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MAGAZINE

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Scott McFarlane examines anti-racist initiatives in the arts and writing in Canada

CHOMSKY SPEAKS in an interview with Husayn Al-Kurdi

AIDS TESTIMONIALS by José Francisco Ibañez-Carrasco

CELEBRATING DRAG Brian John Busby reviews GUY TO GODDESS and LADIES, PLEASE!

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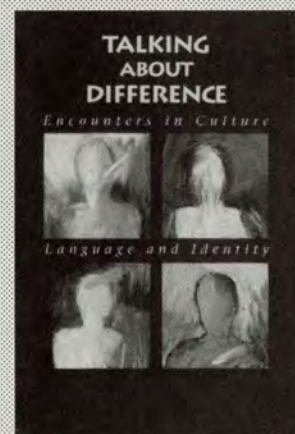
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Cover image: detail from *Musée à vendre* [Museum for Sale],
Roland Jean, oil on plywood, 4 x 8 feet, 1994.

Film and Video News

The Fruit Machine: Sweet, Healthy and Familiar

THE FRUIT MACHINE: A RETROSPECTIVE OF GAY AND LESBIAN FILM

NOVEMBER 25–DECEMBER 8, 1994 CINEMATHEQUE ONTARIO, TORONTO

Review by Andrew James Paterson

The Fruit Machine, a survey of gay, lesbian and bisexual films and videotapes produced by Canadians across Canada between 1957 and 1993, takes its title from two very different meanings of the same phrase. The first reference is to the very high level of productivity by Queer-identifying Canadian media artists. But the Fruit Machine also refers to tests conducted by the Royal Canadian Mounted



Police in the late '50s and early '60s, tests thought to aid the force in its Monty Pythonesque game of Spot the Homosexual—Queer men and women being, of course, such high security risks.

Guest curator Thomas Waugh had initially estimated the number of lesbigay-authored films and tapes to be approximately seventy-five. While previewing titles and scanning catalogues, however, he realized that the actual number was closer to 400. Although The Fruit Machine was scheduled to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall

Riots in New York—considered by scholars and activists alike to be the birthdate of the modern gay-liberation movement—there were many works among the survey's fourteen programmes chronologically predating Stonewall and also referencing pre-liberationist or pre-affirmative scenarios and situations in which the love that dares not speak its name was forced to be clandestine about showing its face.



It has only been since the advent of gay and lesbian cultural history courses that some of the prehistorical works—characterized by inarticulate adolescent longing and confusion, hermetically formalist art-world conceits and victim ideology camouflaged by performing bravado and other alibis—have been contextualized or programmed as Queer-authored works. As for the affirmation pieces, while their

declarations of personal and community identities were (and are and shall remain) brave and inspirational, throughout the survey these landmark works became

departure points for post-affirmational reclamation, recontextualization and research.

The passage from our prehistory to our post-affirmation is more a circular pathway than a linear one. Dissatisfaction with imagery that has

become arguably standardized and thus sanitized has prompted many (usually) younger Queer media artists to re-explore formal practices largely rejected by the identity artists of the late '70s and early '80s pre-AIDS affirmational period. Oblique representational strategies characterize the recent works of artists such as Steve Reinke and Nelson Henricks, who posit scepticism about the wisdom of representing issues as seemingly diverse as approaching death and the remembrance of home with simplistic unequivocal images. Meanwhile, the post-affirmational works which, unlike their

Still from *Shut the Fuck Up*, General Idea, video, 1985. Distributor: V Tape.

predecessors, speak to Queer-assumed audiences, are busy proclaiming the idea of any homogenized gay and lesbian community—and this survey allowed for very minimal space for separatisms—absurd as well as insulting to those of us who self-identify as Queer. Some producers, of course, gleefully reclaim unrespectable images formerly more the property of law-enforcement officers and psychiatric workers. Other producers systematically critique consumerist images taken for granted for far too long. Sometimes the gleeful scavengers and the critical reframers are one and the same.

Waugh's programming studiously avoided the *de facto* gender segregation still too often a reality at many festivals. Because of the demographic reality of the AIDS pandemic, the programme AIDS: Reeling



From the Crisis predominantly presented male voices. In contrast, however, many of the groundbreaking anti-institutional works, such as *Still Sane*, *P4W*, and *A Woman In My Platoon*, have been researched, developed and produced by women. In terms of regional breakdown, the programmes in the survey reflected the availability of production and post-production facilities and funding possibilities across Canada. An overwhelming percentage of the works were produced in either Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver.

There was only one First Nations-authored work in the survey. Often the breakdown seemed like one of Quebec and the rest of Canada, which could be a result of either Waugh's base at Montreal's Concordia University or the relatively high rate of film production in Montreal (and not just by Francophone film and video artists). The urbanity of the programme reflects, of course, the truism that many young men and women might identify their sexualities in rural settings and smaller towns but realize these sexualities in urban environments—especially those with support communities.

The politics of funding, both private and governmental, were apparent throughout The Fruit Machine. The delays between conception, production and completion exist for a variety of reasons, not least of which is myopia and denial on top of red tape with regard to both production companies and granting agencies, not to mention the National Film Board (NFB). The trajectory of the NFB—from the animated alibis of Norman McLaren to the

American-fixated *Some American Feminists* and the suppressed delirium of *Passiflora* through to the breakthroughs of *Forbidden Love* and *Out: Stories of Lesbian and Gay Youth*—warranted a complete programme of its own. The NFB's characteristic caution was evident within other works scattered throughout the survey. The fact that the most creative responses to the AIDS epi-

demic and the most visually and intellectually challenging investigations of desire and pleasure have come from independents (and frequently on video) is obvious and telling.

The Fruit Machine was not a festival. Festivals compete with one another for

the latest titles—they form their own circuit. The Fruit Machine largely presented works that were familiar—in some cases over familiar—to the Queer filmgoer. The survey was directed toward a more historically oriented film audience and seemed like a film course presented within the context of repertory cinema. Cinematheque Ontario operates year-round as an outlet for the international and not completely eurocentric canon of art cinema, a canon in which many Queer-authored films have become formalized as art films and the sexual preferences of their auteurs played down. Many of the films and tapes in The Fruit Machine were programmed in order that their auteurs could be, in fact, reclaimed from that canon.

The semi-outing of internationally renowned Canadian auteurs such as McLaren and Claude Jutra is itself part of the reclaiming process central to post-affirmational debate and production. The premise that shorter works by staples of the international queer film and video circuit (John Greyson, Midi Onodera, Richard Fung, Shawna Dempsey, Michael Balser/Andy Fabo, Jeanne Crépeau, and Bruce La Bruce) are as much a part of the rep-cinema canon as the oeuvres of Pasolini, Fassbinder, Ackerman, Jarman, Ottringer and even von Praunheim—not to mention regional works and transient artists such as Maureen Bradley, Lorna Boschman, James MacSwain, Angela Fung, Ronita Bezael and Wendel Bruno—seems like an almost audacious and constructive intervention. The juxtaposition of video and film, while standard practice on Queer film circuits, is almost daring when done at the Cinematheque. A greater presence of punk-flavoured queer videos shot on super-8 film would have been welcome.

Still from *The Wild Woman in the Woods*, Shani Mootoo, video, 1993. Distributor: V Tape.



particularly successful.

The programme composition was particularly suited to media-arts students and budding cultural historians, the latter group in which I would include

But who and where, for that matter, were the audiences? With a substantial body of the work being known to the festival crowd, at least one other audience was anticipated by both the Cinematheque and by Waugh. The audiences at the screenings I attended were small and not easy to read. Cinematheque regulars and/or members were scarcely present. If *The Fruit Machine* intended to present worthwhile, Canadian, Queer-authored films and tapes to the Cinematheque's membership, then the survey was not

myself (Waugh himself is a cultural historian). I suspect that for many of the films and tapes included in Waugh's programmes the next audiences might be found through television. Television functioned as a sort of absent other within the survey—for example, many of the alternative media and self-produced safe-sex advertisements—and television is also a

FILM AND VIDEO NEWS

Still from *Passion: A Letter in 16mm*, Patricia Rozema, 16mm, colour, 1985. Distributor: CFMDC

medium that has contributed to the further decontextualization of many of the NFB's tentative affirmations. As much as I appreciated seeing many familiar works recontextualized and many almost legendary works revealed, I wonder how Waugh's programmes would have played on television—maybe a sort of *Queer Moving Images* series, complete with acidic commentary by Professor Waugh. The thought of casual home channel surfers zapping into many of the works in *The Fruit Machine* is a pleasant concept so far as I am concerned.

Andrew James Paterson is a bent-intermedia-beyond-disciplinary artist and writer living in Toronto.

Karen Tisch's regular Film and Video News column will return next issue.

AIDS Testimonials:

THE POSSIBILITIES OF TELLING ONE'S OWN STORY

by José Francisco Ibañez-Carrasco



In these times of the AIDS epidemic, the (ab)use of the confessional style found in talk shows, tabloid newspapers and magazines problematizes our desire, as people living with AIDS, to tell our stories. A confession purports to offer the whole story, no

matter how flat. It is the truth and nothing but the truth. In these times of confession I have little to confess. I don't feel low enough or holy enough to be a talk-show guest, parishioner or therapy patient. Instead I offer a testimonial. I leave behind a cozy and self-involved place to expose my body and myself. A testimonial, unlike a confession, has a scarred and uneven texture; *una topografía accidentada*. A testimonial does not satiate the appetite; it fuels it, offering a partial and incomplete story.



When exactly does a story become confessional and lose the possibility of becoming a testimonial? I don't know. The lines are blurry. One can read certain signs revealing the road along the way. In his televised AIDS diary, Dr. Peter Jepson-Young (a Canadian known internationally as Dr. Peter

never talked about money, government neglect, lack of interest in AIDS research, shortage of housing for PWAs (People with AIDS) in Vancouver or the ignorance and insensitivity of health and social-services personnel. Daniel Gawthrop states that "There was nothing about Jepson-Young that would distract television viewers from the education message: he wasn't overly effeminate, he was out of the closet but apolitical, and his outlook on living with AIDS was based on a positive model of coping and survival."¹ By means of carefully orchestrated textual operations, Jepson-Young became a "good" HIV-positive person, shedding the well-entrenched stereotype of the guilty victim. His middle-class story filled

111 diary segments for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) from September 1990 to November 1992. Despite his popularity among the general public, Jepson-Young could not escape the contradictions between his former and current lifestyle.

In my own AIDS work, I have tried to be clear about who I am, what I could stand for and in what ways I could be useful. But it is more difficult to find support for work that criticizes, denounces or analyzes (with a commitment to action) than it is to find support for the detached work of some cultural outsider. In this context testimonials are marginalized and displaced. Testimonials do not easily lend themselves to the preferred relations of power: top-down, North-South, inside-outside, student-teacher. By intervening into how medicine and the body are represented, testimonials subvert and interrupt the "normal" narratives about infection and infirmity. If I base my work only on a diehard script of oppression, victimization and suffering I am treated with pity and condescension. If I join the ranks of the ultra-liberal and sanctimonious, I lose touch with the real issues around surviving with HIV/AIDS.

I inhabit a borderland—*la frontera*—a mythic yet tenuous place like Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Macondo*. I cross the borders illegally to tell my story. The experiences of indigenous peoples and "illegal aliens" are violently (trans)formed by systematic colonization. Our bodies and cultures form a territory called borderland: metaphorical and geographic, somatic and intellectual, medical and political. A borderland is a product of displacement, oppression, and cultural appropriation. In the borderlands I never get to own anything (in the middle-class sense of the term). I need to borrow everything, including the language with which I speak.

Dr. Peter Jepson-Young (left) with David Paperny. Photo courtesy CBC.

Dr. Peter Jepson-Young. Photo: Lincoln Clarkes.

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Crossing back and forth between realities is a compulsive necessity. Lesbians and gay men inhabit borderlands between dictated normality and dysphoria, "innocent" victims of AIDS and "guilty" ones, values and immorality, *pure laine* and *mestizaje*. HIV-positive people inhabit a borderland between pity and self-assertion, health and disease, normality and abnormality, victim and infectious vampire. Migration and change are common experiences to border-dwellers.

When a story becomes a confession it becomes a secret never fully revealed, a flat narrative that hides the underpinnings of racism, xenophobia, homophobia and classism. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with Jepson-Young's contribution to the AIDS canon (or the contributions of other famous PWAs such as Magic Johnson or Arthur Ashe). The issue is utilizing the airtime, exhausting people's attention, glossing over the many issues around HIV and AIDS. Jepson-Young's AIDS diary could be construed as a restrained middle-class tragedy of manners that left out more pressing issues about seroconversion and living with HIV/AIDS. Politeness and liberalism render invisible the "troublesome" aspects of who we are.

The connection between audiences and a confessional style, which the media have made terribly heartfelt, is anchored by a fear of change, by xenophobia and by heterosexuality. We might be listening to our stories and the stories of those who surround us much the same way as we are listening to *Cops*, *The People's Court*, *Oprah*, the saga of Tonya Harding or Charles Manson as interviewed by Diane Sawyer. The elements we need to understand the endless repetition of formats and formulas might not be entirely appropriate to deconstruct those stories. We might be caught in the pleasure of eternal repetition: easier to understand, infinitely safer. We need to understand the connections between telling one's story and the unequal distribution of power. We need to critically examine why Jepson-Young, Johnson and Ashe get to tell their stories in prime time and do educational presentations in schools and why AIDS activist Larry Kramer is insidiously depicted as a raving lunatic who must be tolerated in the name of liberalism. We need to ask ourselves why movies such as *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, and *Paris is Burning* get more commercial play than *Tongues Untied*.

Some stories—and some specific ways of telling them—are favoured and "Other" stories remain esoteric, exotic, different, artistic and passionate. Power (as negative weapon) is less centralized than we

perceive it to be—and domination theories no longer hold water. As Audre Lorde once said, the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. The new and fresh tools must be those of perception and reception. The problem is not so much what stories we listen to but how we listen. Stories become confessional not only because one cries and throws a fit in front of a bunch of strangers but also because the audience is only prepared to listen to it as a confession.

WITNESS/TESTIGOS

The grand, inescapable and sheltering narratives of being Latino, being gay and living with AIDS permeate my life with a sense of tragedy and melodrama. Since I have no choice but to wake up in the morning to see my lover die, to hear about acquaintances' frailty, to see the poison ivy of Kaposi's sarcoma crawl up my legs, I fully embrace this task and speak up. This is why I appreciate the infectious self-destructive tone of American sitcoms and why I understand the kitschy camp of gay self-deprecation and bitchiness. Irony, sarcasm, anger and resentment: the tools of the desperate have helped me to survive. It took me years not to be embarrassed by the tragedy, the accent, the mannerisms, the affectation: the contradictory ideas that make up my own suppressed history. Now I cry visibly and abundantly. Now I show my body in the community centre and swim in the water. Now I eat with you, and when you ask what is wrong I say that I have soiled myself. This subverts the polite British Columbian springtime, the cozy Vancouver winters, the pseudo-Californian summers, the phony politeness of a city that travel writer Jan Morris once described as "variously nice, pseudo-nice, neo-nice," the roundabout ways of this city and its people, ourselves.

