

FUSE

M A G A Z I N E

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Fall 1992

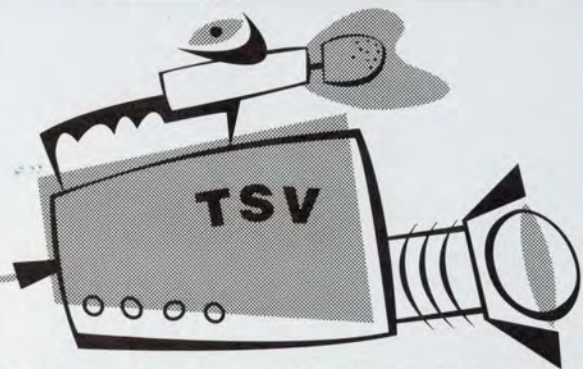
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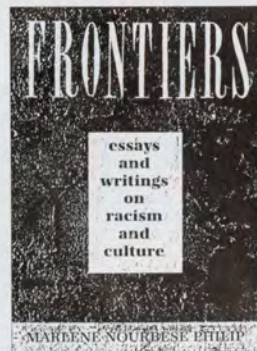
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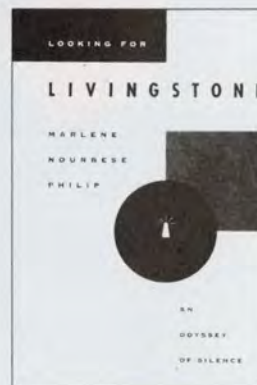
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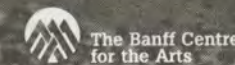
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FROM THE SERIES
"MOHAWKS IN BEEHIVES"
BY SELLEY NIRO

June 3, 1992

The Globe and Mail

To the Editor:

Recently, John Bentley Mays reviewed the exhibition, "INDIGENA: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years," at the Canadian Museum of Civilization until October 12, 1992. (See Globe & Mail, MAY 16, 1992). Several members of the arts community responded in writing to his remarks, which to say the least, indicated his degree of ignorance regarding Native artistic production in the late 20th century. Three of these letters were printed in the Globe on Saturday, June 6, 1992. As you will note from my attached letter to the editor, curiously, letters from three women were not printed.

As the co-curator of the exhibition, as an aboriginal person, and as a woman, I feel that my voice has been silenced. Therefore, I am requesting that my letter to the editor of the Globe (dated June 3, 1992, attached) be printed in FUSE.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,
Lee-Ann Martin
Associate Curator,
INDIGENA

As one of the "axe-grinding curators," I am compelled to respond to John Bentley Mays' "review" of INDIGENA ("Native artists seize the moment to display anger against history," Globe and Mail, May 16, 1992). Mr. Mays dismisses many of the works in this exhibition as "aggressive", "ostentatiously angry", and "journalistic." Are these the new code words of racial indifference and exclusion, to be used by Eurocentric art criticism, together with the likes of "quality and taste"?

Mr. Mays' suspicions and beliefs about many underlying premises of this arts project are not accurate. First, he comments that "...art professionals ... have no particular interest in contemporary native issues..." and notes that after 1992 these curators and academics will return to mounting exhibitions of works by artists of European ancestry (which they prefer to do anyway). I suggest that Mr. Mays is incorrect in this suspicion, and the briefest survey of planned exhibitions across the country will prove this. He also overlooked the fact that there are a growing number of aboriginal curators and academics who feel completely comfortable in critically examining and presenting the works of indigenous artists for a long time to come.

Second, Mr. Mays incorrectly believes that INDIGENA is NOT representative of the opinions of the majority of aboriginal peoples in the Americas. In fact, the oppo-

Letters

site is true: as a direct response to the 1992 "celebrations" of the 500 years since Columbus, native peoples throughout the Americas have been planning events for over a decade. For a far longer period, we have critically assessed the impact of 500 years of colonial domination. The multiplicity of issues involved in this indigenous critique of colonialism became the unifying statement for INDIGENA. As curators of aboriginal ancestry, Gerald McMaster and myself merely listened to the voices in "Indian country" and facilitated their presentation at the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

In fact, my participation in this project was as a representative of the aboriginal arts community through the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (SCANA), a national organization that collaborated with the museum for INDIGENA.

Finally, Mr. Mays accuses INDIGENA of celebrating "anti-white prejudice." However, Native peoples cannot be "prejudiced" toward white people because we do not have the power base to act out "prejudice," which is often synonymous with discrimination or racism. Are we "prejudiced" for exposing racism and injustice? To brand the statements of aboriginal peoples as "prejudiced" and "angry" is to discredit our intellectual integrity and basic right to our voices. Such Eurocentric backlash only avoids the uncomfortable truths in any honest discussion about racism.

I would suggest that Mr. Mays visit Indian country!

Sincerely,
Lee-Ann Martin
Associate Curator, INDIGENA

June 8, 1992
The Globe and Mail

I was delighted to read, "Critic deserves 'P.W. Botha Award,'" which headlined the editorial letters regarding the exhibition, INDIGENA. I was, however, perplexed by the omission of three other letters, written by myself, Vicki Henry of Ottawa and Elizabeth Johnson of Vancouver. Perhaps criticism from women is more than John Bentley Mays can tolerate.

Please note that I am submitting my original letter to the editor (dated June 3) to another publication.

Sincerely,
Lee-Ann Martin
Associate Curator
INDIGENA

August 18, 1992

I am writing to express our appreciation of Cameron Bailey's thoughtful critique of E. A. Julian's recent report submitted to the Toronto Arts Council, Cultural Equity (Fuse, 15.6/1992). There is one discrepancy in Bailey's piece: he states "It is only on page 21, in the report's conclusion that Julian specifically identifies 'African/Black, Asian, and First Nations artists as the most underserved artists from any community.' Finishing rather than starting with this assertion is a mistake." I would draw Bailey's attention, and that of the readers of Fuse to the first paragraph on page 1 of the report in which Ms. Julian rightly focusses the concern of the readers with the following: "In particular, TAC was advised that African/Black, Asian and First Nations artists were the most underserved of all." Otherwise, thank you for your interest and commendable analysis of the issues in Cultural Equity.

