was one of few pieces that tries to explore this route. A snowman form was comprised of three tires, each one painted a sickly candy colour with a circular wooden plaque. The plaques silhouette three different animals. It may still be relevant to use recycled materials in art production but Fastwürms have milked this concept to the point where one asks: are they producing art or more refuse?

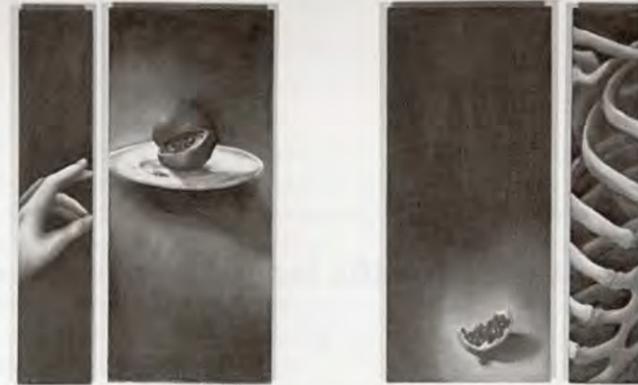
Homage to Hanna Wilke by Oliver Girling comes closest to a critique of consumer culture but more through Wilke's efforts



Flavour Sno-man, Fastwürms, 1995.

than Girling's. Two portraits show her familiar chewing gum stuck to her face and body while images of Juicy Fruit packaging show through as underpainting. The painter's own ineptness at figure drawing and sluggish use of colour produce thrift-shop art hybridized with '50s pin-up calendars. Girling more lovingly reproduces the Juicy Fruit logo than his subject and this combined effect creates a weirdly misogynist tone, one which was probably not the artist's intention.

Despite the lack of curation, content and disappointing quality of work there are a few plums of intriguing work. *Doubting the*



Juice of the Fruit by Gretchen Sankey is one of the most openly critical and darkly elegant paintings in Juicy Fruit. Four small panels portray a hand reaching for a pomegranate, the fruit's rind and a rib cage, suggesting the deadly results of excessive fruit ingestion. Deceptively sim-

ple and poetic without pretension, it could also be read as an allegory of the Adam and Eve mythology.

The only work to address the formalist, semiotic issues of the ill-conceived proposal were the successfully saccharine

Doubting the Juice of the Fruit, Gretchen Sankey, 1995.

paintings of Anda Kubis. *Juicy, Juicy* reflects her continuing obsession with the overtly sentimental and the dangerously cute. Kubis' blending of a yellow-coloured field painting with the two Pop-like cartoon-bubbles was a fresh approach. But the exhibition overall, in attempting to create a bridge between advertising and painting, ignored the importance of subverting advertising and consumer culture. A transit ad and the love of painting are not, unfortunately, cohesive reasons or even theories on which to base an exhibition.

All quotes are from the press release for *Juicy Fruit*.

Andrew Harwood is a Toronto artist and janitor.

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FANTASIES OF CONQUEST

If Only I Were an Indian

DIRECTED BY JOHN PASKIEVICH

PRODUCED BY ZEMMA PICTURES IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH NFB CANADA, 1995, 80 MIN.

Indian Princesses and Cowgirls: Stereotypes from the Frontier

BY MARILYN BURGESS, GAIL GUTHRIE VALASKAKIS

ARTIST PROJECT BY REBECCA BELMORE

MONTREAL, OBOBO, 1995

REVIEW BY DEBORAH ROOT

In contemporary art and writing, the notorious "vanishing Indian" trope can be reinforced by idealization and fantasies that invest Native people with a redemptive function. The trick is to undo the narratives of conquest that underpin such constructions. Two recent works attempt to address this issue, one more successfully than the other.

In *If Only I Were an Indian* a Canadian anthropologist and three First Nations people from Manitoba visit the camp of the all-European White Wampum Tribe in the Czech Republic. The film's title comes from a line by Franz Kafka, well-known for his *Mitteleuropa* angst. The White Wampum people echo Kafka in their alienation from their culture, but locate a rather bizarre line of escape: they have precisely reproduced what they imagine to be a Lakota camp, complete with horses, teepees, beadwork, and ceremonies.