Something has to be stirred inside both the audience and the witness in order for a story to become a testimonial. It is not romantic; it is intimate. A testimoni-

al may happen as part of a larger event. The night my lover died I was doing a fundraiser drag show in Vancouver and I integrated into the performance a celebration that he was ever born and a celebration of his energy. Testimonials celebrate the passage of many people on this earth, the end of their suffering; they celebrate their energy, now suspended in mid-air. A testimonial may also happen between two or more people or grow out of support-group environments. The various tips and tricks I know about pain management, grief and bereavement, treatments, diets and medicinal side effects I have learned from others who have taken the time and energy to sit down and tell me about their lives.

But beware the booming production of testimonials in videos, posters, art and books. This production needs to be seen within the larger context of a rabidly capitalistic economy of representation and a growing iconography of the plague for "promotional" purposes (for example, the Benetton tableaux vivant of a man dying of AIDS). The many relaxation tapes, manuals for experiential workshops, AIDS-education videos, brochures and posters, aromatherapy, acupuncture, acupressure, courses in miracles and other things surrounding or borne out of the AIDS pandemic may not necessarily contribute to a just social agenda, it might only fatten some wallets.

The difference between biographies and testimonials seems to be one of intent rather than form. Biographies (with their usual ghost writers) are the result of the work of an individual and their intent is largely self-serving. Biographies may be exemplary, but they are not necessarily representative. Testimonials, used interchangeably but not unproblematically with testimony, oral history, life history and autobiography, are a result of some form of self-inquiry conducted within various contexts (feminist research, critical ethnography, anthropology).

The intent of testimonials is didactic and political—to advocate, denounce, demand. Testimonials crack open the fragile capsule of the binary private/public. They subvert its apparent determinacy. Personal narratives like the well-known *I... Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984) keep a delicate balance between explaining personal circumstances and feelings and having them stand for some universal experience of oppression and liberation. Paul Monette partially achieves this effect in his *Borrowed Time* (1988) and *Becoming a Man* (1992). Michael Callen appears to play the testimonialist role in his *Surviving AIDS* (1990), in which he also interviews other "witnesses." In a humorous fictional style, David B. Feinberg portrays experiences such as "getting tested" or "having sex again" in his book *Spontaneous Combustion* (1991). Gradually, the written texts that bear witness to the plague are getting the recognition they deserve.

Testimonials are politically aware (auto)biographies and should not be confused with confessions in which the writer/speaker occupies a subordinate position. Testimonials are preceded and informed by raw experiences. They are likely to have been rehearsed, performed "unplugged," many times before the auspicious conditions are energized to give it a written form. In AIDS-prevention education this format has shown many educational possibilities: a testimonial can be a moment of reflection and consciousness-raising in which contents, attitudes and behaviours are reflected and acted upon.

TESTIMONIALS IN AIDS EDUCATION

AIDS education is a significant area of border work. There is a series of practices inscribed in this area that overlap political work, service delivery and social marketing. Testimonials are attentive to developing a democratic public philosophy respecting the notion of difference as part of a common struggle to extend the quality of public life. They presuppose an acknowledgment of the shifting borders that both undermine and reterritorialize different configurations of culture, power and knowledge, and they link the notion of schooling and the broader category of education to a more substantive struggle for a radical democratic society.² Testimonials are my preferred example and my source of experience, validation and legitimation.

Testimonials as border pedagogy emphasize participation and the foregrounding of power, ethics, advocacy, epistemology and representation. They contribute to the completion of a social project in which



One Year of AZT, from the exhibition "Fin de Siècle," General Idea, 1993. Photo: The Power Plant.

Arthur Ashe





Tongues Untied, Marlon Riggs, 16mm, colour, 1989. Still: Frameline Distribution.

the liberal notion of multiculturalism linking difference within the horizon of a false equality and a depoliticized notion of consensus is strongly criticized, and in which the central values of democracy must provide the principles by which differences are affirmed within rather than outside of a politics of solidarity forged through diverse public spheres.³ Testimonials have the potential to be radical in their insistent disruption of the hegemonic narratives: "No, I'm not well, no, I'm not clear on this, no, I'm not a man." Testimonials have been an important area of popular education. I am talking here about community education, adult education and popular education, which are projects whose scopes expand beyond mere information delivery to the provocation of social change.

Testimonials interrupt a colonialist tradition of speaking for the Other and about the Other's experience. In conventional AIDS education, however, testimonials are demoted to a secondary position through the investment of "exotic" characteristics that remind us of zoological exhibits (the tragic sideshow of AIDS). Anti-racism, unlearning homophobia, sexual health, planned parenthood, gender equity and other areas of community education are projects taken on by and between social classes—patchwork repair on the terrible acts of conditioning and socialization promoted by formal schooling, media and biological (as opposed to chosen) families.

The educational possibilities of testimonials have yet to be recognized. Imagine the value and impact of women talking about domestic violence and breast cancer, of groups of survivors discussing political torture, of people living with cancer, HIV or heart disease documenting their experiences with diets and treatments, about housing and education. Paying attention to the in-patient remains an uncomfortable issue with most members of the health-care establishment. They are not familiar with democratic forms of participation that erode medical control over bodies and treatments.

AIDS testimonials offer pedagogical possibilities extending beyond the classroom and into the courtroom, the union meeting and the funding committee, shifting the rigid formats of those discourses and discursive forms by insolently asserting the personal as collective and the personal as important: "I am gay and I have AIDS." AIDS testimonials offer the possibility of hearing from the person who bears witness to a plague.

Testimonials have been misused and exploited as accessories to education, last-minute additions to the show or esoteric salutations to individual courage and spiritual strength. Granted, not everyone can be a rabid AIDS activist, but it is the duty of community activists to be critical in their invitation of testimonialists as community resources. Who witnesses the plague? Who is telling the younger generation that although they are not called a "high-risk group" anymore this is exactly how they are being treated? Who tells young people at large that they are not "safe" because "safety" does not really exist? Who tells us that confidentiality has been a misunderstood form of secrecy and that the only way to let them know we are still here is by crying, yelling, moaning, cursing, laughing in their faces? In its ideal form, an AIDS testimonial is when I come to speak about me—not the grand patriarchal me, just me hoping that this will make you think and will make you uncomfortable. The addressivity of testimonials is not passive, it is insolent and disruptive. It speaks loudly and cynically, rudely and flamboyantly because it has the certainty that it most likely does not want to be heard.

Notes

1. Gawthrop, Daniel. "Whose Death Was It Anyway?", *Vancouver Magazine*, November 1993, pp. 90f.
2. Giroux, Henry. *Border-Crossings, Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 28.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

José Francisco Ibañez-Carrasco is a Vancouver-based PhD candidate living with AIDS. He is a member of VIDA: Latin American Committee for HIV/AIDS Prevention Education and the B.C. AIDS Secretariat. His piece "Multiculturalism and AIDS: Do the Right Thing!" appeared in Fuse volume 17, number 4.

Chomsky Speaks

by Husayn Al-Kurdi

No figure is more lauded in what is often called the "progressive community" in the United States than Professor Noam Chomsky of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Enjoying academic renown for his linguistic theories, Chomsky has written and published hundreds of books, booklets, essays, editorials, and feature articles. His oppositional stance to the American establishment goes back over five decades. According to one study, he is the world's most cited living author, ranking eighth in footnote standing, between Freud and Hegel. In Husayn Al-Kurdi's interview with him, Chomsky was frank, engaging and matter-of-fact in his responses to a number of critical questions.



HUSAYN AL-KURDI: What do we need to know about the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)? What are their consequences and how can we more efficaciously resist their "globalizing" designs?

NOAM CHOMSKY: NAFTA was much more popular among U.S. corporations than GATT because NAFTA is highly protectionist in ways that GATT is not. The main selling appeal of NAFTA to U.S. corporations is that it gives them an advantage in the North American market over their European and Japanese competitors. That aside, NAFTA and GATT are quite similar. They both have highly protectionist elements. They're a mixture of liberalization and protection designed to expand the power of transnational corporations. They are basically investors' rights agreements. One crucial part in both agreements is the "intellectual property right," which is a funny way of saying that corporations like pharmaceutical companies will have near-monopolistic rule over future technology. This now includes *product* as well as *process* rights.

These agreements increase corporate power, protecting huge, essentially totalitarian institutions from market discipline and also from popular pressures and scrutiny. A network of semi-governmental institutions like world trade organizations, the World Bank and so on, are taking over the process. There is a considerable polarization taking place here, increasing the gap between rich and poor. It is most dramatic in Third World countries, of course, but in rich countries it is also very noticeable. Parts of the United States are taking on a Third World look. Enormous and growing parts of the population are basically superfluous for profit-making purposes. Along with this, the U.S. jail population is increasing very rapidly—it's the highest in the industrial world by far. New and onerous crime bills are being passed to deal with this superfluous population.

We are now in a situation in which capital is highly mobile and labour is basically immobile. The capacity to transfer production elsewhere is a weapon against Western workers. Workers in different countries can easily be played off against each other.

AL-KURDI: Given this bleak but realistic scenario, what are the prospects for resisting the globalization process? How do we stop the juggernaut?

CHOMSKY: Let's go back and take a lesson out of history. These measures have indeed been applied before. The same ideas were applied in England during the Industrial Revolution in the early nineteenth century, when classical economics was developed also as a technique of class war—developed largely in an effort to drive the population into either the labour market or workhouse prison and to eliminate the precapitalistic world. In the precapitalistic world everyone had a place. It might not have been a very nice place, but at least they had some place in the spectrum of the society and they had some kind of a right to live in that place. Now that's inconsistent with capitalism, which *denies the right to live*. You have only the right to remain on the labour market.

The population wouldn't tolerate this. They were unwilling to be denied the right to live and for a long time the British army was devoted to putting down riots. After that came the early socialist organizing and so on. At that point the policy moved toward welfare-state capitalism and "*laissez-faire*" became a bad word for about a hundred years. That was on a national scale. Now the same thing is happening *internationally*, picking up on the early nineteenth century but on a global scale, with pretty much the same ideology: people have no human rights, they have only the rights that they can gain on the labour market. Above all, wealth and power have to be protected.

It has been reported that about thirty percent of the world's population is unemployed. That's worse than during the Great Depression, only now it is an international phenomenon. You have thirty percent of the world unemployed and a huge amount of work that needs to be done just rebuilding the society. The people who are unemployed *want* to do the work, but the system is such a catastrophic failure that it cannot bring together idle hands and work. This is all hailed as a great success, and *it is* a great success—for a very small sector of the population.



AL-KURDI: What's your personal background with regard to Israel and Zionism?

CHOMSKY: I grew up in what amounted to a Jewish ghetto in the United States. My family at home was very much involved in the Zionist movement and the revival of Hebrew and what was then Palestine. I myself drifted very quickly to a wing of the Zionist movement that was then opposed to the idea of a Jewish state. That was in the 1930s and '40s. At that time, a substantial part of the Zionist movement was opposed to a Jewish state. The idea of a Jewish state didn't become official Zionist policy until 1942.

After 1948, when the Jewish state was established, there was no longer any question of opposing the idea of a state. The problem was how to deal with the Palestinians—the native population had been dispossessed and its rights were not recognized. Israel was the Jewish state, not the state of its citizens.

AL-KURDI: What about the effects of the so-called Arab-Israeli peace process, including the celebrated Israel-PLO handshake and the recently consummated Cairo deal between these parties?

CHOMSKY: The Cairo deal on May 4, 1994, simply institutionalized what was going on before, and what had incidentally been talked about in Israel among Israeli industrialists for the last several years. They were seeing the value of changing the relations in the territories from colonialism to *neo-colonialism*. That's the way they describe it—that is their phrase, in fact. The earlier arrangement was essentially colonialism, in which they actually occupied the territory. It would be more efficient to turn it into *neo-colonialism*. The goal is to integrate Third World regions into the economy without direct military application. The idea is that local forces are much more efficient at repressing and patrolling the population. The agreement simply implements this.

For the Palestinian bourgeoisie, it will be a great opportunity to enrich themselves. The same holds true for Israeli investors. There's nothing in the agreement about Palestinian rights—that's off the agenda. It all remains based solely on UN Resolution 242, which says nothing about the Palestinians.

AL-KURDI: Speaking of national liberation movements in the Middle East, how do you rate the prospects for the Kurds in Iraq attaining their goals?

CHOMSKY: The Kurds are kind of like the Palestinians. You gain rights in the international system insofar as you provide services to the rich and powerful. Otherwise, you don't have any rights. The Kurds, like the Palestinians, have performed no such services. They are occasionally exploited in one or another [service], but that's about the limit.

Let's just look at Turkey, always hitting the Kurds with nobody batting an eyelash. The United States was long supporting Saddam Hussein in repressing the Kurds, right through the period of his worse atrocities. They kept supporting him up until the day of his invasion of Kuwait. He crossed the line by doing something the United States didn't like.

Right after the war, Saddam Hussein turned to smashing up the domestic resistance. Bush just stood there watching. Iraqi generals who were rebelling asked [American general] Norman Schwarzkopf to just let them have access to captured Iraqi equipment. They were refused. The United States supported Saddam in deploying what was explicitly called the "iron fist," to "restore stability."

In the case of the Shi'ites in the south, there was no popular international reaction. The case of the Kurds was slightly different. The media coverage showed Kurdish children with blue eyes and fair skins. [The Western allied troops] then extended a "protection zone" over the Kurdish area in the north. Right now, they're in a miserable situation—they're under a double embargo, one from Saddam Hussein and another from the UN embargo on Iraq. These Kurds need a piddling small amount of money to get their economy going, but they can't get it from the United States or anywhere else. The Kurds, the Palestinians, the people who live in the slums of Cairo, are *useless* from the point of view of wealth, power, and privilege. They simply have no rights, just like the people in South Central Los Angeles.

AL-KURDI: It seems that "globalization" and "internationalism" in all their varieties are detrimental to the health and true progress of the vast majority of the world's peoples.

CHOMSKY: Yes, *because of who is running it*. This is class war on an international scale and power is in the hands of those who control the international economic system. This framework does require extensive state power to protect the rich. The Saudi Arabian ruling class, for example, have rights because they are performing a service for Western power, ensuring that oil profits go to the West and not to the regional population. The local gendarmes like Israel and Turkey have rights, at least in their ruling groups. Others do not.



AL-KURDI: There's a lot of discussion now on the question of "humanitarian intervention," under which U.S./UN forces are sent to a country on "humanitarian" grounds. Where do you come down on this issue?