Your sincerely,
Rita Davies
Executive Director

Fighting Back With Fashion

If you're in clothes

"Homo does not stand for homogeneity." Heather Sapphire

Across North America, the end of June marks the commemoration and celebration of the Stonewall riots—riots in which drag queens, faggots, whores, and working class dykes fought back against a 'routine' police raid on the Stonewall bar in New York City, in 1969. Stonewall is often cited as the birth of the modern lesbian and gay liberation movement. Many urban centres organize parades to both recognize this history, and to continue pressing for lesbian, bisexual, and gay visibility. Yet, the structure and organization of these parades has left many sexually disenfranchised people wondering 'pride in what?' and 'pride for whom?' Recently, these questions have been asked repeatedly in the context of the gay and lesbian pride parade in Montréal.

Montréal is a city whose gay community is visibly fractured around sex/gender, language, and age issues (among others): to speak of a 'gay community' is somewhat of an oxymoron. The city's Pride Parade has only been operating for two years now, and in those two years, it too has been

fraught with contradiction and internal debate. In 1991, for example, there were in actuality two separate parades: one organized by the 'official' parade committee, and one organized by the activist groups Queer Nation Rose and ACT-UP. QNR and ACT-UP organized their own parade because the 'official' parade was scheduled to march from one end of the 'gay village' to the other.

These groups argued that there is little point in remaining in the ghetto of gayness during a gay/lesbian pride parade: many gay people do that almost everyday. The ACT-UP/QNR parade thus marched through the downtown core of Montréal, meeting with the 'official' parade at the border of the gay village.

This year the organization of the parade has been characterized by the same sorts of divisions around what it means to be 'proud' 'for whom? for what?' Parade organizers requested that all people involved in the parade register, so they would know exactly who would be participating. Moreover,

such registration was mandatory for all those planning to march in the parade. Queer Nation argued that while this move may be useful in encouraging the participation of community groups, it serves to exclude people not affiliated with any groups from participating. QNR

went on to argue that contrary to the organization of Pride Parades in other North American cities, Montréal's event was shaping up to be a spectator sport—a parade which people could watch go by from the sidewalk (just like the Santa Claus one). Yet even the organizing of the parade as a spectator event was fraught with contradiction. The city's lesbian/gay bookstore, l'Androgyne, for example, was not provided with a poster advertising the event. In an effort to encourage the parade to be a festive event in which people actively participate, Queer Nation Rose registered and claimed that anyone who was marching and not

registered was part of QNR.

Yet the controversy around the organization of the parade was not limited to the question of registration. The route for 1992 included that already travelled last year by members of QNR and ACT-UP: small victory, then, has been moving Montréal's 'Pride Parade' out of the gay village, allowing queerdom to proliferate throughout the city. In spite of this victory, however, the parade was scheduled for 6 p.m. The organizing committee claimed that this was the only time the police would grant a permit to march down Ste. Catherine, one of

the main streets of Montréal. Activists have been critical, however, of the organizing committee's acceptance of this limitation. Among other reasons, they cite the fact that at 6 p.m. all the shoppers have gone home and all the tourists have gone out to dinner—not to mention the fact that the evening news is over! Given that the 1991 parade marched a similar route, and that there were no problems in obtaining a permit, many have wondered why no city councillors were lobbied, and question the deferential attitude of the parade organizers towards the police. Activists charge that this move is an attempt to limit gay/lesbian visi-

Pride Parade Perversions and the Tyranny of the Homogeneous

ISSUES & EVENTS. FUSE 7

bility, and is thus the complete antithesis to a Pride Parade.

Yet the most controversial aspect of the 1992 Pride Parade in Montréal relates to the 'rules and regulations' laid out in the contracts groups were to sign in order to participate. These rules stipulated that, due to complaints police had received in the past (i.e. 1991), there was to be no cross-dressing, no exposure of breasts or buttocks, no displays deemed too 'vulgar' or 'erotic', and no flags (the latter in an effort to dissociate the event from St. Jean Baptiste). As if this outlawing of extravagant fashion attire weren't enough, it was suggested that the preferred attire of parade participants be blue jeans and a white T-shirt. (Can you say 'Clone Fag'?)

The pronouncements of these rules led to an intense activist response, and certainly lays true the claim that if you want a bunch of 'sexual perverts' to not do something in particular, the last thing you should do is outlaw it! Indeed, some have even speculated that the entire attempt to outlaw the proliferation of fabulous attire and bawdy behaviour was a covert plot designed to spice the parade up! Unfortunately the attitudes of parade organizers belie this rather titillating theory.

Fighting back with flyers

Upon hearing the news of the limitations about to be imposed on the fabulous in each of us during the 'pride' parade, Queer Nation Rose set out to produce a flyer encouraging diversity and difference. As such, their flyer (adorned with the fabulous drag queens Vaginal

Creme Davis and Glen Meadore of the queer speed metal band Pedro, Muriel and Esther) announces that 'The Freaks Are Coming', followed by a list of slang terms used both by and against sexual 'perverts' and those who love them. The list, ranging from 'percé', 'végé-queers', 'ostie d'fifs', 's/m', 'les bis' to 'gouines' and 'RE/SEARCH MAGAZINE ADDICTS', invited all 'perverts' to 'come, come, come protest the parade which doesn't include us'. Significantly, QNR's flyer finishes with 'NOTRE FIERTÉ'—our pride—noting how the pride parade is not only for gay men, but that in an historic sense, it is especially for drag queens, bull dykes, prostitutes, and street sexual outlaws. This flyer was distributed the Tuesday prior to the parade (taking place the following Saturday), and immediately generated additional response, outrage, and wardrobe-planning sessions.

The QNR flyer was quickly followed by several others. One, produced by the bar-complex Station 'C', cited that Station 'C' will not be participating in the event because 'the censorship imposed upon the parade restricts the rights and freedoms of each individual.' The Station 'C' flyer went on to encourage people to join in the protest. Community response was generally positive to the position taken by Station 'C', in part because the complex houses a mixed dance bar, a women's bar, a lounge bar and a leather bar—

you're in

revealing the diversity of the community all under one roof. (Station 'C' is affectionately referred to as 'GayMart'—One Stop Shopping.) Moreover, Station 'C' patrons note how the bar is in touch with lesbian, gay and bisexual communities in Montréal, frequently having benefits for community groups (such as ACT UP) and providing a venue for local artists.