In viewing the documentary film, the unfolding of the White Wampum experience reminded me of summer camp, where children canoe and learn woodcraft. The Tribe (to whom I will henceforth refer as "campers") seem to have fixated on morphology, on getting the "look" of nineteenth-century Lakota material culture exactly right. As they explain it, their rationale is that they want to live close to the earth. Fine, but the campers seem unable to ask why their desire to live close to the earth must be given the

proper name Lakota. "Lakota" is linked to historical and contemporary reality, and to real people who have their own concerns for survival.

Throughout the film the campers continuously refer to "real Indians": they tell the camera how excited they are to have "real Indians" in their camp; one young man tells the First Nations visitors from Manitoba that his childhood dream is to talk to a "real Indian"; another speaks of his desire to understand "the Indian mind."

The campers clearly have a preconceived idea of what authenticity looks like, and because of this, their desire for a fantasy version of "real Indians" gets in the way of their other expressed desire, to be close to and understand land. The campers are the ones who decide what is "authentic," imagining themselves to be in charge of determining meaning, a Western pathology not unconnected to how the earth is conceived in culture. For instance, they associate Plains nations very strongly with horses and accordingly select as their authentic Lakota moment of choice a time when Plains people ride horses, in other words, a time after the European invasions had already begun.

From the textbook arrival scene, which chronicles the meeting between Native visitors in modern dress and Czechs in full Plains regalia, to the emotional farewells,

If Only I Were an Indian is an extremely (if unintentionally) comic film. Some bits are screamingly funny, like the black-wigged organizer who stares beadily at the camera while standing in front of a shelf full of anthropology textbooks. However, the issue of cultural appropriation never really arises, except when one young Czech speaks of visiting North America and running into the position taken by the American Indian Movement and other groups against the appropriation of Native spirituality. He explained to the AIM spokesperson that he was "sincere," and was shocked and depressed by AIM's response that spiritual appropriation has to do with colonialism rather than sincerity.

The Czech's response illustrates one consequence of the disappearance of European histories: he tells us that the AIM person did not realize that "at one time," "thousands of years ago," white people were themselves Native but that this memory has disappeared from European consciousness. He speaks of European separation from the natural world as if it all happened long, long ago. But what he forgets is that, even in the construction called "Europe," the idea that the land is a dead thing had to be imposed over time, and occurred and continues to occur for very specific historical reasons. In many places this conception of land was and always has been resisted. At the same time, a persistent feature of

non-Native fantasies of First Nations people is the way these constructions enforce an equivalence between authenticity and the past: time becomes an imaginary space inhabited by "real Indians," while in real space the separation of people from land is still going on, colonial wars for territory continue, Natives and non-Natives alike experience the consequences of environmental degradation. Locating these events in the past is dangerous because it draws attention away from contemporary sites of resistance and change. These young Czechs seem unable to recognize that they are living out this "past," in that their concern about privatization of land in Czech Republic is more than a question of the escalating cost of real estate, but rather concerns conceptions of land itself.

If Only I Were an Indian ultimately offers a redemptive message, in that it focuses on the benign intentions of everyone concerned. These particular First Nations visitors are receptive to the campers, but other visitors might react differently. In a related vein, I would really like to see how the White Wampum people would be received at, say, the Lakota community at Pine Ridge in South Dakota, site of Wounded Knee and many struggles against colonialism.

The articles and artist's project in *Indian Princesses and Cowgirls* have a very different agenda from the film. Here, the authors seek to trace out how historical constructions inform contemporary practices. The work in this collection shows how images of Natives and non-Natives feed off and inform each other. Unlike many discussions of stereotypes, the texts situate these images within the discursive disappearance of colonial history, and the construction of new narratives of racial and cultural authority.

In "Sacajawea and Her Sisters: Images and Indians," Gail Guthrie Valaskakis

argues that current issues around the politics of difference cannot be separated from the popular mythology of the Western frontier (I am reminded of Philbert in *Powwow Highway*, who watched *Bonanza* as a way of locating Cheyenne culture). Valaskakis traces out and historicizes the various projections that underpin the image of the Indian princess. She shows how the seemingly innocent pictures found in popular images of ads and poster art (for instance, soulful canoeists in 1920s calendars and the Land o'Lakes butter logo), utilize a process of idealization that ultimately distances the non-Native viewer from both history and from the narratives of conquest that continue to inform popular culture.