CHOMSKY: I don't think there are any absolute general principles. There are some things to be understood and then you have to apply them to particular cases. You just have to go case by case. I agree with Bill Clinton when he said the U.S. forces should not be sent to Haiti—but not with his reasons. Since then, of course, things have changed and the likelihood of an invasion is high.

The United States is alone among all the participating countries in that it does not permit U.S. military forces to be under any threat. Other countries are willing to have forces in peacekeeping operations where they sometimes are under threat, but the U.S. is not willing to do that.

On the issue of intervention under the UN framework, I think that sometimes it's legitimate, even helpful. There are many cases around the world in which the presence of the UN peacekeeping forces has had a somewhat beneficial effect. In Bosnia, right now, I think there is an argument for keeping and increasing ground forces under UN rule, with quite restricted rules of engagement.

AL-KURDI: There seems to be a terrible game being played in Haiti, and liberals and leftists are often complicit in it. What is your assessment?

CHOMSKY: The Clinton administration only expresses privately its dislike and distrust of [Jean Bertrand] Aristide—not him personally, the popular forces he represents. Ever since Aristide's election, in December 1990, the only question has been how the United States was going to get rid of him, because he came to power on the basis of organized populist grassroots forces that were very substantial and that had developed without anybody paying much attention to them. There was a vibrant, lively, civil society that threatened to establish the basis for some kind of popular democracy and, naturally, the United States wouldn't accept that.

Haiti is an offshore assembly plant, with cheap labour. All measures and options are based on that assumption.



If the U.S. wanted to restore Aristide they could do it without military intervention. The embargo on Haiti has been a farce—it didn't even apply to the United States! American-owned plants were exempt from the embargo. Haiti, which is a starving island, is *exporting* food to the United States. Textiles and baseballs were being exported—women are working for five or ten cents an hour producing baseballs for the American market. All this increased under Clinton.

Narcotics keep flowing through Haiti. The U.S. claims it can't stop it because—are you ready for the official reason?—Haiti doesn't have radar! The Americans don't stop it because they don't want to stop it. I was in Haiti over a year ago and met people in the popular movement. They don't want U.S. military intervention. They understand what it is—they lived through twenty years of Marine occupation. When the U.S. invades, that will be the end of Aristide and the end of any popular organization in Haiti.

AL-KURDI: You are a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). When I went to talk to them about Kurdish and Palestinian national rights, they were indifferent at best—one of their leaders informed me that morality and politics didn't mix. Freedom for Kurds and Palestinians was definitely not on their agenda. What's a nice professor like you, with such a strong moral commitment to liberation and human rights for all people, doing in an organization like that?

CHOMSKY: DSA is a mixture of people. Some of the younger people afford hope for the future. I am not opposed to reform initiatives. For example, if you can build up enough popular support in the United States to put through a reasonable health-care program or to support the rights of working people against the version of NAFTA that was rammed through, these can be good things.

AL-KURDI: But nowhere near the Alpha and Omega of revolutionary emancipation of the oppressed....

CHOMSKY: No, but there are a lot of things that can be done within the framework of existing institutions that would be very valuable for people. On these particular kinds of things, reform groups perform a valuable service. What's more, they perform an organizing and educational function. As far as DSA is concerned, I'm perfectly happy to be associated with it while disagreeing with a large part of the leadership.

AL-KURDI: So you think that's the best place for white people in the U.S. to go politically?

CHOMSKY: I wouldn't say that. I think it's a good place, but there are many others.

AL-KURDI: Could you suggest what some of the others are?

CHOMSKY: Some of the others are also reformist. The New Party is the kind of social-democratic political party I'm happy to see develop, and I think that it will do good things. And I'll also disagree with it. It could turn out to be something like the New Democratic Party in Canada, which has been by and large a positive force. It has made Canada in many ways a more pleasant place in which to live. In addition to that, there are all the activist groups on every imaginable topic—solidarity groups, environmental and feminist groups. Sectors of these movements do very valuable work.

AL-KURDI: What was behind the collapse of the Soviet Union? Give us your view of the Russian experience in this century from the Bolshevik Revolution to Yeltsin.

CHOMSKY: The Soviet Union was pretty much what Lenin and Trotsky said it was. The Bolshevik Revolution was a counter-revolution. Its first moves were to destroy and eliminate every socialist tendency that had developed in the pre-revolutionary period. Their goal was exactly as they said—it wasn't a big secret.

They regarded the Soviet Union as a sort of backwater. They were orthodox Marxists, expecting a revolution in Germany. They moved toward what they themselves called "state capitalism." Then they moved on to Stalinism. They called it democracy and they call it socialism. The one claim was as ludicrous as the other. However, when you read about the end of the Soviet Union, it's always about the "death of socialism." They never say "the death of democracy." But it makes about the same sense.

I should add to this that Western intellectuals and also Third World intellectuals were attracted to the Bolshevik counter-revolution because Leninism is, after all, a doctrine that says that the radical intelligentsia has a right to take state power and to run countries by force. And that is a rather appealing idea to intellectuals.

Husayn Al-Kurdi is a writer and documentary filmmaker living in San Diego, California. His writing has appeared in various publications including The Guardian and The Independent.



Artist's Project by Nina Levitt



WINIFRED WARD

Abominable Pollution

Active Invert

Amazon

Androgyne

Berdache

Congenital Invert

Criminally Amorous

Cross-dresser

Deviant

Female Fiend

Female Hermaphrodite

Female Homosexual

Female Husband

Homme manqué

Intersexual

Invert

Irregular

Man-woman

Mannish Woman

Monstrous Woman

Passing Woman

Pervert

Practicing Lesbian

Pseudo-hermaphrodite

Sapphist

Secret Identity

Sex Variant

Sexual Aberration

Temporary Transvestite

Third Sex

Tomboy

Tommy

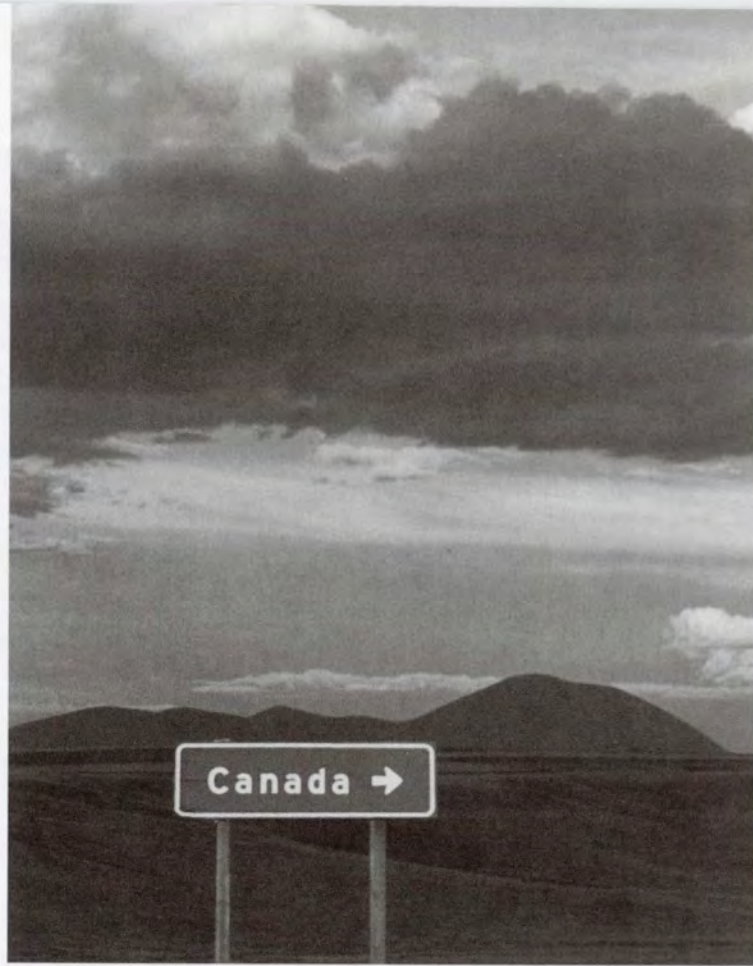
Transvestite

Tribade

Unaccountable Intimacy

Unnatural Affection

IN ADVERSIS ETIAM FIDA



The Haunt of Race

by Scott McFarlane

Canada's *Multiculturalism Act*,
the Politics of Incorporation,
and Writing Thru Race

The rigours of thought that refine in a perverse way the actual events into a myth, a fiction, establish the social groundwork for the breakdown of ethics, a reformulation of aesthetics. Each conquest brings a new aesthetic. Hence the warrior caste imagines itself as beautiful no matter how many carcasses litter the ground.

The conquest of consciousness is manifested in an aestheticization of consciousness. Refined human beings transcend brutality. Behold the humanist sensibility and renaissance splendour.

Marwan Hassan, "From 'Words and Swords: An Anagram of Appropriation'." ¹

development. The Act thus produces a bureaucracy of anthropological fieldworkers in the service of the State.

The *Multiculturalism Act* is also disciplinary in that it takes culture as a given, thereby effacing the power relations establishing a system of identity classification. These classified cultures, which accord specific identities to citizens, immigrants, those in other lands and tourists alike, are to be valued equally according to the ideal of Canadian society. Thus an anthropological understanding of culture is made to operate within a relativist logic that formalizes and thus dehistoricizes cultural differences in the service of the production of an ideal Canada. This ideal Canada is also defended by the Act, whose objectives are stated as the protection of multicultural respect, development and participation (see clause 3(1)). Cultural specificity is imprisoned by the discourse of rights — the very spirit or soul of the liberal nation state.

The exclusion of the Yukon and Northwest Territories as well as First Nations and band councils from the Act (Section 2) suggests a crisis of representation with respect to aboriginality. It is through these exclusions that the Act perpetuates two myths of Eurocentrism,⁵ providing a rationale for the operation of the liberal nation while at the same time obscuring a colonialist history of violence. The Act's exclusions suggest that the liberal nation was born "elsewhere" and not through ongoing colonialist relations with First Nations and band councils — the first myth of Eurocentrism. (This "elsewhere" is, of course, Europe.) As an example of needs-and-rights-based legislation, however, the Act obscures its relation to the colonialist history of Europeans in Canada, instead tracing its origins through the development of European constitutional law. Specifically, the preamble contextualizes the Act in relation to the Constitution Act, 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the *Citizenship Act*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The history of the formation of the Act is

thus omitted in favour of its placement within the abstract formalism of Canadian and international rights legislation.

Constitutional law and rights legislation have their own histories, including the perpetuation of the second myth of Eurocentrism, which holds that European notions of democracy and rights legislation can be generalized and applied around the world. This second myth is, of course, crucial to the legitimation of colonial conquest and violence. From this perspective the *formalized* protection of human rights and the guarantee of equality before the law smacks of a pedagogical missionary zeal through which signs of cultural difference ultimately refer to an ideal, inclusive Canada. In this sense the Act is a theological simulacrum in which "Canada" functions as the transcendental signified, because all the exterior signs of cultural difference always already refer back to a homogenizing Canadian interiority or spirit. That is to say, within the multicultural paradigm, the "living principles" of Black culture or Asian culture and their intersections are understood primarily in relation to the ideal: Canadian "multi-culture." This Canadian ideal defends the myth of Eurocentric priority and ultimately reduces race to the purely specular which has its meaning controlled within an economy of signs devaluing race in favour of the juridically defended (raceless/white) individual. People of colour and First Nations people are figured outside the discourse as, for example, immigrants or nonpersons who become "Canadian" through their relationship to whiteness, as opposed to "the land." We see this operating through writers like Neil Bissoondath and Evelyn Lau, who are repeatedly quoted as saying things like, "Don't call me ethnic [*sic*]. I'm Canadian."⁶ Furthermore, as Jerald Zaslove suggests, the construction of the juridical or constitutional self also facilitates the state's "economic steering mechanisms" through the normalization of experience, denying historical trajectories that "organize the experience of collectivity" crucial to challenges to the State.⁷

The *Multiculturalism Act's* normalizing pedagogy compartmentalizes "the people" within a certain anthropological spirit. This spirit, I have argued, works in the service of a Eurocentric priority through the production of juridical selves (individuals whose rights need to be protected by the state). The Act insists that this Eurocentric spirit is the nation's spirit. Thus the "living principles" of cultural difference and inequality, *signified by racialised bodies in the present*, are encrypted within the Act's spirit of equality and relativist justice. Echoing Michel Foucault, I am arguing that the *Multiculturalism Act* constructs a Canadian spirit that imprisons, or encrypts, the racialized body.⁸

The *Multiculturalism Act* can be theorized in terms of psychoanalytic subject formation because it works within identity politics and has as its end the production of the juridical/constitutional self described above. The Act functions through the work of mourning. In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud argues that the work of mourning allows us to come to terms with the loss of a loved one through a narcissistic process of identification in which we psychically take the dead or departed other into ourselves. This process of assimilation buys us time to unravel memories binding us to the departed.⁹ What is the *Multiculturalism Act* but the unraveling of memories/history that binds collectivity in the present?¹⁰ The Act both produces and attends to



racialized bodies in terms of their contribution to an ideal Canada. It is explicitly concerned more with cultural *contribution* as opposed to the cultural *relations* that produce race discourse. In fact, it understands the latter only in terms of the former. The Act is therefore a tribute system. Furthermore, reading the Act against the grain of its liberal rhetoric suggests that it aesthetically represents one's relation to an other culture as that of departure: You have left all that. You are departed. The reasons for you or your ancestors coming here (the Act is obsessed with origins) and the specific memories, expectations and historical forces comprising those reasons are important only in relation to their contribution to an ideal Canada. The international is dead. Being responsible to the ethics of nation-building is a priority now. A priority; a first world. You are born again in the land of opportunity, equality and freedom. Being born again, your relationship to your past is one of death. You are dead but reborn through the narcissistic spirit of multiculturalism in which we see each other as individuals, as *ourselves*, as "we," equal within the protection of the state. You are reformed.