The Station 'C' flyer was complemented by an additional flyer, produced jointly by ACT-UP and Queer Nation Rose. The focus of this flyer was on the issue of drag in the community, attempting to educate people as to the historical roots of lesbian and gay liberation, as well to point out how drag queens and effeminate men are denigrated in many gay male circles.

During the actual parade, the Montréal anarchist group Liberté universelle distributed flyers entitled 'NON AU FIFASCIME/ NO TO FAGSCISM'. Their flyer claimed that to put up with Normand Jolicoeur (the main parade organizer) is to find oneself hand in hand with the oppressor. And in a

vigilant resistance of the boring clone attire, attitudes, and lifestyles Jolicoeur encouraged people to adopt, Liberté universelle shouts: 'Non à l'homogénéisation/ No to clone factories.'

Now many people may be thinking that Montréal's streets must have been littered with paper in mid-June, and that all those flyers killed a whole lot of trees for nothing. But they have proved themselves crucial tools in the realm of providing information and education. For activists, this means that all those long, intense discussions about what to write on the flyer do matter, because, as in the case of the QNR flyer, they can touch off a whole flurry of activist movement and organizing. It also means that more than one approach to education is useful in addressing these sorts of complex issues. Precisely because of the QNR, Station 'C', and ACT UP/QNR flyers, just days before the actual event, the question on everyone's lips was 'What are you going to wear?'

If you're in clothes, you're in drag

In light of all the anti-drag, anti-leather, and just plain anti-fabulous sentiment among the parade organizers, participants with highly developed political and aesthetic senses were under a great deal of pressure in deciding what

to wear. Drag queens abounded, showing those clone fags that the fun is in the difference. Gender-fuck was another common theme among the fabulously attired, consisting of such items as fish-nets and army boots, glamour makeup and leather chaps, frock and hard-hats. And of course, irreverent combinations of identities proliferated, including fags posing as dykes, dykes dressed as clone fags, and bisexuals pretending to be fags pretending to be lipstick lesbians. Clearly, the message of these individuals—most of whom were clustered around the QNR and ACT UP sections—was twofold: 1) no one can dictate what we can wear, especially in a 'Pride Parade'; and 2) as the QN (Los Angeles) sticker claims: 'If you're in clothes, you're in drag!' It's all drag—everywhere, all the time.

At the end of the parade, there was an altercation between the parade organizers and many participants. It began when the main organizer attempted a justification of the anti-drag, anti-'erotic' rules: that 'we' didn't want to offend the heterosexuals. Once again, people asked 'Pride in what?' 'Pride for whom?' In a move which is itself highly significant, however, this expression of anti-drag sentiment was followed by the entertainment for the closing of the parade: you guessed it, drag queens! Indeed, that drag queens were kept on stage as entertainment enabled parade organizers to claim that they were not being dragphobic. A parallel argument was made after discussion of the issue on a local community radio show 'Queercorps' (CKUT 90.3FM). After the show had aired,

parade organizers called up and claimed that of course drag queens were permitted to participate—L'Entrepeau (a drag queen bar) was going to be in it!

This contradiction—that drag is simultaneously disavowed and permitted—is perhaps best understood in terms of its situation and context. That is, drag queens are permitted in certain spaces, among certain people, at certain times, the practices of gender-fuck, or the notion that if you're in clothes you're in drag, calls that containment of drag into question. It argues that if everything is drag, then drag as a performance cannot be contained, its borders cannot be delimited. Thus the parade organizers outlawed its proliferation. They want their type of drag, in the spaces they designate, not that type of drag in any and all spaces whatsoever. Clearly, the activist focus on the idea that drag is everywhere threatens precisely the borders, boundaries and limits which gay men establish as 'acceptable.'

Unfortunately, even among many people who were in 'drag' for the actual parade, there was a



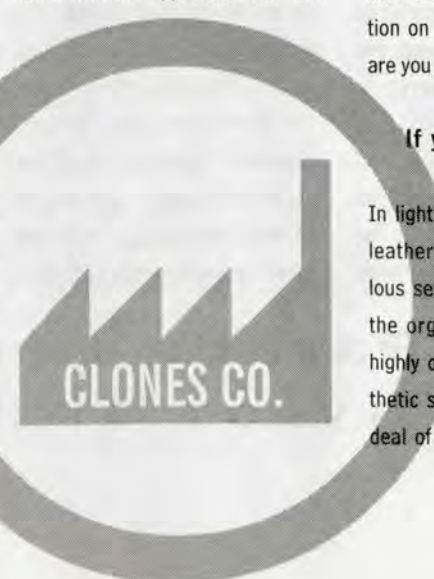
disavowal of any sort of 'drag identity.' Thus people claimed that they were cross-dressing as a reaction to the dragphobia of parade organizers, but not in any way because they maintained (even momentarily) an identification with drag. Once again—this time in activist circles—'gayness' becomes defined as 'not drag'—even at the precise moment that people engage in cross-dressing!

To destabilize the limits set out not only by people like the parade organizers, but also those established by 'activists', is to insist on the right to wear what we want, where we want, when we want. Ultimately, it is to redefine issues of 'pride'. Indeed, it is to question how the development of a gay male politic frequently occurs at the disavowal and exclusion of marginalized sexual identities and practices—drag queens, gender-fuckers, whores, bisexuals, s/m'ers, transsexuals, and others. In the context of Montréal, it is telling that these sexually marginalized people were most visible in organizing a march to commemorate the police violence against a bunch of queer 'freaks' in the summer of

1990. Significantly, the flyers for that march (July 19, 1992) asked people to join in the fight for lesbian and gay pride and freedom.

Indeed, if the discourse of 'pride' is characterized by clone fags outlining what we are proud of, who can be proud, in what ways, as well as where and when that pride can be expressed, maybe we need to think about organizing around something other than 'pride'. To paraphrase Liberté universelle, we don't need any more clone factories—not even 'proud' ones. We need liberation from the tyranny of the homogeneous.

ki namaste is an active member of Queer Nation Rose, and loves being blatantly bisexual.