Rebecca Belmore's artist's piece, "Five Sisters," is based on a previous performance work. In the bookwork, a series of photographic images in wooden frames forces the viewer to confront preconceived ideas about how Native people occupy space. Belmore appears in a bar, juxtaposed against a wooden figure, next to a stuffed moose. Her body becomes the site where fantasies — and a critique of these fantasies — are played out. "Five Sisters" reminds us that there are always real bodies behind the stereotypes, which calls into question both ideologies of vanishing and imaginary categories, such as the so-called "real Indian" of the White Wampum fantasy.

Marilyn Burgess' article, "From Noble to Notorious: The Western Adventure Heroine," exposes how popular images of the cowgirl collapse narratives of national identity and gender through the reworking of entire complexes of fantasies. Burgess demonstrates that in the timelessness of the mythical frontier, "Indian" comes to be subsumed by "American" in a way that reinforces narratives of conquest and national origin. In an interesting argument, Burgess explains how

frontier women who wore male dress and were sexually active outlaws were coded as Native, because of their supposedly "wild" behaviour.

By utilizing stories of historical outlaws like Belle Starr, Burgess reminds us that for many white people the allure of "playing Indian" refers to possibility of escape from social constraints. In *If Only I Were an Indian* one camper earnestly informs us that "doing Indian things makes one healthy," which refers to the point Burgess makes about cowgirls: for many white people, "Indian" was the sign of vigorous health and, more importantly, personal freedom. Native activist and musician John Trudell makes a similar point from a radically different perspective when he says that the continuing wars against Native people circulate around issues of freedom as much as land.

White people have come to stand in for Native people in many popular narratives, which requires the discursive and sometimes literal disappearance of actual people and communities. This is why good intentions have little to do with issues of cultural appropriation. In very different ways *If Only I Were an Indian* and *Indian Princesses and Cowgirls* demonstrate that for many non-Natives fantasies of Native people have supplanted contemporary realities of colonialism by situating the First Nations in an imaginary past. However, the film neglects to place the make-believe world of the Czech campers within an historical context. Whereas *Indian Princesses and Cowgirls* seek to locate such fantasies within a critique of colonialism, the projections of the White Wampum people reveal more about the people doing the projecting than about the focus of all the interest.

Deborah Root is the author of Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996).

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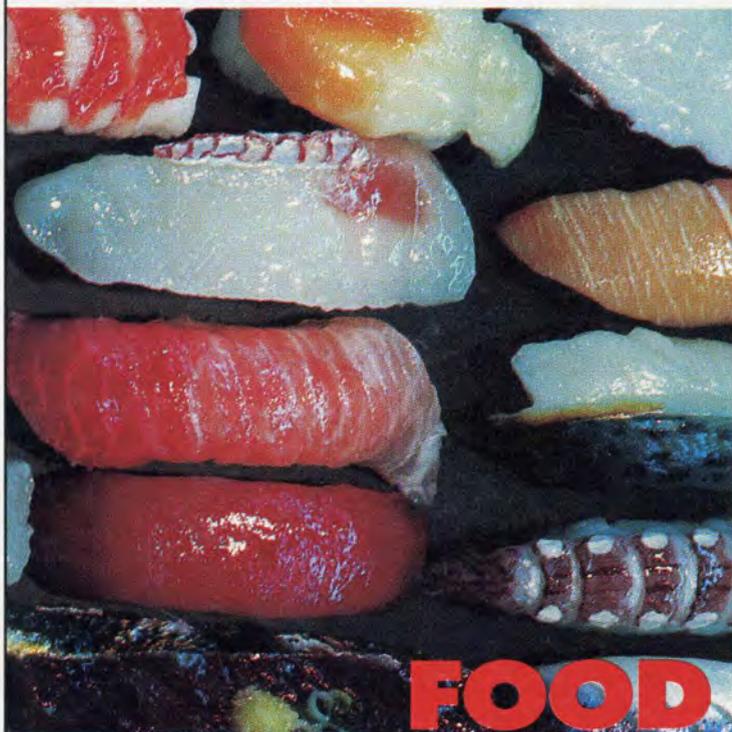
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