At the level of discourse, the *Multiculturalism Act* takes living bodies and encrypts them within anthropological compartments in the name of justice and equality. The Act's pedagogical spirit does the work of mourning in which other cultures are acknowledged as lost or "dead" and

then figured forth only in relation to the Canadian multicultural spirit, which both displaces and "surpasses" that loss. The pedagogical spirit, however, is continually interrupted by its performance, its insistent application.¹¹ In other words, because the *Multiculturalism Act* is both a guarantor of equality and a recognition of the value of ongoing contributions by distinct cultural groups to Canadian society, the Act is always acting. So, at the same time the Act is pedagogical in that it produces and interprets cultural difference in terms of a monolithic ideal Canadian society, the Act is also performative in that it must continually and repeatedly aesthetically represent a "living principle" of Canadian culture in the present. The performative thus repeatedly interrupts the pedagogical address of multiculturalism that would continuously accumulate all cultural difference unto "Canada." The performative continuously challenges the Act's promise, and the vacuum of multicultural pedagogy cannot keep up with the dust of the present, which has moved on. (But to where?) The *Multiculturalism Act* thus functions through a crisis of representation. Specifically, it is the disjunctive movement between the culturally monolithic pedagogy and the racially and ethnically signified otherness of the performative within multicultural policy that is the *act* of multiculturalism. It is by staging and not transcending this movement between the pedagogical and performative that radical interventions can be made. By staging the otherness *within* racial identities, two questions emerge with regard to the application of multicultural policy: Who is being encrypted or how is racial identity being constructed in discourse? And who owns the tomb or what specific ethnographic site/sight is being serviced by that construction? In the context in which otherness is staged the latter question refuses the answer, "we all benefit from this practice."

If the anthropological basis of the *Multiculturalism Act* produces a state of crisis then it also produces doubts about the logic of knowing humans. If we are in doubt as to what it might mean to be human, we are confused about what it might mean to be living or dead. The figure that represents this living-dead confusion is the ghost. In the context of the *Multiculturalism Act*, it is the visibility of race, its spectral quality, produced by the Act and its otherness, that haunts its assimilative modes of knowing

people of colour through the core category "Canadian" with a ghostly doubleness — the insistent return of the not yet assimilated, not yet recognized, not yet "Canadian," spectres of race. The *Multiculturalism Act* is haunted by its own gesture, which would encrypt *living* bodies. Impossibly, it mourns the living. The assimilative spirit of the *Multiculturalism Act* mourns not death but a death to be, and like one confronted by a ghost, it struggles to name it.



Writing Thru Race: A Conference for First Nations Writers and Writers of Colour

i) The Culturally Funded Body: A Revision

I want to discuss the crisis of representation brought on by the spectres of race in the contemporary context of the arts — that liberal bastion of Canada's "inner life" and "culture." Specifically, I want to focus on the organization of 1994's Writing Thru Race conference. The publicly funded national conference was extremely controversial due to its policy of restricting attendance at daytime events to First Nations writers and writers of colour. The conference policy is indicative of a recent shift in anti-

**If multicultural policy would
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appropriation.**

racist strategies, working within specific crises of representation as opposed to simply trying to overcome them. Calls for access to and representation in the nation's funding bodies and calls for the nation to operate according to its liberal spirit are being joined by strategies challenging the ideal of inclusion and celebrating both separate spaces and cultural difference.¹²

Historical revisionist anti-racist strategies work within the idealist logic of multiculturalism, emphasizing the need for and value of racial equality. They advocate assistance, acknowledgment, and access to programming for groups that deserve support and protection due to their historic experiences with racism. Historical revision operates within the notion of race being a fixed identity category whether in the service of a singular self or a "multiple self" whose variations refer back to one's (ultimately singular) race background. The ground of contestation here is the massive gap between the present state of inequality and the multicultural ideal. The goal is a transformation of present policy through the reconfiguration of the past, which more accurately

reveals processes of social and cultural violence, appropriation and erasure in order to present current needs more convincingly. Historical revision, however, only indirectly challenges the *idea* of racial equality as it is configured by the *Multiculturalism Act* through the compartmentalizing of race and culture. The past is used to justify changes in the present but the relativist system of racial justice, which equates one allegedly autonomous culture with another, is not brought directly into question. Culture remains a given and protection is accorded to the rights of individuals to express their cultural inheritance as an essential aspect of their identity. Revisionist history works within identity politics. Indirectly, however, this strategy taps into the great anxiety of the liberal state — its crisis of representation. We hear this anxiety in the familiar response, "Well, yes, but if we give you people that money and programming we'd have to give the same to every racialized community and we just can't do that." Revisionist history continually calls forth other revisions yet to be named. The masked armies loom.

In the context of writing in Canada these strategies have had varying degrees of success in achieving their ends while being quite successful at exposing the lack of representation of First Nations writers and writers of colour in various culturally funded bodies and writers' organizations. These strategies tend to use empirical data such as demographics in order to reveal the gap between the multicultural ideal and the existing levels of funding and representation of racialized groups. If multicultural policy would tell a history of a nation aspiring to racial equality, revisionist strategies expose histories of erasure and appropriation. In the context of writing in Canada, revisionist challenges include Makeda Silvera's address to the 1983 Women and Words conference in Toronto, which brought issues of race and representation to the foreground; the highly publicized 1988 dispute between the Publishing and Policy Group (PPG) and the fiction manuscript committee of The Women's Press regarding the anthologization of three short stories deemed

racist by the PPG; and protests against the lack of representation of writers of colour and First Nations writers in the Writers' Union of Canada and at Canadian PEN in 1989.¹³

The Writers' Union of Canada, in particular, has been engaged by anti-racist workers. M. Nourbese Philip reports that as early as 1986 there were initiatives to increase the membership of people of colour and First Nations writers in the Writers' Union.¹⁴ At the Union's 1989 annual general meeting, a panel on racism in publishing prompted the recommendation that a task force "investigate access to publications, training, and broader cultural questions surrounding copyright and artistic authenticity." The recommendation was voted down.¹⁵ In 1990 the Union created the Racial Minority Writers' Committee to identify the needs of "minority" writers. And in 1992, the Committee organized the Appropriate Voice conference in Ontario, a gathering of approximately seventy First Nations writers and writers of colour. The aim was to develop strategies promoting common concerns, especially with regard to issues of appropriation.



Theoretically, revisionist strategies can never bridge the gap between the multicultural ideal and "reality," although the rhetoric is geared to close the gap as much as possible. Demographics, however, are in constant flux and their categories always open for various interpretations. As well, racial identity categories are divisible by other identity categories such as gender, sexual orienta-

tion, class, age and/or generation. The seemingly infinite number of permutations to be represented is a continual rhetorical burden that activists — as representatives — are forced to bear. And even if the presentation of evidence is irrefutable, the state may take radical steps to alter that evidence. Historical revision, then, works within a model of public contestation that places the primary onus on the excluded, the victims of racism, to generate change within the discursive framework of the state. This position is hampered because, in working within the ideal of multiculturalism, it thus operates within a similar crisis of representation produced by the disjunction between the pedagogical (the assertion of an empirical reality) and performative (temporal, interpretive and categorical flux) aspects of its discourse. Nonetheless, historical revisionist strategies have successfully provided evidence of racism in the operation of the nation's cultural funding bodies, and they have been responsible for almost all the anti-racist gains within the publishing industry and in cultural funding bodies.

Increasingly, however, there has been a decided movement away from the idea that there can be a singular revision of history we can all agree on and thus, on that basis, establish more equitable access to and representation within the arts. There has been a subtle movement away from a faith in there even being a process of revision in which we can all share equitably. There is too much of the unnameable looming, pressing and the goal of revision continually encounters its other. The spirit of revision is haunted, and the recent shift in anti-racist politics stages this haunting. As a strategy, revision is being supplemented by historical interruption. The question that hangs: If "our" cultural institutions cannot and should not try to represent "the people" through funding and programming that reflects a "Canadian" identity, upon what basis should they operate?¹⁶

ii) The Culturally Haunted Body: The Politics of Incorporation

The politics of cultural difference are shifting away from identity politics and the work of mourning and toward what I will call the politics of incorporation. As Judith Butler points out, in its psychoanalytic use incorporation "denotes a *magical* resolution of loss" wherein that loss (originary/maternal) is maintained as unnameable or "other." Incorporation encrypts loss within the body "as a dead and deadening part of the body or one inhabited or possessed by phantasms of various kinds."¹⁷ The politics of incorporation act by staging that which is "encrypted" in the body politic and also in its phantasms. In the context of multiculturalism, the politics of incorporation stage the haunting of race — its very "otherness" — as encrypted within the institutional, cultural and political bodies that ostensibly represent people of colour and First Nations people. The staging of "otherness" *within* the multicultural discourse now operating funding bodies incessantly reveals the inadequate scene of representation in which "minority" writers/artists are always underrepresented. The goal of incorporation is the creation of occasions for the eruption of "other" scenes without claiming the liberal privilege of representing that scene. I want to discuss this shift of politics within the specific context of Writing Thru Race.

Writing Thru Race was conceived and organized by a planning committee of Vancouver-based First Nations writers and writers of colour. In fact, the planning committee has haunted the controversy surrounding the conference. Both critics and

supporters of Writing Thru Race have disavowed the significance of this committee, describing the conference as a project of the Writers' Union. The origins of this anti-racist initiative were more heterogeneous than the controversy would presume.

On June 22, 1993, Roy Miki, acting as chairperson of the Racial Minority Writers' Committee of The Writers' Union, and Angela Hryniuk, acting as the Union's Western/Yukon representative, presented the idea of a national conference dealing with issues of race and writing. The first pitch of the conference was followed by a series of meetings throughout the summer, during which a core group formed the conference planning committee. Input at these initial meetings came from approximately sixty people including community activists, artists, filmmakers, critics, writers, curators, performance artists, students and teachers. The vast majority of these people were not members of the Writers' Union, and many expressed discomfort with the

White guilt and its various obstructionist narratives of worship, confusion, envy, fear-mongering, going-Native, tearful apologies and so on repeatedly occupy crucial time at anti-racist gatherings.

conference's association with the Union and its race politics. It was at these summer meetings that the policy of including only First Nations writers and writers of colour to the daytime events was established.

The formulation of the conference policy was the planning committee's direct challenge to the Union for control of the conference. Angela Hryniuk is misleading when she suggests that a meeting on November 7, 1993, "was the date when the delegate policy was established by both the [Racial Minority Writers' Committee] members and the conference committee members with unforeseen (some would say ill-fated)

ramifications."¹⁸ The meeting was attended by the planning committee, most members of the Racial Minority Writers' Committee and guests Silvera, Beth Cuthand, and Myrna Kostash (then chairperson of the Writers' Union). The conference policy was already in place at that time and, in a gesture indicating a shift in power, the planning committee pitched *their* conference back at the Union. This is one reason why Silvera and Cuthand were asked to attend the meeting — to pitch the conference as providing an opportunity for writers of colour and First Nations writers to establish and address their needs and, further, to declare that publicly funded bodies like the Writers' Union have a stake in this process.

In an odd move Hryniuk claims that during the meeting support for the policy came from "Predominantly...younger writers" and those who "were *not ready* yet to speak with whites."¹⁹ I took the minutes for this meeting. I have no record supporting such claims. More importantly, her description refuses to see the conference as operating outside the "patient" hands of the Writers' Union — as if that warm embrace were the goal of the planning committee. The goal of the meeting, in fact, was to gain access to the resources of the Writers' Union, which agreed to continue to administer the funding for the conference and to provide staff support from its offices. Hryniuk's infantilization of the planning committee and her suggestion that it naively failed to anticipate the media backlash omits the time spent at the meeting deciding whether or not to hire someone to deal explicitly with public relations. In the end, Kostash agreed to

provide public support in the event of protest from within the Union itself and from the media.

The conference strategy was created for various reasons. One reason was the practical desire to avoid having to spend crucial time during the weekend conference attending to white guilt. White guilt and its various obstructionist narratives of worship, confusion, envy, fear-mongering,

going-Native, tearful apologies and so on repeatedly occupy crucial time at anti-racist gatherings. The policy was also put in place to create an environment that would promote mutual strategizing among isolated groups, to access or challenge the publishing industry. There was also the goal of promoting "safety" in the various discussion groups. Finally, there was the planning committee's belief that needs do not exist "out there" only to be named by individuals and groups. Rather, conference organizers supported the idea that a conference for First Nations writers and writers of colour would reflect valuable private gatherings that have taken place throughout the history of this land, producing particular needs not produced in a conference or social space organized within an all-inclusive paradigm. And considering that a growing body of anti-racist work ostensibly debunks liberalism, why would a conference be organized on those premises?

The conference policy was extremely controversial because it made evident the discontinuity between political representation (speaking for) and aesthetic representation (re-presentation) conflated in the pedagogical discourses of the multicultural nation.²⁰ The ideal as articulated in the *Multiculturalism Act* is an aesthetic representation of a "Canada" that functions politically in the form of a promise and a guarantee. The performative discourse of the *Multiculturalism Act* interrupts the pedagogical conflation and reveals it to be politically speaking for *certain* bodies and constructing a certain, Eurocentric body politic. Ironically, as an example of needs-based legislation, the *Multiculturalism Act* is greatly restrained in its representation of "race." It produces and attends to a particular set of ethnocentric (Eurocentric) needs. Because a ghostly "other community" of nonwhiteness haunts and circulates *within* the discourse of official multiculturalism, the Act lacks the grounds to speak for or represent this otherness or "nonwhiteness" politically. This crisis of political representation is further exacerbated by the fact that this "other community" is a noncommunity due to the heterogeneity of interests within the "group." The exclusionary policy of Writing Thru Race insisted that political leadership in anti-racist politics

could only emerge by abandoning multicultural inclusionary paradigms. Furthermore, the policy tapped into a national anxiety by suggesting that precisely because multiculturalism is in a state of representational crisis the current scene of representation in which people of colour and First Nations people are always underrepresented must be redressed.

That Writing Thru Race brought national anxieties to the foreground was made evident in the media response to the conference. The announcement of the conference policy, in the March 1994 edition of the *Writers' Union Newsletter*,²¹ brought on a barrage of media attacks that continued right up to the conference at the end of June and which are still ongoing.²² Critics such as Michael Valpy and Robert Fulford, both from *The Globe and Mail* ("Canada's National Newspaper"), compared the weekend conference to South African apartheid and saw it as yet another sign, or re-presentation, of the fragmentation of a "pluralist" Canada.²³ The familiar conflation of political and aesthetic notions of representation in their articles is notably sensational and telling of both a state of crisis and the desire to sell newspapers. What the columnists attacked was the "exclusionary spirit" of the conference, arguing that Writing Thru Race was antithetical to the "pluralist tradition" so much under siege of late due to issues of race. The irony — that their "pluralist tradition" of treaties and policies regarding First Nations people actually became the model for South African apartheid — did not escape many readers.