On June 17-21, 1992 over forty delegates from across Canada came to Banff to participate in the About Face/About Frame conference for First Nations and People of Colour working in film and video. The entire conference was like the first few days of being in love, meeting someone you connect with very much. The meeting began with ice breaking games and by the end, we were touching each other's hands trying to figure out who had the largest and who had the smallest. Indeed the ice was broken. We cemented our intentions with a sweet grass ceremony and our expectations of each other and ourselves were heightened.

The conference was organized by Premika Ratnam, president of

the Independent Film and Video Alliance to address the "lack of access for people of colour working in film and video towards professional development, institutional structures, and organizational funding." Participants came from five levels of expertise: producers, policy experts, programmers, distributors, and administrators. The meeting was set up as a series of workshops in which all the participants brainstormed on various issues trying to come up with some strategies for the future.

The first day of workshops included 'Negotiating The Differences and Expressing Solidarity,' facilitated by Gail Valaskakis and Raphael Bendahan with Richard Fung giving a special report. We examined how we identify ourselves and our work which lead to splitting up into two groups to discuss representation and cultural appropriation. In the smaller groups we were able to vent some of our frustrations which are so specific to our experiences that only a conference like this could

give us an understanding audience. When we reported back in the large group with a summary of the concerns discussed, many heads nodded in recognition and support.

Day two included reports on issues of programming and exhibition. Raymond Yakelaya from Dreamspeakers Festival in Edmonton, Linda Mabalot from Visual Communications, Los Angeles. Monika Gagnon, a freelance art critic and programmer and Estaban Toledo from Décrouvez l'Amérique Festival in Montréal, all gave presentations on their specific experiences as programmers. Marjorie Beaucage facilitated a discussion around the issues programmers have to confront in their work, which provided

an analysis of how our work has been programmed in the past.

Michelle Mohabeer moderated a similar discussion concerning issues in distribution. Helen Lee from Women Make Movies in New York, Yasmin Karim from Full Frame in Toronto, Reginald Woolery from Third World Newsreel in New York and Jeff Bear from the Journal in Toronto all gave presentations on how they are attempting to build audiences for our work within our various communities and the mainstream.

By the end of the second day, we were starting to understand the mountain of work ahead of us. And like new lovers, sleep became an afterthought. With our tired bodies and minds, we faced the

personal struggles of being creative artists struggling to produce our own work, as well being advocates of equity issues. We are often forced into the dual positions of artist as well as cultural spokesperson. The two roles could not be separated. Nevertheless, we garnered enough energy and vision to plan for the future. Instead of relying on the "kindness of strangers" to open doors for us, the conference was part of a process of strengthening and opening the doors ourselves.

Employment Equity and Professional Development was discussed on the third day with Anne Marie Stewart as facilitator. Betty Julian and Will Campbell reported on strategies for creating equity

policy and professional development models. The First Nations' group and the People of Colour group spent the afternoon working on specific strategies pertinent to their communities.

The last day was spent deciding what to do with all that we had learned and shared. Our decision was to stay together as a group to present these concerns to the Alliance in the form of a report to be tabled at the Montréal, 1992 Annual General Meeting in September. We would keep in contact with each other to work towards a document which clarified our resolutions and strategies. The meeting was instrumental in focusing key issues of importance to People of Colour and First Nations filmmakers, as well as bringing together those concerned who may have never formed an allegiance otherwise.

But like any new relationship, we had to overcome some hurdles to stay together. Each participant was coming from a different history with these issues and those fears and expectations influenced the course of the discussions. As well as being supportive and liberating, at times, discussion was emotional, intense, and confrontational. Most importantly, they were real and honest. What better grounding for the commitment we've made to each other.



About Face / About Frame



Left to Right: Yasmin Karim, Monika Gagnon, Michelle Mohabeer, Helen Lee

(PHOTO: ALI KAZUMI)

Mina Shum



Mina Shum is an independent filmmaker from Vancouver who is currently obsessed with themes of honesty and deception in relationships.

The 'Post-Colonial' Imagination

I feel a little like Zola, making political and now literary proclamations from within a sense of reality which other humans do not necessarily share. Here I am, one of two non-academics at a conference of English academics on "Post-Colonialism: Theory and Practice". I am the only non-degreed teacher ever hired to deliver a university program at the University of Victoria and I am the most published Native author in the country.

I remember my first words... the sun was gone and rain spilled from the sky. I watched my mother enter, hunkered down into her coat as though hunching her head into her shoulders would protect her from the rain and cold. She slipped off her boots and said, "It's raining pitchforks out there." I saw no pitchforks. Instead I imagined her discomfort and played about with the picture of her hunching down to protect herself from the rain. I imagined pitchforks falling from the sky, thin and sharp—painful. To some folks rain is painful, like pitchforks might be to shafts of hay.

"Between cloud and rain there are no pitchforks, only people who think they see them—right mom?" And my Mom laughed and hugged me. It was my earliest understanding of metaphor and its place in our lives. I was three and a half then. I have memories that pre-date this image, but no words were ever let go of by me, until this moment. In my mind, the image always came first, then the words were layered overtop. This process of thought still lives with me. The images come, then the words. If there are no images, then there are no words. Consequently, I understand mathematics only in terms of physics, chemistry or shopping.

I remember the first time I spoke in school. Ms. C. asked me, "Where did Dick run?" I answered, "Far from the fenceposts who locked up the grasses no one wanted to grow" and everyone laughed. It was a different kind of laugh. Ms. C. responded, "Your insolence will not get you far in life." Perhaps it was not insolence that did so much as belief, belief in

my own dreamspace where my words are born...

There is a place between the sandbank and the river where silver streaks are born. This place slides along the dreamspace of the stream [which] birthed it, unaware of the wonderment of its conception, the miracle of its birth and the tenuousness of its life. Fools see the silver in terms of cost and thus place no real value on it. The wise know that in the thin lines of silver live the secrets of truth - a soft whirling knowledge that calls the body to free itself of all burdens and look at the world through the dreamspace of this silver streak.

Thin is the line along the river's edge but vast is its internal life. This place spins dreams, and webs of new life are woven into whole new worlds. I live within the boundaries of this streak. Others live here with me. They are shaped by colour and difference but no one possesses the authority to disempower others on the basis of this colour and difference. In this place all are distinct, powerful and beautiful. In this place we dream new words with

old themes rich in human love and promise. We strive to inspire through words, painting our dreams of change. We are the poets, the painters, the dramatists, those who really believe if we just write this one last poem, paint this one last picture, create this one last character, we can change the world...

In this dreamspace there are no "post-colonial conferences on literature", no "conferences on Indigenous sovereignty" and no one asks "What do you Indians want anyway?" We all know that the human spirit divine requires freedom to blossom, freedom to dream, to create and become whole. This freedom is as basic a need as is food. However, in the real world, colonialism is our condition, and so we need to have a conference such as this one.

Unless I was sleeping during the revolution, we have not had a change in our condition, at least not the

Indigenous people of this land. Post-colonialism presumes we have resolved the colonial condition, at least in the field of literature. Even here we are still a classical colony. Our words, our sense and use of language are not judged by the standards set by the poetry and stories we create. They are judged by the standards set by others.

With conditions as they are, it is a luxury for me to wander into my dreamspace and conceive of "post-colonialism." A multitude of faces, all white and too numerous to name, gather around the edges of my dreamspace. If I enter despite them, their words ignite and nearly melt away the thin line of silver housing my ability to dream. Images of screaming squaws, dirty Indians and weeping women writhe along the rivers of tears we have shed over these images which continue to meet page, print and reader. And still I imagine new words to deal with old dilemmas that still stand on the way to freedom.

At dawn, when the river reaches the sea, before me my ancestors potlatch,

dance and sing. There the sun keeps time with her own sense of music, and the surface of the sea transforms. On it I see a tiara of grandmothers and grandfathers. I hear words of challenge and struggle, of transformation and change and my nation's passion for these things. I see the future. The voices of George Ryga and some of the good citizens who died before me join the congregation of my ancestors and form an arc; I suffer living and envy the dead.

In the literature of this country is the search for an essential Canadian self. This is an arc created of our common voices and vision, born with each new dreamer added to this space. Born of the realization that humans hold a thread of hope, thin, stubborn and resilient. Watered by poets, storytellers and old writers, this hope is held by all those who refuse to peer like cowardly voyeurs at the world from behind the fence posts of a colonial fort. I am inspired by all those whose spirit excites literary courage, those who recreate language, reconceive humanity not as statistics but as

Lee Maracle



creative sacred beings capable of change and transformation, capable of bringing dreams from conception to birth and transformation.

In the thin arc bridging my life to the future, the roots of my life are nearly overwhelmed. The industrial revolution, the lie of it, the stagnation inherent in it, the violence and the death culture it birthed become clear. The history of this revolution and its victims has long complex tendrils of industrial waste and death, this culture which aggrandizes its authors stretches itself all over the world, winding itself around imagination, choking all those whose images have no room for it. Those who stand in awe of this industrialization process are not yet free of it. Even our dead are not free of it. We can't even imagine beyond our common colonial condition because of it.

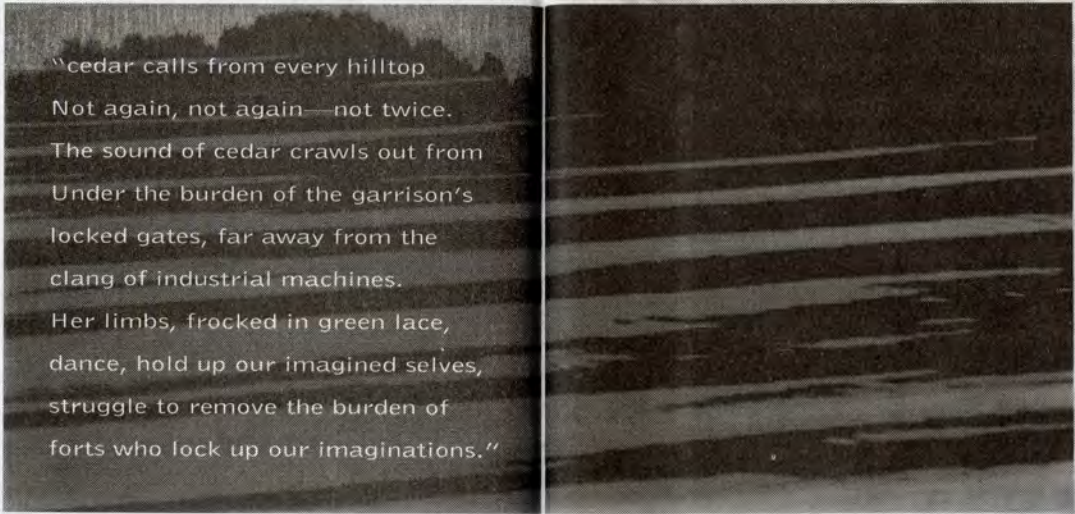
We are the grandchildren of an abusive industrial British parent, and in fact are nowhere near a post-colonial literature. The dirty waif of Dickensian literature has become the modern "Indian" waif. Canadian writers still hover about the gates of old forts, peek through the cracks of their protective ideological walls and try to write their own yearnings for freedom from the safety of their intellectual incarceration. The colonized still hover outside the gates, dreaming of coming in while the ideological madness of this ridiculous desire hides our truer aspirations and colours our language in stilted erratic parroting of the "mother country's" tongues. Or worse, this desire paints images of coming into the fort as equals. The existence of the fort, the laws of this fort, the humanity of it are rarely questioned. Canadians must get out of the fort and imagine something beyond the colonial condition—beyond violence, rape and notions of

dirty people. We must move beyond what is—re-enter our dreamspace and recreate ourselves. We must get away from the fort's door where the scent of pillage and imprisonment still terrorizes our dreams.

In George Ryga's play "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe", Rita says "no child on the road would remember you, mister". Ryga joins the congregation of my ancestors and their dreams of a life outside the fort. "No child would remember you, mister." You who clutch the gatekeys of your colonial master, acquiesce to your colonial imprisonment in language and law intended to dehumanize you can never be remembered by an innocent child. Children are forward people, they are dreamers and their memories are too innocent to recall the jailed and the jailers. Ryga knew something then...

I want to be able to fictionalize our lives and still hold fast to truth, yet our lives are so rich with death. Yet I fear that in storying this death in numbers so immense, with love so deep, I may not survive. I spiral down into the silver streak of solitude to find my ceremonial self. From within this bright womb I can spiral out into the world again to reconceive of place. I can stretch time. I can erase the artifice of separation that divides today from yesterday and yesterday from tomorrow. In this place all time is the same time. In this place images speak reality—paint truth in believable pictures.