Lost in the topsy-turvy present, Fulford mourns for a return to the pluralist tradition that homogenizes so-called Canadians under the humanist core category of individuality. He writes, "Pluralism maintains that humans should be regarded, first of all, as unique persons; race may be their least important attribute." For Fulford, race is a supplementary sign of the "human," an attribute or re-presentation of one's human essence. However, as Derrida has pointed out, "the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace."²⁴ Race thus represents that which cannot represent itself — the absent human essence. Race is a replacement or proxy of this essence. The doubleness of race in humanist discourse — that it is *both* an addition to and a replacement of human essence — marks a crisis in representation. Humanism, like the anthropological basis of the *Multiculturalism Act*, is haunted by the spectres of race. When Fulford claims race is a person's "least important attribute" he is trying to resolve this crisis by privileging the notion of race as an "addition." This privileging is culturally regulated by the pedagogical discourses of the nation, which posit a Eurocentric priority as essential to Canadian identity. This is the cultural privileging of whiteness. Dionne Brand, then, is correct to suggest that when "Robert Fulford says that colour is his least important feature, he is, of course, lying. It is his most important feature."²⁵

Aside from those mourning for an ideal, unitary Canada, many critics complained about the use of taxpayers' money to support a conference that did not directly benefit all Canadians. Their protests refused to imagine the public interest and stake in the production of specific needs by racialized groups in a country that can no longer hide its racism. As well, their complaints only worked within the construct of the "anonymous taxpayer." This re-presentation of a "taxpayer" constructs an ideal worker whose portion of income is distributed by means of the state in ways that benefit the whole

population equitably. Thus this taxpayer works for the liberal state, whose fantasies of equality and multiculturalism efface the interests of both the state and of capital. Because this "taxpayer" works in the service of a Eurocentric priority, Silvera justly interrupted Pierre Berton's address at the 1994 Writers' Union annual general meeting by reminding him that "We [people of colour and First Nations people] pay taxes." It is this payment that is a haunting debt of the liberal state.

The Writing Thru Race controversy itself encrypted the planning committee. Those opposing Writing Thru Race most often attacked the Writers' Union for staging the conference, thereby disregarding the planning committee and initiating a dialogue between liberals and a national cultural union that "was supposed to" defend liberalism, entrenching the misrepresentation of Writing Thru Race as the Union's conference and circumscribing the debate to within the question of whether the Union was acting according to the spirit of the nation.

The haunt of an other planning committee returns, however, arriving with more and more frequency these days. As Monika Kin Gagnon has pointed out, the Writing Thru Race conference should be understood within the context of anti-racist initiatives led by people of colour and First Nations people in other cultural institutions:

In 1992, the Independent Film and Video Alliance (IFVA/AVCI) sponsored the About Face, About Frame conference for forty First Nations video artists and filmmakers of colour. And in 1993 the Association of National Nonprofit Artist-Run Centres' Alberta group co-hosted It's a Cultural Thing with the Minquon Panchayat, [an] anti-racist caucus within ANNPAC. While differing in structure and intent, these three conferences could be seen as tackling the systemic dimensions of racism within cultural institutions.²⁶

What has distinguished Writing Thru Race and the aforementioned conferences from processes of "outreach" (with the goal of liberal inclusion) was their eventness. While organized with the support of arts organizations and funding bodies, these conferences were for artists and writers who self-identified as people of colour or First Nations people. As a result, these national gatherings staged an aggregate mass of cultural producers, which in itself rhetorically staged processes of cultural difference and historical trajectories not directly referring to whiteness. It is as if these conferences produced a different ethnography (in the service of people of colour and First Nations people) operating within the national address. As such, they function as signs of cultural locations within the all-inclusive nation that they cannot know. As a result, the nation cannot know itself. In this context the priority of the all-inclusive nation



becomes secondary or, more accurately, postponed. The nation here functions as an event.

This is not to say that racism in the arts was not directly engaged at these conferences. On the contrary, the conferences produced numerous recommendations for structuring anti-racist agendas within supporting arts organizations. But the recommendations were not made simply with a claim to right the past. The conferences also staged productive, politicized, and aesthetic cultural processes for which the all-inclusive paradigm of the nation's spirit could not account — and this coming from large groups of people who were supposed to be, as artists, among *the* representatives of that spirit. Furthermore, the staging of separate cultural processes and needs themselves became the signs for other processes not represented. In the spirit of anti-racist work, the conferences staged both the spectres of race and the anxieties of multiculturalism, locating not

only the whiteness of the national address and the racialized location of the conferences' rhetoric but also the *materiality* of the discursive space in between. What I have previously been calling cultural relations, this space is characterized by a shared otherness that produces the conditions for knowledge, narratives, the exchange of capital and ownership and hence programming, access and funding in the arts.²⁷

iii) The Performative and Possession

So despite the current backlash against issues of race, pressure is mounting. The backlash brings forth its ghosts.²⁸ The haunting of the rhetoric of Fulford, Valpy, and those who attacked the conference in the media is exacerbated by the media. Media function by means of representational crisis, attempting to cover all sides of the story, capturing its essence; yet the project is haunted by that which is not reported — the stories of brutality not captured on a bystander's videotape. The "other" side — that which is encrypted in the body politic — is looming larger, what with developments in telecommunications, twenty-four-hour news stations and virtual reality. The frequency of the nation's haunting is increasing. The last five years of this century are returning incessantly and they will be crucial for establishing anti-racist agendas. In the context of the arts and cultural funding bodies, liberal administrations must continue to acknowledge their inherent injustice and they must do so more frequently. Justice demands that they develop the power of listening — that they learn to speak *with* and no longer speak *for* their "ghosts."

The politics of incorporation operate within the return of this haunting future, or, as Derrida would say, its eventness. They foreground and stage the separateness of their events and organizations and initiate the complete transformation of existing structures on the basis of a crisis of representation, not identity politics. They premise both the organization or community and their actions on the inadequacies within the liberal discourses that form these specific "noncommunities." They foreground their own heterogeneity. They intensify the frequencies that disrupt the conflation of political and aesthetic representation.

Commensurate with this intensification of frequency is the staging of the performative nature of the political.²⁹ Fulford's and Valpy's ludicrous analogy of Writing Thru Race as "cultural apartheid," for example, is less concerned with a responsibility to "the real" and more concerned with using their access to print media to have a particular effect on forces that threaten the authority of that access and their white privilege. The preconference attacks culminated in Reform MP Jan Brown's reactionary response to the conference — she maintained that the conference policy was "reverse racism," provoking Minister of Canadian Heritage Michel Dupuy to withdraw \$22,500 in promised funding — one-quarter of the conference budget — in a last-minute decision, without consulting the organizers. Only an emergency fundraising campaign drawing from the cultural community and trade unions bridged the budget's shortfall. Brown later wrote the organizers of the conference, congratulating them on pulling it off. It seems she doesn't mind "racist" conferences as long as they are privately funded. Brown's act of speaking out against the conference staged race as a threat to the nation's cultural integrity in order to consolidate the white moral majority Reformers desire as their electorate. Their electorate is this discourse. As has been demonstrated in the American context, to target and win the "white male vote" is an effective means to power.³⁰

The staging of the performative nature of politics in the media is, however, increasingly discrediting our acting politicians (and politicians who are actors). The authority of liberal states "founded" on the fantasies of representation are in a state of crisis. Their crisis is not something we want to access. Their unnamable ghosts are returning, arriving more and more frequently. There is a sense of the threshold of history and history as threshold. The encrypted ghosts of race, gender, sexuality and class are *in* the media more and more, leaving their marks on liberal discourses, interrupting their addresses and demanding they listen. These marks call forth the just-ness of a complete transformation of our social order. They also call forth other marks, and so I will conclude with a quote, knowing that even the family must be transformed. The nation is possessed:

[I]n his Philosophy of Right Hegel rightly starts out with possession, as the simplest legal relation of individuals. But there is no such thing as possession before the family or the relations of lord and serf... have come into existence. On the other hand, one would be right in saying that there are families and clans which only possess, but do not own things. The simpler category thus appears as a relation of simple family and clan communities with respect to property.³¹

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Notes

1. Marwan Hassan, "From 'Words and Swords: An Anagram of Appropriation,'" *The Toronto Review* (Summer 1993), p. 18.
2. A version of Brand's talk is published in Dionne Brand, "Notes to Structuring the Text and the Craft of Writing," *Front Magazine* (September–October 1994), pp. 12ff.
3. See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994). Here, Derrida charges that the increasingly staged quality of politics, accelerated by developments in media technology, haunt the ontological basis of liberal justice.
4. See Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," *Nation and Narration*, Homi K. Bhabha, ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 298.
5. See Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies and/in New Worlds," *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*, Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, eds. (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 92.
6. Although there are significant overlaps in the meanings of "ethnicity" and "race," in the context of the recent debates surrounding Canadian multiculturalism "race" refers primarily to a group's shared physical features (e.g., skin colour), while the term "ethnicity" usually refers to shared languages or national/regional origins. Subsequently, it is usually white people who foreground their ethnicity to distinguish their cultural differences from the Canadian Anglo or French "norms."
7. Jerald Zaslove, "Constituting Modernity: The Epic Horizons of Constitutional Narratives," *Public* (no. 9, 1994), p. 75.
8. In the context of his discussion of penal institutions Foucault writes, "The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 30.
9. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1957), pp. 244–245.
10. See Chris Bracken, "White Gift: The Potlatch and the Rhetoric of Canadian Colonialism, 1868–1936," *English Literature* (University of British Columbia, 1994), pp. 223–227.
11. See Bhabha, *op. cit.*, pp. 296–297.
12. Representation is haunted by what Derrida has called "differance," or the trace; the disruptive haunt of the other within a text that would aspire to refer to the real or the present, that would work within the structures of ontology, which would insist that all signifiers ultimately refer to Being.
13. For detailed discussions of racism and the arts see M. Nourbese Philip, *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (Mercury Press, 1992). The Women's Press incident is described on pp. 211–231; protests against PEN and the Writers' Union on pp. 134–154.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 245–246.
15. Angela Hryniuk, "Writing Through Race and the Mainstream Backlash," *The Toronto Review* (vol. 12, no. 3, 1994), p. 1.
16. See Gayatri Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 154–175.
17. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 68.

18. Hryniuk, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 3. My italics.
20. See Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.
21. See Roy Miki, "Writing Thru 'Race': A MIDSTream Report," *The Writers' Union of Canada Newsletter* (vol. 21, no. 8), March 1994, pp. 1–2; 13–14.
22. One of the latest critiques is from Neil Bissoondath, "I Am Canadian," *Saturday Night* (October 1994), pp. 14–22. Bissoondath follows Fulford et al., critiquing multiculturalism for its needs-based perspective.
23. Robert Fulford, "George Orwell, Call Your Office," *The Globe and Mail* (30 March 1994). Michael Valpy, "A Nasty Serving of Cultural Apartheid," *The Globe and Mail* (8 April 1994).
24. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press), p. 145.
25. Dionne Brand, "Notes to Structuring the Text and the Craft of Writing," *Front Magazine* (September–October 1994), p. 12.
26. Monika Gagnon, "Writing Thru Race in Vancouver: Landmarks and Land Mines," *Front Magazine* (September–October 1994), p. 6.
27. For discussions of the failure of ANNPAC to take on the challenges of anti-racist work, see Monika Kin Gagnon, "How To Banish Fear: Letters From Calgary," and Lillian Allen, "Transforming the Cultural Fortress: Imagining Cultural Equity," *Parallélogramme* (vol. 19, no. 3, 1993–1994), pp. 38–59.
28. The Ministry of Multiculturalism has recently become only a portfolio of the new Ministry of Heritage and Languages. This shift devalues issues of race, which were being staged by debates concerning "multiculturalism," by placing them within the broad, general category of "heritage" or "background." This shift is thus simultaneously an effort to diffuse racial controversy and emblematic of the government's anxieties.
29. My sense of this phenomenon is derived from my reading of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, especially pp. 78–81.
30. Michael Omi and Howard Winanti, *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 134; pp. 146–147.
31. Karl Marx, "Grundrisse," in *Selected Writings*, David McLellan, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 353.

MONSTERS AND VIRGINS

Karla's Web: A Cultural Investigation of the Mahaffy-French Murders

(TORONTO: VIKING — PENGUIN BOOKS CANADA LTD., 1994)

BY FRANK DAVEY

REVIEW BY DIANA FITZGERALD BRYDEN

Outrageously wrong. Inhumanly wicked. Unnatural. This is how we describe our monsters. Monstrosity and its opposites (virtue, innocence, purity etc.) have served an abundance of purposes as archetypes. To name someone a monster or an innocent victim is to reduce them to emblematic status and to excuse us either from understanding their apparent wickedness or from empathizing with their suffering.

In his book *Karla's Web*, Frank Davey examines in detail what he calls the "mediatization" (p. 17) of the murders of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French. He dissects the ways in which the press has taken a series of events and turned them into a cohesive narrative—a horrific fairy tale with all the requisite moral symbols, where monstrosity and innocence in turn are represented by man and virgin, killer and victim, legal system and public (with the media as its surrogate), ban maker and ban breaker.

Serial killer monsters are ubiquitous in a popular press that accumulates and narrates each detail of their monstrosities, and women serial killers are presented as the most fascinating and perverse of them all. In 1967 I was growing up in London, England, just after the trial of two of Britain's most notorious serial killers, Myra Hindley and Ian Brady. I was very young, so my understanding of the "Moors murders" (the torture, killing and secret burial of several children) was cloudy and nightmarish and full of half-truths—an atmosphere exacerbated by

threats that Myra Hindley would come and get me when I was bad.

Since then—having read several articles and books about the Moors murders and most of the media coverage surrounding Karla Homolka—similarities in the press and public responses to the two women are evident. In each case, the fact of their gender has been perceived as shocking. Each woman's physical appearance has been fetishized, although Hindley was never referred to as a fairy-tale princess. (Instead, she was described as "Medusa-faced,"¹ and her elaborate hairstyle, a popular '60s fashion, was frequently portrayed as if it were some kind of evidence of her voracious and perverse sexuality.) In 1966, the media and other observers including psychiatrists, religious people, and legal experts speculated that Hindley and Brady's crimes were the result of a sexually permissive society² that had gone mad and created its own monsters—as if sexuality, allowed free rein, somehow had an inevitably "unnatural" or monstrous outer limit. The discussion at the time was explicitly Christian in its moral tone and content, and while the

whole atmosphere surrounding Homolka's trial today is far more secular, much of the rhetoric and imagery remain.

In *Karla's Web*, Davey describes the ways in which religious and mythological metaphors have become secularized and embedded in popular narratives. During the ongoing Homolka-Teale proceedings, while there are no interviews with archbishops on the meaning of evil and the dissolution of public morality, there have been numerous portrayals of Paul and Karla as devils in disguise, and of their victims as innocent, virginal even saintly. Davey quotes Michele Mandel of *The Toronto Sun* describing Kristen French as "everything that he [the murderer] is not; she is light to his darkness, innocence to



La Maddalena, Carlo Dolci, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



his evil.... She is as gentle as he is savage. She is a parent's dream. And a monster's fantasy." (p. 128) (Davey also tells us that Leslie Mahaffy's mother has described Mandel's rhetoric as "close to pornography." (p. 129))

An element common to the narratives surrounding both Myra Hindley then and Karla Homolka now is the notion of the particularly perverse monstrosity of women. Thirty years ago, a culture that would not allow women jurors at Hindley's trial—their sensibilities being considered too tender to expose to the gruesome details of her crimes³—perceived her as the worst of all monsters: the maternal turned murderous. Now, as then, it's not that our culture can't conceive of wickedness in women. It's that this wickedness is somehow seen as worse, more unbridled, more savage than that of men.