In this place my self is a significant self—a self who rises swan-like to engage the rigors of loyalty and love—a self who rises eagle-like to the need for vision, a self who, wolf-like, journeys doggedly along old trails with new directions in mind, a self who sees transformation, personal and social as natural and indispensable to growth.



"cedar calls from every hilltop
Not again, not again—not twice.
The sound of cedar crawls out from
Under the burden of the garrison's
locked gates, far away from the
clang of industrial machines.
Her limbs, frocked in green lace,
dance, hold up our imagined selves,
struggle to remove the burden of
forts who lock up our imaginations."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAULA GIGNAC

These things inside are not things at all, but songs sung by me, my grandmothers, my grandchildren and men like Ryga.

We conjure new words by understanding our different and common pasts. We cannot resolve this past unless we can come to this silver streak between river bank and sand without quarreling.

From inside this dreamspace comes my language coloured by my need for you to see me—really see me. The heart and spirit under my skin animate my need to carve images of myself on the pages of your books, never to be

forgotten. Inspired by my need to experience oneness with you at the crest of an arc of our mutual construction in a language we both understand, I build my end of this arc, word by word, dream by dream.

This arc becomes the meeting place of our two worlds. The desire for this arc, this meeting place, this oneness does not negate the existence of both our worlds. The arc pre-supposes the harmony of both: not inviting the invasion or the suppression of my world by yours. It invites sharing between them.

But we are plagued by our colonial condition. Inside the fort, Canadians seem to think this arc can be built despite the disentanglement of our land, our words, our very selves. Outside the fort, we hear the laughter and feel we must shed our ancient selves, move away from our homeland and give up our words. If Canadians are locked in the fort, we are locked outside of it. Doubt rises huge and fogs the source of our creative voice, making the arc disappear. We search your institutional hallways for evidence of ourselves. But we have forgotten the trail to our ceremonial selves in the dreamspace we once occupied.

In order to resolve this colonial condition in literature we need to have Canada recognize that first it is our condition, and second, Canada needs to view this condition as unacceptable. In literature this means to move over and create a new space for us in the annals of literature in Canada. It means don't pick up a pen and imagine you need to write on my behalf or that you should. It means that those who lay claim to a place in the dreamspace of creativity must come to understand the difference between honest stretching into the world of the imagination and pirating someone else's imagination.

If you conjure a character based on your in-fort stereotypes and trash my world, that's bad writing—racist literature and I will take you on for it. If I tell you a story and you write it down and collect the royal coinage from this story, that's stealing—appropriation of culture. But if you imagine a character who is from my world, attempting to deconstruct the attitudes of yours, while you may not be stealing, you still leave yourself open to criticism unless you do it well.

Part of our colonial condition is that we are still too busy struggling in the whirl of it, paddling through the rapids of it, to be able to enter the dreamspace at the edge of it. Few of us have had the time to study our remembered story. Some have no memories to ponder. But those of us who have pondered our memorized stories know we have a criteria for story.

If the speaker achieves oneness with the listener, it's a good story.

If the listener is empowered to move to this dreamspace and re-imagine his/herself, it's a good story.

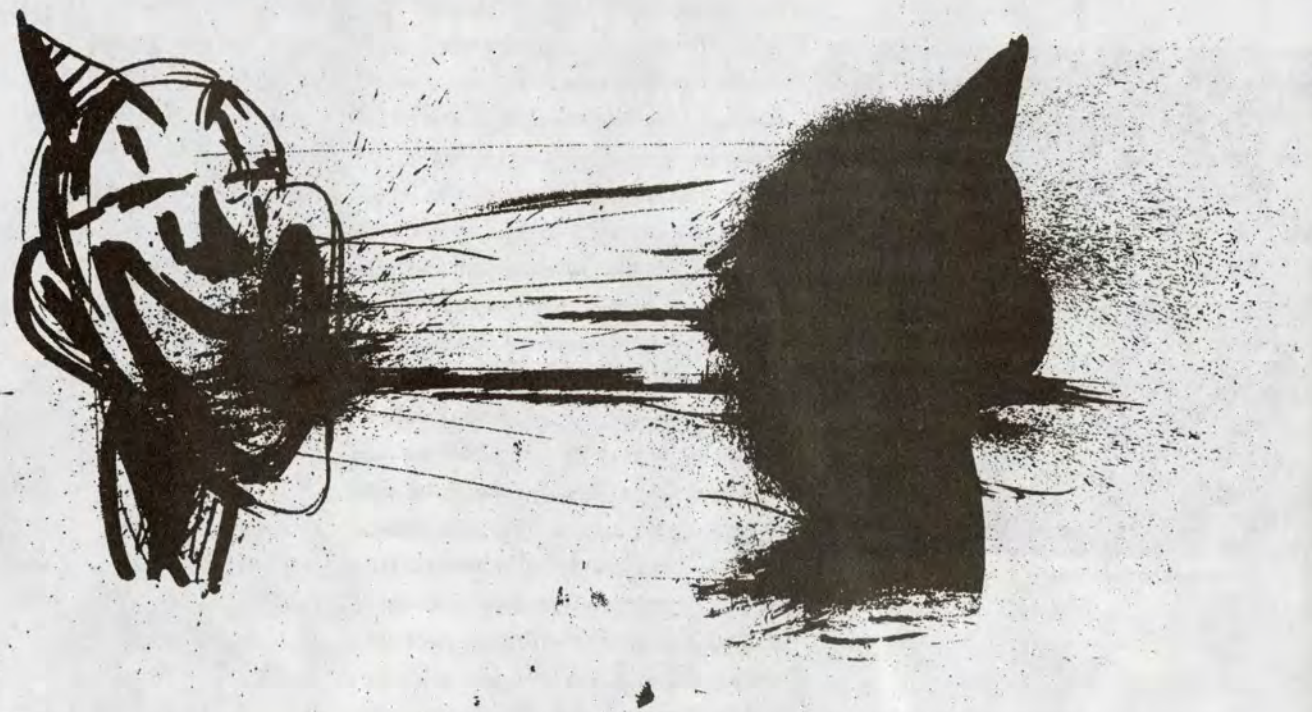
If the listener is empowered to move to this dreamspace, and re-imagine oneness with humanity, earth, flora and fauna, it's a good story.

If the story enters the world from the dreamspace where all good stories are born, it's a good story.

These are my culture's standards—conscious and unconscious—and until they become standards alongside of yours, colonialism in literature will prevail.

Lee Maracle was born in North Vancouver of a Métis mother and a Salish father. She now writes, works and raises her family of four in Toronto.

LIGHTEN UP



RACIST HUMOUR: A PERSONAL ANECDOTE

Kwame Dawes

Kurtz [a fictional construct—using his actual name would create closure—so I choose a larger name with its own literary baggage]—a friend of mine and I got into a very nasty argument about a year ago. It was a crucial point in my life in this city [of elms—fredericton—middle class capital of new brunswick—my “home” for five and a half years]. He is white. Since the argument I still consider him a friend and he confides in me. However, we both know things are not quite the same. Something significant happened after the argument.

You see, we used to talk a lot together, he was into sports and I listened with genuine interest to all the details about American sports. I really wanted to learn and he helped me to understand baseball, not the rules of the game, but the culture of the game, the history of the game. He even helped me understand the history and the place of blacks in the game. You see, he knew [was conscious of the fact that/noticed/acted as if/reacted to the fact that] I was black and that this history was something I was interested in. I discovered much about racism in baseball—the fascinating shift from participation in the major leagues by black players during the fifteen to twenty years after the Civil War, to a retrogressive exclusion of blacks that lasted for over half a century. Contained in this American pastime was a fascinating history of racism in America. Kurtz was helpful in bringing me closer to an understanding of American racism. But we also joked a lot. Joking, insulting each other, teasing each other, this was all part of the vocabulary of our friendship, and we worked at it with relish and considerable energy.

Then I began to notice a curious trend in his humour. It began to typecast, to stereotype. First it targeted our mutual friend, the Catholic lad called John [again another constructed name—read white, middle class, liberal male]. He was a fairly easy target because of his strident Catholicism. [...and we all knew that laughing at someone's faith, especially when it was a faith that exercised incredible power all over the world, was not only acceptable, but perhaps revolutionary, a kind of hitting back.] I thought these jokes were funny. I made some of them too. We all laughed at them until it became clear to me that John was really getting annoyed at some of our humour. I felt really awful and I desisted. [guilt for participating in an act of abuse—an act that reduced an individual's intense beliefs and sense of self to a series of stereotypical and demeaning constructs. i was participating in a ritual that I had been a victim of. my shame was incredible.]

But Kurtz was unperturbed and appeared to take my participation in this ritual of abuse as a cue for him to freely focus his attention on my identity, my blackness. Almost as if the closer we got the more he felt he had license to make jokes about my blackness. I winced every time one of the jokes slapped me. [we start off by wincing because we are not ready for it and where the speaker is an enemy, an easily defined foe, we know how to act, to swing out. but here kurtz was my friend and i was lost. maybe i would just wait for him to note the absurdity of his actions. maybe i would just not laugh. maybe he would see. maybe...]

It bothered me, but he felt they were funny. He felt this was fine, this was cool: “I have this black friend, you see [trophy of his multiculturalism and liberal sense. pitted against the racism of some of the people he knows, why, his friendship with a black is radical. you know the kind. they buy a reggae record and they feel they must announce this fact to you, that somehow you will be impressed, feel more welcome, accepted]. This is a black guy who can take a joke, not stuck up with a chip on the shoulder like some blacks I know.” [now i understand that for me to be so characterized—that is—placed in the box with the quiet, passive, unresponsive blacks who allow themselves to be abused for the sake of friendship, was the most shameful and radically uncharacteristic occurrence in my life. me, the aggressive and outspoken race-conscious type who never accepted any kind of racist innuendo without lashing out quickly and decisively. now here i was, hemmed in and tethered because i had let my guard down too easily, because i had for a second become an accomplice. maybe this is what made me such a perfect trophy for kurtz.]

Soon I realized that this was becoming more than a trend, it was becoming a habit, a pattern of our relationship. I began to evaluate my actions. Had I started this, maybe I had made some kind of comment about his white-



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TONY HAMILTON

ness, something that would give him a cue to proceed as he did. But there was nothing—nothing but the period of jokes at John's expense. I had never made a joke about his whiteness. Never. It had never occurred to me to do so. Yet every black joke that he could get, he felt he had to try it out on me. It was as if he had contained in him so many of these jokes, balled up in his soul, jokes that he needed to purge from his system. For some reason he felt that these jokes should be shared with me. For some reason there was this need to relieve his own conscience by letting me share the joke. Perhaps he felt that sharing it with a black friend would legitimize the joke as a joke. [this particularly if the black friend laughs. such complicity would make a joke of those who scream racism at every turn. archie bunker's racism would be justified. the racism is there, let it out, let it out to blacks, let them see we have nothing to hide, then maybe we can all see why whites have found it so funny all these years and we can live happily ever after.] Soon he was telling these jokes in front of other people [flaunting the trophy.] I wasn't laughing, but I was not saying anything.

But I realized I was looking like a fool, a hypocrite. People I had torn down for their racism were hearing this man make racist jokes about me without my whiplash tongue responding. Soon they would take their cue from him and Kwame the radical would be the good black guy who can take a joke. It took me awhile to finally act out my anger but as it had gotten completely out of hand, I did react.

But first I had to deal with a number of questions. You see, I was drawn by the peculiar nature of this kind of close contact racism, and a part of me was fascinated by the mechanics and psychology of such racist behaviour. I tried to understand it by asking questions. He was my friend [a contract typified in the fact that we worked in the same office, we had dinner together, we talked sports, he knew my wife, he was at our wedding, i had met his parents and sister—superficial indices of friendship—this now was the real test of the core. did he really understand me?] What was it that made him feel he had to repeat these jokes? I struggled with these questions for a long time. I even began to analyze the humour.