The reasons for this are complex. On the one hand, the more potentially innocent (or victim-like) a character is, the more monstrous she is when she does harm—therefore, an angelic-looking woman who kills other young women is horribly perverse. On the other hand, women have always been suspected of being more corruptible than men. Wicked women are often seen to be creatures of uncontrollable passions, and those passions to be closely related to their sexuality. "Good" women are less sexual, more innocent—more victim—than "bad" women.

Our female archetypes, multiple and complex, include woman—particularly wife and mother—as benevolent angel.

Several years ago, "street proofing" programmes were teaching children who found themselves lost in department stores or malls a distinctive iconography for those who might be their saviours. They were told to turn to men in uniform (policemen) or women (particularly women with children) for help. These were considered the only safe strangers; the guardian angels. From such logic it makes sense that, as Davey says:

Part of the reason for the media's treating both the accused as monsters seems to have been our insistence on stereotypically regarding normal women as more helpful, nurturing, and kind-hearted than men, and on regarding major deviations from such a norm as unnatural or monstrous. (p. 136)

As women, many of us have internalized these images of our gender while still being aware of their falseness. I've talked with friends about our feelings of rage and betrayal surrounding Karla Homolka, at the same time that we cringe at portrayals of her as the ultimate perversion of womanhood—and of her victims as transcendently pure and innocent. She has been portrayed both as a possible victim herself (and therefore as less responsible) and alternatively as a greater monster than her male partner.

Among the writers I've talked to, including both men and women, there has been much interest in the way this case has embodied popular notions of good and evil, viciousness and innocence. There has also been a spate of artistic activity, much of it aimed at unraveling such assumptions. In light of this, I'm grateful for Davey's analysis of the many represen-

tations of victimhood in the press. Like him, I was both frustrated and disturbed by Judge Kovacs' statement at Homolka's sentencing, in which he referred to "the deaths of two innocent young girls who lived their lives without reproach in the eyes of their communities,"⁴ and by the media's increasing virginalization and dehumanization of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French.

Davey pinpoints a *Hamilton Spectator* article that "seemed to constitute a kind of turning point in Mahaffy's image, and a turning also from an adult-world perspective on her as a difficult child to one that was sympathetic, appreciated her energy, and associated her with idealism." (pp. 31–32) He goes on to show the ways in which the media approached Kristen French from the start as a saintly icon while they familiarized the public with her family, her friends, her dog (and, supposedly, with the suffering she experienced at her death and the pain it caused everyone around her). And he says that "Mahaffy's transformation from suspected runaway and shoplifter to Judge Kovacs' girl 'who lived beyond reproach' was sharply accelerated by the Kristen French abduction" (pp. 32–33) and the subsequent conflation of the characters of the two girls.

The mostly gay victims of American serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer were never treated like this, although in a recent *People* magazine article, written upon the occasion of Dahmer's own murder in prison, there is an attempt to represent at least some of the boys and young men as being "innocent" and full of promise.⁵ But it would be

Photo-collage of Myra Hindley and Ian Brady
by Dave Goodman, 1987.

naive to assume that acceptance of such a representation is widespread, as is evident from the fact that police sent victim Konerak Sinthasomphone, naked and bleeding, back to Dahmer's house after he ran into the street for help. According to reports at the time, they thought that 14-year-old Sinthasomphone was involved in a lover's quarrel. Their reaction is in keeping with the reality described in a *New Yorker* article about Dahmer and the status of his victims:

So long as the serial killer chooses his victims from the ever-shifting population of drifters, prostitutes, and the disenfranchised of America—those who seem to lack identity—he can operate with impunity for a very long time. He will be caught only through some blunder of his own, not through police investigation.⁶

And in Toronto recently there has been little or no public mourning—or photographs, or lengthy sentimental portrayals of the victims and their lives—surrounding the murders of several women, including two prostitutes, from Parkdale.

As Davey points out, in the case of the Mahaffy-French murders media depictions of innocent victims versus evil have not been confined to the obvious subjects. Much of *Karla's Web* is devoted to analyzing media responses to the publication ban, including the attempts by many journalists to represent themselves as vulnerable innocents brutalized by the ban and to "create the illusion that the writer and reader are equals in powerlessness...." (p. 93) In one of his best passages, Davey writes:

The recurrence of phrases such as "bad child," "like children," "little minds," and "captive" pointed to the huge extent to which the media themselves felt diminished by the ruling. It also pointed to the pervasiveness in the media of the belief that they had become the new victims. The scene of abuse the media were portraying had a striking resemblance to the Gothic scene



they had earlier portrayed of the Mahaffy-French murders. The abusers were male [an assumption made before the knowledge of Homolka's involvement], the place of violence was dark, obscure—behind "closed doors," a "black wall," cloaked in "secrecy." The victims were again innocents—mere "children." (pp. 83-84)

Davey understands that the ban is, in many ways, a boon for the media; one that allows them to extend and rehash their coverage of the murders. (And in place of further details, they can offer descriptions of the anguished responses of family, reporters and court stenographers to the facts referred to in the courtroom.) In his analysis, which is too extensive and detailed to do justice to here, he considers American responses to the ban, the use of the Internet to relay banned information and rumours and the effects that American comments on Canada's laws have had on public perceptions and discussion of these laws.

At the end of *Karla's Web*, after his exhaustive examination of the implications that these murders and their media coverage hold for Canada's legal system, communications networks, literary traditions and cultural sovereignty, Davey rightfully

turns our attention back to Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French, whose deaths have provided material for so many commentators. His description of their fetishization and iconization remains attentive to fact that the lives of the two young women have more meaning than the mere circumstances of their deaths and that their suffering was, quite literally, unspeakable since no one but them could describe it for us.

Leslie Mahaffy's mother has said: "[W]ords are simply not adequate to describe the pain. They seem to trivialize the emotions."⁷ She has asked that her daughter be released from the imprisonment of her depiction as mere victim:

I don't ever want to see another image of that body bag again. I don't want to see those men carrying my daughter from the lake.... Show a picture of Leslie when she was alive. I already know what happened. It aches to be constantly reminded.⁸

Notes

- ¹ Pamela Hansford Johnson, *On Iniquity*, (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1967), p. 93.
- ² Pamela Hansford Johnson, *ibid.*, p. 25.
- ³ Judge Gerald Sparrow, *Satan's Children*, (Odhams Books Limited, London, 1996), p. 28.
- ⁴ *Maclean's*, "Unspeakable Crimes," 19 July 1993, p. 17 and Frank Davey, pp. 32-33.
- ⁵ *People*, "The Final Victim," 12 December 1994.
- ⁶ Joyce Carol Oates, *New Yorker*, "The Talk of the Town (A Riddle Wrapped in a Mystery Inside an Enigma)," 12 December 1994, p. 45.
- ⁷ *Maclean's*, *ibid.*, p. 17.
- ⁸ *Maclean's*, *ibid.*, p. 17.

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CELEBRATING DRAG

Guy To Goddess: An Intimate Look At Drag Queens

(VANCOUVER: WHITECAP, 1994)
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROSAMOND NORBURY, TEXT BY BILL RICHARDSON

Ladies, Please!

(TORONTO: EXILE EDITIONS, 1994)
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARYANN CAMILLERI, INTRODUCTION BY TOM HEDLEY

REVIEW BY BRIAN JOHN BUSBY

Photo: Rosamond Norbury, 1994.



Photo: MaryAnn Camilleri, 1993.

Drag is hot these days, so hot that one need no longer haul out the tired list of Orlando, RuPaul, and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* as evidence. Therefore, the cynical may view these two collections of photographs—both studies of drag queens, both by Canadian women, both published within days of each other this past autumn—as the work of those eager to cash in on a craze. Others will see these volumes for what they are: books that waited to be born, works that might not have found publishers just a few years back.

Rosamond Norbury has been a drag-club habitué for over twenty-five years, so it is no real surprise that she concentrates on the professional queen, ignoring those who might occasionally don a dress as a lark. Her queens are as serious as they are meticulous. She captures degrees of calculation, whether in the preparation of a wig or the application of eye shadow,

that can't help but lead to a greater appreciation of the drag queen as artist.

In her nightclub photos, Norbury places the queens firmly in the spotlight they crave. Whether on-stage or off—it is they who are lit, the clientele and the entire club often fading into darkness. One of her strengths is her ability to capture both the glamour and the tackiness of drag through the use of black-and-white film.

In his accompanying text, Bill Richardson all but ignores Norbury's photographs, allowing the images to stand on their own. Richardson approaches drag with the timidity of one who has all-too-often witnessed its acidity and bitchiness. Choosing to avoid the show, he concentrates on the more private moments backstage. Richardson seeks to uncover the motivation behind the make-up, and



Photo: MaryAnn Camilleri, 1992.

although he provides some interesting and revealing glimpses into the subculture, he is forced to concede defeat. Ultimately, Richardson sees drag as an unknown country, a territory those lacking the urge to move to may visit but always find foreign.

Tom Hedley makes little attempt to unlock the mysteries of drag in his introduction to *Ladies, Please!* Instead, he writes nostalgically of past encounters, including one with the late Warhol superstar Candy Darling, whose spirit he believes lives on in MaryAnn Camilleri.

Camilleri's book takes drag out of the clubs and into the light of day. Most of her photographs document annual events like New York's Wigstock and Toronto's Pride Day. There are few professionals here and a noticeable increase in the trashy. There is also much more in-your-face gender-fucking going on: three queens with matching dresses and mustaches, another queen wearing a collection of cheap plastic necklaces on a mat of chest hair.



Those who were fooled, then titillated, by the sight of Jaye Davidson in *The Crying Game* might be in for a disappointment. Both these books are on *drag*: very few of the characters within would ever be mistaken for women. The make-up is garish, the jewellery blinding, and the costumes are just that—costumes. “We’re cousins to clowns,” says one of the queens interviewed by Richardson.

There is much humour in these photographs, some subtle (Camilleri’s forest of male legs, two of which are encased in fish-net stockings), some not (Norbury’s trio of queens in Little Bo Peep underwear).

What comes through in these photographs is the feeling that these are people having fun. And it is this mood that sets these two books apart from so many of their predecessors. Norbury and Camilleri celebrate drag. They populate their books with confident, smiling, laughing faces. George Alpert’s tearful transvestite is absent,¹ as are Nan Goldin’s downcast bar queens.²

The obvious irony is that while Richardson and Hedley look at drag through the eyes of outsiders, Camilleri and Norbury really know and love their subject. Although women, the world of the drag queen is not so alien to them. It is perhaps for this reason alone that they are so successful.

Notes

1. George Alpert, *The Queens* (New York: Da Capo, 1975).
2. Nan Goldin, *The Other Side* (New York: Scalo, 1993).

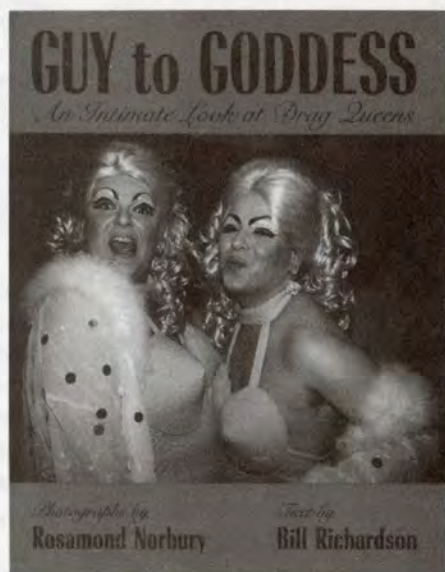
Brian John Busby is a writer living in Vancouver. He is the west coast editor of Clik Interactive.

Why do they dress up? Why don't you?

—
—
—

*We're cousins to clowns. We shake things up.
We hide our surface selves with makeup,
and let what's beneath come out. In drag,
I feel like I'm something more than myself.*

—
—
—



—
—
—

Lots of fags look down on drag queens. They should remember that it was mostly drag queens who fought back at Stonewall. If it wasn't for them, where would any of us be?

—
—
—

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ETHNIC TALENT FOR EXPORT

Mexarcane International

NOVEMBER 10–14, 1994
DUFFERIN MALL, TORONTO

REVIEW BY GABRIELLE HEZEKIAH

Mexarcane, the performance by Los Angeles-based artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña in Toronto in early November, was an exploration of the exotic. Situated within the context of free trade and the so-called globalization of culture, *Mexarcane* focused our attention on the commodification and performance of ethnicity. Perhaps unintentionally, it also raised interesting questions about audience, authenticity—and the strategies we choose for its subversion—and the “performance” of art events.

For three days a bamboo cage was set up on an Astroturf platform near the food court at the Dufferin Mall in west-end Toronto. Surrounded by Stitches, Black’s Photography and hair-products store Trade Secrets—and with The Body Shop just across the way—the cage occupied a space occasionally reserved for community events. During the performance, Gómez-Peña sat on a chair in the cage and listened to tunes on his yellow portable stereo. He spoke a make-believe “indigenous” language. Although the grass skirt was reserved for the first performance, the elaborate make-up and boots were consistent throughout. On the floor were various trinkets, artifacts, and symbols.



Mexarcane, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, performance, 1994.

Tied to the cage was an assortment of legal documents guaranteeing the so-called native’s authenticity—visa, passport pages, a work permit issued by the Canadian government. He was listed as “ethnic talent.”

Fusco played the part of the corporate representative, managing the primitive. She too was elaborately dressed as she sat at her desk with a laptop computer conducting interviews with volunteers from the audience. Behind her was a panel inviting the customer to sample



Photo courtesy YZY Artist's Outlet.

global culture. Interview questions centred on dress, destinations, food and artifacts, with clients rating them within a range of "normal" to "exotic." Based on the answers, which she entered into the computer, Fusco was able to determine the taste of the client and the performance in which she or he was most likely to be interested. The client was then instructed to go straight to the cage and utter the words "Live Action A" (or B or D or O) so that the "native" would perform. These performances involved ritualistic and exaggerated manipulations of the objects in the cage and included an extended and deliberate application of make-up, the eating of a (fake) human heart, the lip-synched advertisement for a box of Mexican multigrain health food, Gómez-Peña stabbing himself in the stomach. In-between command performances Gómez-Peña would perform his own rituals.

In theme, conception and staging, *Mexarcane* seemed quite similar to the Fusco/Gómez-Peña performance documented in the videotape *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatimau Odyssey*, by Fusco and Paula Heredia. That piece, produced at the height of the debate over the Columbus quincentenary celebrations, featured Fusco and Gómez-Peña as members of a "newly discovered tribe" from an

imaginary island in the Gulf of Mexico. The artists exhibited themselves in a cage in various museums and public spaces around the world and in the tape expressed surprise that they were often taken for "real natives." At the *Mexarcane* pre-performance lecture at the University of Toronto, Fusco showed excerpts of the tape and also made some comparisons. *Mexarcane* was intended to draw on the older work, challenging the enduring legacy of colonialism and anthropology and their role in objectifying the Other. Yet *Mexarcane* was also intended to move beyond the emphasis on objectification of the Other by engaging with the dynamics of the futuristic post-free-trade era.

The Dufferin Mall, although home to recent site-specific art exhibits, is not a traditional art space. But neither is it simply a site of consumerism. The mall has recently been at the centre of a political controversy: accusations that the mall is drawing commerce away from small businesses in the area; perceived problems with loitering and crime. As a result, there have been a number of strategies aimed at deliberately constructing the mall as a community space. Within this complex and multi-layered site, visitors to the mall responded to the work in different ways. Some circled the cage warily. Others asked questions of those in the crowd.

Many waited for a very long time, checking out the scene, before submitting themselves to the interview. Once they had received their instructions from the interviewer they were themselves put centre stage. The "native" performed but retained control. He leaned forward at his own pace, ensured that he had correctly understood the instruction, and proceeded to perform. He determined the length of his performance. The client was left standing, fidgeting, not sure when it was going to be over. Some looked as though they felt they'd been "had." Others were having a ball. The nativization of the consumer was put on display—it was, in effect, *their* talent and not the ethnic talent of Gómez-Peña that was being sold. Although this was a crafty use of subversion and reversal, it also posed the danger of reinscribing the very questions of authenticity and spectacle it sought to challenge.

Dufferin Mall is situated in one of the most racially and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in Toronto, and the audience reflected that reality. The performance, however, seemed to address the client and the audience as largely white and also as politically and culturally naive. Even when audiences meet these expectations there is the danger of reinscribing the status quo through the replaying of



Photo courtesy Mercer Union.

stereotypes and, in this performance, the creation of a "native" language. There is also the issue of "putting-on" the audience and the licence one takes with performance. But what are the implications when First Nations people and people of colour also make up the audience and part of an artistic community? How does the performance shift to accommodate the changing context? How does the staged authenticity of the performance confront the lived, embodied experience of indigenous Mexicans and other aboriginal peoples? To their credit, when faced with this situation, the artists seemed to alter their performance to show solidarity and respect. But the problem remains: once this kind of performance leaves the realm of the symbolic (the imaginary island and nation of *The Couple in the Cage*) to locate itself more specifically in real space and time (present-day Mexico), it leaves itself open to new challenges to authenticity—precisely the kinds of challenges and paradoxes posed by the shifting sites, contexts and positions implied by the globalization of culture and trade.

This was compounded by another question of audience: who was the "real audience?" How many were "naive" and was that a requirement for the performance to be effective? There was the sense that the mall space had been "invaded" by artists.

During the Saturday and Sunday performances, in particular, there were lots of cameras and video cameras. Who was this performance for? Those of us "in the know," individually or collectively, looked on voyeuristically to see who had "got it" and who had not. There was, in effect, a private little art show going on all by itself. What did that do to the performance of the audience? This question is posed by the practice of traditional anthropology as well. But in light of the nativization of the audience described above what does it mean when aboriginal people and people of colour are again made the spectacle? It is clear, certainly from their lecture presentation and their other performances, that Fusco and Gómez-Peña are not unaware of the political implications of doing this kind of work. Their analysis of cultural production is more sophisticated than that. This spectacularization was a function not only of conception but also of the ways in which artists' communities appropriated the site of production.

Adults and children alike were often intrigued by the performance. One kid draped himself over the platform, blurring the boundaries between performer and audience, and drew masterpieces in his workbook, clearly comfortable with the scene but oblivious to the enormity of the

cultural event taking place around him. And then there were the three little kids, eating their McDonald's dinners, transfixed by the man in the cage. Then there was the conversation I overheard on the first day of the performance:

"What he doin'?"

"Look like he takin' pictures ... he must be taking pictures of children."

"Oh. An' what she doin' then?"

"Where? Oh, dey have another one. Well, anyting for a dollar, yes."

What was most interesting about *Mexarcane* were the questions raised about audience and who performs for whom and why—and whether our present art practices can in fact subvert the answers.

Gabrielle Hezekiab is a writer living in Toronto who has an interest in cultural studies.

BLACK MALE: IMPRINTING FEAR AND ANXIETY

ROBERT ARNESON, JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT, MEL CHIN, ROBERT COLESCOTT, RENEE COX, DAWN DEDEAUX, KEVIN EVERSON, ROBERT GOBER, LEON GOLUB, DAVID HAMMONS, LYLE ASHTON HARRIS, BARKLEY HENDRICKS, BYRON KIM, JEFF KOONS, GLEN LIGNON, ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE, ADRIAN PIPER, CARL POPE, TIM ROLLINS + K.O.S., ALISON SAAR, ANDRES SERRANO, GARY SIMMONS, LORNA SIMPSON, DANNY TISDALE, CHRISTIAN WALKER, CARRIE MAE WEEMS, PAT WARD WILLIAMS, FRED WILSON, X-PRZ

Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, NEW YORK CITY NOVEMBER 10, 1994–MARCH 5, 1995

REVIEW BY NICHOLAS BOSTON

There is a scene in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*—amusing but not without serious subtext—in which a trio of adolescents uncaps a fire hydrant, unleashing torrents of pressure-packed water into the open convertible of a middle-aged man, an "innocent passer by." Drenched and humiliated, the man explodes in rage, commanding a pair of tired cops on the beat to nab the culprits. "Who did this?" the cops drone. "I don't know—a bunch of black kids!" is the indignant response. The camera, angled in classic Spike style, is directed to a crowd of onlookers—all Black, mostly male—who are laughing, even though the spectre of guilt looms all powerful. Were this not satire, the stage would most certainly be set for yet another unpredictable/predictable case of mistaken identity.

Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art was an exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum of

American Art that sought to tackle and pin down the social construction of the racial identity of African-American men. The show ideologically challenged that persistent impulse in the collective imagination to implicate Black men in three adrenaline-charged arenas: sex, crime, and sports. The Whitney's branch manager and *Black Male* curator Thelma Golden said her goal was to "look at work produced in the last twenty-five years. It became clear [to me] that the subject of representations of the black male as stereotype and/or archetype has been taken up by a wide range of artists—both African American and white, both female

and male—from a vast array of personal and political perspectives."

Faithful to this burgeoning movement, the selected works in *Black Male* represented twenty-nine artists, six artistic genres—painting, photography, sculpture, mixed media, film and video—and included an accompanying lecture series through which artists and funky academics had their turns to pitch theories about the black male as subject and object.

The exhibition was physically organized into three sections corresponding to the colours of the Black nationalist flag—red, black and green—a fact that was not readily understood unless you read the catalogue. More effective to one's experience of the show was its circular carnivalesque set-up. You entered at one end, travelled through passages and antechambers imprinted with fear and anxiety, then found yourself spat out on the other side, opposite where you started.



Guarded View, Fred Wilson, four mannequins with museum guard uniforms, 75 x 48 x 166 inches overall, 1991.

There was movement and progression in the presentation of *Black Male* that offset the history of pain and rage it chronicled. "It knocks you down and then it brings you up again," said cultural critic Greg Tate, a contributor to the exhibit's 200-page catalogue of essays. "Sometimes you've got to go in real close [to the work] to see what's going on."

The elevator doors open on the Whitney's third-floor gallery, and I am greeted (or confronted?) by a row of security guards. This is Fred Wilson's installation *Guarded View* (1991). Four brown mannequins, all without heads, each clad in a different museum security-guard uniform, stand lifeless atop a raised platform. In a society where every museum, every public building, every fancy dress boutique is guarded by an otherwise invisible Black man, the representation here solicits no further scrutiny.

Image is a funny thing. In common speech, a male is referred to as a "guy", the term intended as a buffer between the patriarchy of "man" and the insouciance of "boy." As a word, "guy" liberates; it allows for a certain awkwardness in defining the space where age, gender and power intersect. Now if a guy happens to be Black as well, then he is referred to as a "Black guy," which to the ear conveys a whole other meaning. Just listen: "She goes out with a Black guy;" "There is a Black guy on the news;" "He is the Black guy on our staff." In the racist scheme of things "Black guy" is a nickname for something other than what its separate components denote. Whether intended or not, reductive power exists therein to cement race and gender into one monolithic block, leaving little room to breathe.



Constructs #11, Lyle Ashton Harris, gelatin silver print, 72 x 48 inches, 1989.

ing on my race and gender, be privy to the discussion outside of Piper's artificial space? *Four Intruders* recalls a basic truism—that the fight against white supremacy is, in no small part, about white people educating white people.

Stopping short of framing *Time* magazine's shady cover shot of O. J. Simpson and hanging that on the wall as art, Gary Simmons presents a large-as-life interpretation of that most media friendly of Black male stereotypes: the star athlete turned brutal criminal. Against one wall, Simmons creates the set of a police lineup in *Lineup* (1993). All is told:

the bold, black stripes to measure height; the long, narrow stage on which suspects are made to stand; the whitewashed back wall that reflects light and facilitates "viewing." But instead of placing characters on the platform, like Fred Wilson's headless watchmen, Simmons positions shoes—gold-plated basketball sneakers—in a banjee-boy¹ receiving line.

So literal a statement are the shoes in Simmons' work, their symbolism can be stretched across widely divergent pegs of reference without snapping. I see the innocence of a bronzed baby bootie; the all-glitter-but-little-gold allure of pro sports for inner-city Black youth; even a bit of camp, à la Dorothy following her yellow brick road to self-realization. What all this adds up to, perhaps, is the dire need for Black men to subvert the binarism of good/evil that is placed upon their lives.

A friend of mine recounts a not uncommon tale of grade-school alienation. "I was seven years old," he says, unconsciously placing emphasis on the age.

Adrian Piper's multimedia installation *Four Intruders Plus Alarm Systems* (1980) leads the spectator, peep show-like, into a blackened enclosure lit only by four projections of Black male faces. Alone in the chamber "you" are literally encircled by the "Black menace." Beneath each projection is an audio headset that, when donned, broadcasts a monologue delivered by a white woman in reaction to the art you are experiencing. "I'm antagonized by the hostility of the piece," begins the "critique."

These images are so resentful. The only Blacks who are angry and hostile are the Blacks who just don't understand that we are trying to help them. I've never felt that anyone's anger has been the result of my actions. It's just not my problem. Some of my friends are Black people. They're just like us; they're just a different colour. Everyone has anxieties and fears.

The voice represents itself with such candor and assurance that the listener's immediate response is to ask, To whom is this woman speaking? Would I, depend-

Tuff Tony, Barkley L. Hendricks, oil on canvas, 72 x 48 inches, 1978.



My best friend and I had this ritual where we'd save parts of our lunch to share with each other on the bus ride home. One day he pulled out a box of Burger King onion rings, and I was so excited, I kissed him. The bus driver saw this in his rearview mirror and started yelling, 'Faggot! You're a faggot!' I knew I'd done something wrong, but I didn't know what it was, or how to remedy it. It took me years to triumph over that experience, but I have.

This narrative of simultaneous dissolution and awakening bears the stamp of one of the central dictates of . . . "Black male:" that dominant sexual codes ought never to be tampered with.

Lyle Ashton Harris in his own evolution undoubtedly shared my friend's moment of crisis—as well as the coding and decoding invention and reinvention of self that ensued. As an artist, Harris' work is obsessed with issues of gender and sexuality as they relate to his own social construction as a Black gay man. In a series of photographic self-portraits, fittingly entitled *Constructs* (1989), Harris plays with butch-femme representations to transgress the normative image of Black man as hyper-masculine heterosexual.

Harris' photographs are at once confrontational and dismissive. In one he dons a wig and tutu and throws shade at the camera. In another, dressed in the same drag, he turns his back in a "fuck you all" stance. The remaining photographs show the "real" Harris—naked, bald headed, free of pageantry. The inclusion of *Constructs* in the *Black Male* exhibit extends the show's field of interrogation. Harris questions not only racial stereotyping, but the demands of sexual conformity within Blackness.

The photographs and text of Carrie Mae Weems are similar to Harris' in their commentary on the impact of white racism on Black social interaction. *Kitchen Table Series* (1990) looks at the struggle of a black heterosexual couple to effectively communicate given the man's dysfunctional behavior, which is informed among other things, by the experience of racism. I follow, frame by frame, the emotional tide of their relationship as they sit at the kitchen table beneath an oppressive overhead light. Difficult as it may be to expose, given the divisive strategies of racism, the friction between heterosexual Black men and women is an issue that calls out for careful exploration.

African-American artist Lorna Simpson encourages a reconsideration of the self-defensive posturing of young Black men, now a commodity in advertising and other media. In *Gestures/Reenactment* (1985), she focuses her camera on the body language of a single subject, a Black man whose face is never fully revealed but whose form is explicit. The resulting five photographs are boldly dynamic—the man

appears to move from shot to shot, occupying various positions in the frame. Below the photographs, Simpson provides statements such as "how Larry was standing when he found out," "Mr. Johnson walks out," "sometimes Sam stands like his mother," interjecting context and complexity where, elsewhere, the same images might be exoticized in their presentation or representation.

At the end of *Black Male* where do I end up? Where does *Black Male* land me? The trouble with mounting a show of this nature—and the worry in viewing it—is that in order to appreciate the work, one must dwell in the racist imagination. I search for myself and my comrades behind the essentialized headline *Black Male* but come up empty, uninspired beyond the hope that art can and will be more visionary in a future moment. "There is so much more to us than this," a visitor to the exhibit told me as he looked up at Dawn DeDeaux's mural *Rambo* (1991), on which a beautiful bare-chested manchild lazily holds a gun to his side. "I'm waiting for the show that is *really* about Black men."

Notes

1. The term "banjee boy" refers to a gay home-boy aesthetic coming from African-American and Latin-American communities in New York and Washington, D.C.

Nicholas Boston is a freelance writer from Montreal. Currently he is a student in Creative Writing at the School of the Arts, Columbia University, New York City.

ERASURE AND RETRIEVAL IN MIXED MEDIA

Jane Ash Poitras Heaven To Earth

OCTOBER 22—NOVEMBER 12, 1994

LEO KAMEN GALLERY, TORONTO

REVIEW BY MARILYN DANIELS

The issue of cultural identity is not one that looms large in the mind of a small child, particularly if that child finds herself lost, alone and unable to communicate with those around her. It can become a pressing issue when that child becomes a grown woman and finds that she has been taught to deny any link with her own history.

Such was the case for Jane Ash Poitras. She was born in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta and, for the first five years of her life, spoke only Cree. After the death of her mother and temporary assignment to a number of foster parents, Poitras was taken in by a sixty-five-year-old German widow who found her wandering the streets of Edmonton. Had social services authorities checked band records before allowing the widow to raise the child, they would have found that Poitras had relatives still living on the reserve. Since they did not, Poitras grew up under the care of a woman who believed that the welfare of the child would be best served if her Native identity was hidden. It was not until her late twenties, when Poitras began taking art classes, that she began exploring her Native origin.¹ Her recent Toronto exhibition continues to record what she has retrieved—and is still retrieving—of her erased history.

In "Heaven To Earth," Poitras works with elements one immediately recognizes as deriving from Native visual and social history. Her works are collages of materials: feathers, old photographs, painted imagery and script scrawled in both

English and Cree syllabics. Much of the painted imagery is inspired by the ancient drawings carved into or painted onto rocks by her ancestors,² and by the patterns woven into blankets or decorative beadwork. These materials surround tinted photographs; early records of the faces of Black Elk, Sitting Bull and Poundmaker, as well as those ancestors whose individual names and stories have been lost.

In most of the works, the collage materials are carefully arranged and balanced according to principles of geometric organization. Typical of this approach is *Horses, Shamans, Language*, which is divided into three horizontal bands. The larger central horizontal panel consists of three photographs. Each photograph occupies an equal measure of space separated by

strong, flat, coloured borders. Modulated earth-toned bands are located above and below the central panel. In this space, as if drawn on clay, are linear figures reminiscent of the records left by cave or rock paintings. In the lower panel are totemic and shamanic figures dispersed at regular intervals, echoing the measured organizations of the whole. In the upper panel, three horses gallop across the canvas, again at regular intervals. The three sections are superimposed upon a border meant to look like an enlarged page of a notebook filled with drawings and notations.

Poitras' regular spacing and geometric organization of the elements lend the works a sense of self-contained balance, clarity and stillness. The bold contrast of colours strengthens the impression of



Eli's Blanket, mixed media on canvas, 36 x 48 inches, 1994.

Collection of Jane Corkin, Toronto.



Albert Indianstein, mixed media on canvas, 36 x 48 inches, 1994. Collection of Jane Corkin, Toronto.

calm power, lending the series a sense of cultural strength and pride. The works are multi-layered: those who stay with the works may uncover a quiet tension despite the initial impression of calmness and balance.

This tension derives from a number of sources including the choice of painted imagery. The three horses galloping in profile across the top panel of *Horses, Shamans, Language* would, to many consumers of popular culture, be associated with a Hollywood image of the young brave riding off into the sunset. Hence it may seem to recall a romantic past that ended when white people arrived in North America. A quiet irony is introduced, however, if one is aware of the fact that the horse was part of the first wave of elements introduced to the First Nations by the Spanish, and that this single influence dramatically altered Native cultures.

The ancestral photographs continue the feeling of tension. Products of European technology, the photos act as a window into the past. The stiff and formally posed figures appear uncomfortable and strained as they peer silently out into our space; a strange foreign world. The photos reveal the course and progress of Western assimilation—traditional headgear and beadwork against European jackets, trousers, and military gear. But most memorable are the faces. The eyes, which Poitras often paints white, confront the viewer in a way that borders between the eerie and the disturbing.

The tension carried by the individual elements within the works is further strengthened by their juxtaposition. In *Eli's Blanket*, a photograph depicts a young child, face painted, wearing beads and feathers. The image, placed beside an old photograph of a Native family, appears at first glance to be from the late nineteenth century until one notices the modern elements—the brick wall behind

him, his cut hair, the sweatshirt under the strands of beads. The modern Native child readopting the old ways is thus contrasted with the older photograph recording the gradual process of assimilation.

While the images within Poitras' collages refer primarily to Native artistic and social history, she occasionally includes fragments deriving from modern Western culture. Above the photographic images in *Eli's Blanket* are the pages from a typical kindergarten workbook. On one page a teddy bear, dressed in a striped T-shirt, is "fishing for sums" in the water. In another the reader is asked to "colour the things that are usually red." The lessons are about naming, describing and categorizing and the small, seemingly innocuous ways in which children learn dominant-culture paradigms. In Native culture, the child would grow up respecting the bear as a powerful relation, not as a humanized toy. There is also a double irony in the apple being among the objects to be coloured red, for what is simply a fruit to



Horses, Shamans, Language, mixed media on canvas, 36 x 48 inches, 1994. Collection of Hugh Mappin, Toronto.

the dominant culture is sometimes used as a term of derision (red on the outside, white on the inside) among Native traditionalists.

One of the more perplexing of Poitras' references to Western culture are the scientific notations repeated in some of the works, which are often contrasted with images from rock carvings. One makes the profound connection that $e=mc^2$ is a notation of parallel complexity and depth to the abbreviated etchings on the rocks. The idea is echoed in *Albert Indianstein*. Here an artistic representation from the Aztecs, one of the most scientifically advanced cultures of its time, is placed alongside an old photograph of Albert Einstein. He is wearing a Plains headdress and standing among the people of a Native village. Again there is an irony implied: Einstein, whom Western culture has raised as an icon of scientific and technological genius, is here acknowledging the same people whom Western culture has denigrated as being preliterate,

backward and superstitious. One is left with the question of just *who* was backward.

There are many such references, connections and commentaries to be found within the "Heaven To Earth" series. The tensions deriving from these references, however, are presented within a formal artistic context that is powerfully balanced, measured and calm. The tension generated between the form and content of the works is not an obvious one. It is one only revealed through individual involvement—through observation and the ability to access historical and personal memory. The meaning within the works is the result of a gradual accumulation of knowledge and the retrieval of history, ultimately revealing itself through a similar process. If one does not know who Black Elk was or the role and purpose of the Ghost Dance, those levels of reference are lost.

One can only speculate as to Poitras' rea-

sons for presenting her latest work in this manner and her own personal relationship to its content. If there is tension within the work, it is ultimately our own. But in some ways, the works are reminiscent of the strength of some Native elders who have transformed the pain and rage of past and present brutality and injustice into power, clarity, balance and pride.

Notes

1. Gillian MacKay, "Lady Oracle: Jane Ash Poitras and the First Nations Phenomenon," *Canadian Art*, Fall 1994, pp. 74-81.
2. The term "ancestor" here denotes the idea, common to the First Nations, that all Native people, even those of differing nations, are related in terms of their indigenous ancestry and their connection to the earth.

Marilyn Daniels is a former university lecturer of art history. She is presently researching psychotherapy and cultural criticism.

Photos courtesy Leo Kamen Gallery. Photos: Jeff Nolte.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND FRAGMENTATION

Gary Hill Encountering Bodies

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART OF CHICAGO
SEPTEMBER 24–NOVEMBER 27, 1994

REVIEW BY TODD MEYERS

What good is a whole body anyway? However tiresome this question may seem, we are at a point in human history in which our search for identity is also a search for the body. And with the identification of the body we subsequently create subjectivity. Much like F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the byproduct of a *totalized* subject is always an object of disaster. Subjectivity can produce the realization of our greatest fear: (mis)representation. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari prescribe the avoidance of representation as a necessity toward revolution.¹ But is it too late? As Rhonda Lieberman says, "We are all walking around with stubbed toes."² Given this, Gary Hill qualifies as one of the many podiatrists helping us avoid stagnant representation.

In Gary Hill's work, the utilization of video technology helps us to locate the proximity of the body. Rather than being a whole body, however, his work deals with a fragmented, accelerated and (sub)textualized body. In this way Hill's constitution of the human body challenges traditional sensibilities of representation, acting, that is, not as representation but as a kind of encounter. In

Suspension of Disbelief (For Marine) Hill presents flickering images of naked male and female bodies on a long row of video screens. The fragmented bodies create a multiplicity and the sequences of parts never lead to a whole. There are, instead, only zones of indiscernibility³ that replace the literal depiction of the body. Hill shows us an alternative to representation by drawing the body out along a horizon-

Still, the body is such a sticky subject. Everybody wants one, but what do we do with it once we have it? And once we begin to understand our bodies, we begin to ask: "Whose body is it, anyway?" This line of questioning is really the shifting agenda of bodily inquiry. The body's limits have been mapped, calculated and itemized to the point where that which cannot be done can be accessorized. Like a 20,000-byte cashmere

sweater, technology can be "fashioned" to suit the body. (I overheard a woman on the subway telling her friend that her laptop computer matched her blouse perfectly.)

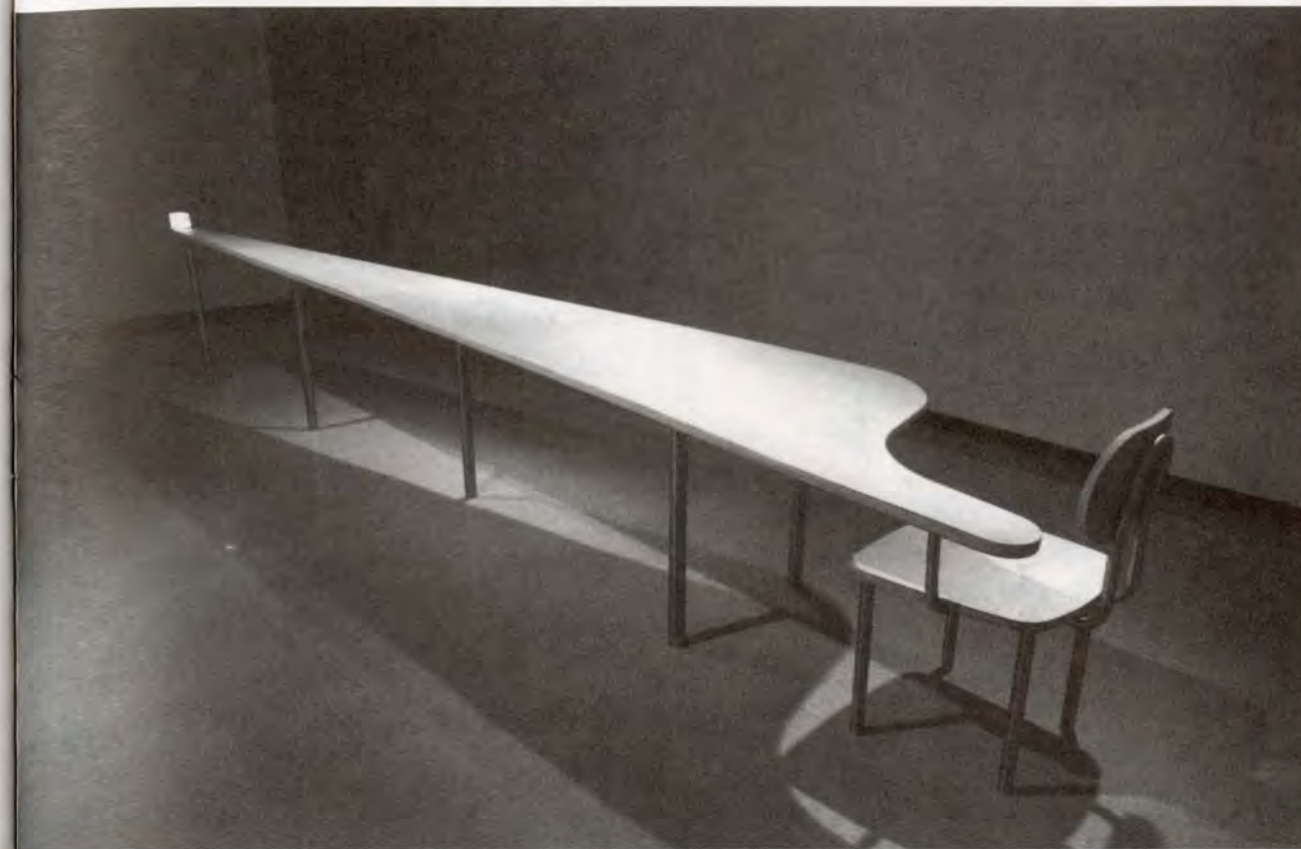
So it seems safe to suggest that technology is an extension of the body. William S. Burroughs, in a recent Nike shoe commercial, emphasizes that technology (the shoe) needs the body and the body, in turn, realizes its potential through technology. I guess that makes sense, but wasn't

Burroughs part of that auspicious group of thinkers warning us about that spooky technological stuff? Maybe I have him confused with somebody else. Nonetheless, my point remains: we are beginning to give new consideration to questions concerning the body and



I Believe It Is An Image In Light Of The Other, (detail: face), installation with 7-channel video, audio and books, 1991-92.

tal event. And in *I Believe It Is An Image in Light of the Other*, the image of the body is projected and meshed with the image of text of actual books. Hill creates new planes upon which the body can emerge. For us, this work is the manifestation of a third body: the body as (sub)text.



Learning Curve, installation, 1993. Photo: James Prinz.

technology. Whether we like technology or hate it, we can still deal with it critically.

Suspension of Disbelief, for instance, positions and contains the body within the parameters of technological devices (i.e., video screens). This is the space that Hill designates as a "safe place" (for the body); where the body is transformed into figuration. And with figuration, we are led to believe there is something more to the image presented. The Figure is something that shrugs off subjectivity and is freed to move about: a dismembering of the Subject.

If our greatest fear is (mis)representation, our second greatest may be adolescence. Psychoanalysis creates for us a system that helps sift through the aftermath of our prepubescent tribulations. Gary Hill, on the one hand, creates a place for our childhood consciousness. In *Learning Curve (Still Point)* we confront the object of childhood constraint—the school desk. A place where silence is required and bodily

functions are denied. Hill allows us to enter into a continuum where the object (the desk), the image (video) and the body are reflective. There is a dynamic produced, which contours the object as well as our associations stemming from it (consciousness).

The biggest polemic in Hill's work is the apparent contradiction between consciousness and fragmentation. Consciousness, it seems, has been unjustly stuck with the job of defining the Self. This discourse always seems to fall into the murky depths of Cartesian explanation: "I think, therefore..." (blah, blah, blah). Unfortunately, we feel obligated to concern ourselves with our-Self. Fragmentation, on the other hand, has the uncanny ability to do without subjectivity (i.e., the representation of Self). This may have some bad implications: we may find our identities going down the (television)-tube. We need to retain control of who's doing the fragmenting. There is a real concern that we are becoming *dividuals*

(Deleuze-Virilio); consumed, that is, by the apparatus. But I refuse to scream hysterically every time I see a banking machine. We can remain critical without becoming big suckers. As we are still struggling with the condition of sovereignty, Gary Hill's art creates a critical place for it.

Notes

1. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972).
2. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Collier, 1925 [1925]).
3. Rhonda Lieberman, "Springtime of Pleasure and Trauma," a seminar given at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1993.

Todd Meyers is currently researching at the School of Art Institute of Chicago where he is writing on Gilles Deleuze and voodooism.

Photos courtesy the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

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