His humour was not always incredibly witty, but he knew a genuinely good joke, yet he was cracking these bad black jokes and pretending that they were funny. [in retrospect, i am convinced that he found these jokes funny because of the circumstance of telling them. he had to

overcompensate for their political offensiveness by laughing harder than he cared to. there was also a streak of viciousness running through his amusement. positioned as the teller of the joke, he had power, a certain superior edge that filled him with a sense of well-being thus inducing this peculiar sense of humour. in no uncertain terms, the jokes were at my expense.] Was he trying to offend me, to hurt me? I think so. I think so in as much as offence could be seen as humorous—in as much as, in so doing, he could enjoy his feeling of assurance that he was still a nice non-racist type who just liked a good joke.

I proffered up a few other theories: maybe he is trying to stir me up, trying to test the limits? I didn't think so, he was comfortable with the jokes, and expected my reaction to be a big guffaw. Even if I was offended, how could I resist the humour of it? He was relying on a sense that I would never make a joke come between our friendship. [it is time to redefine "friendship". "why, some of my best friends are (fill in appropriate minority)" was his definition. His definition made his actions acceptable. mine did not.] Just a joke. I concluded that this was something deeper. He wanted to crack these jokes because of the novelty of having a close black friend. Because he felt that the safety to say these things to a black friend gave him a certain assurance that the friendship was cool, was interracial but not bogged down by over-blown sensitivities. He carried the baggage of centuries of abuse perpetrated by his white people, and in this curious manner he was trying to suggest that maybe if I as a black, understood the way their humour works, if I could sit through an episode of Archie Bunker and understand the purpose of satire and irony, and then forgive them of their many ill deeds.

In many ways, he was trying to define the terms of our friendship on the premise that racial tensions about racist jokes emerge out of a basic lack of humour on the part of those insulted. By telling these jokes and getting away with them, he was assuaging a guilt that he felt for all these years of telling those jokes outside of my ear-shot or that of black people. He was asking me to forgive his racism and that of his people. There was something incredibly sad about it.

I asked him to stop. I said I didn't like it and that I couldn't continue to call him a friend if he kept this up. He didn't stop. So I blew up at him and withdrew. I decided that it was best to avoid him, to avoid bantering witticisms with him and so avoid the recurrence of the humour.

He at first decided that I was being silly and became annoyed with me. He pretended not to care. Then it became clear that I was seriously willing to forfeit the friendship on this basis.

One night he had a few to drink and he came to talk. It was a painful evening and I tried to explain what I was feeling and thinking. He cried a little because he thought we were good friends—he really did. It took a great deal for him to understand that my terms of friendship were different and that he could not simply ignore centuries of historical relationships while trying to forge a friendship in the now. We were both defined by our histories and these histories play a significant part in shaping the way we deal with each other now. He had to recognize that and deal with me on that basis. It was this, I suspect, that proved the most difficult for him to accept. I think we lost something between us that night. I regret that it was lost; however, what we lost had to be lost—it was founded upon self-denial, an untenable fiction. I know that for him, that night, I was a black man and he was a white man. We were trying to explain what that meant to our friendship. Maybe he understood finally. Maybe he understood these jokes, these attacks on my blackness were attacks on who I was. They were attacks about something that was essential to my identity, I was not prepared to have that dignity taken away by jokes. And maybe that is why we stopped joking for such a long time. Since then he has not cracked such jokes. Maybe...

He left town and we have been in touch by telephone and the occasional social gathering. We do talk, he confides in me and is genuine about being a close friend. [writing this, i do feel a sense of guilt—a kind of betrayal—because i know he regards me as a close friend, one of his closest, and yet i am unable to dismiss the suspicion that his closeness emerges despite my colour. you see, these are not terms upon which i want friendship to be based. it entails a denial of who i am. while it allows us to be friends when it comes to understanding our academic work, our family relationships, our non-race specific concerns, but we are still avoiding an issue that is at the core of the power dynamic existing between us. we do so for peace to reign. i also know that our commonalities are on his turf—in his terms. i have connected with baseball, with the close-mindedness and peculiar beauty of the new brunswick psyche, with the language, the pop culture of the society, with the geography, the political systems, the histo-

(continued next page)

White Skin, Black Make-up

Minstrelsy in a high school drama

WARNING: I did not see the production that I am about to discuss, so if this is enough to dissuade you from reading this article, stop now. If you are curious about why I still feel audacious enough to write the piece, please continue.

During the winter term, Fredericton High School, perhaps the largest high school east of Toronto, staged the popular musical *Big River*, a Broadway show that did quite well in New York during the latter part of the eighties. For those of you not hip on Broadway trivia, *Big River* is based on Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a work which is still accepted by many as an American Classic.

The Broadway show doesn't stray too far from the novel version of the story about a poor white boy from the south and his adolescent adventures and misadventures along the Mississippi river. His accomplice is a black slave called Jim, a man filled with deep superstitions and a level of intelligence that makes him quite compatible with the boy Huck. But this is Huck's story and Jim merely functions as a symbol of escape and a foil for Huck.

Twain candidly presents the racist quality of Southern life, but he also trivializes slavery, freedom, and the values and beliefs of the black people. Even if one could grant that Twain might be excused for his racism on the grounds that he was a product of his time, the same excuse could not be applied to the creators of *Big River* whose use of the classic functions largely as an endorsement of the stereotypes presented in Twain's novel.

But my quarrel is neither with Twain nor the creators of *Big River*. (That battle is being fought all over North America by concerned African-Americans and African-Canadians who are convinced that their children should not have to be forced to study this novel as a part of their cultural heritage.) Rather, my quarrel is with the teachers at the Fredericton High School who decided to stage this musical.

Now don't get me wrong. I think it is a "good" musical. I saw it on Broadway and enjoyed the spectacle and the music. But the circumstances of its staging here

(continued on page 21)

Lighten Up (continued from page 19)

ry—it is on those terms, his terms, but he remains completely removed from my world, located as it is in jamaica, in ghana. excluded because he feels no need to enter it—i have become accessible to him from within his world. i know his language—he does not know mine nor does he feel he needs to. i could try and force the issue, but is it worth it? and what would that mean, anyway? we are limited friends. our "raciality" is denied. this is at best a tolerant state. i must define friendship differently.] But something has changed since that explosion and the attendant detente, something lost. When we meet now, he is careful about his humour. I know it is a strain for him, and I know that there is a part of him somewhere that doesn't get it. I know he is being polite because Kwame will blow his cool.

The joke thing has stayed with me a long time. I am a witty person and I will never accept that humour is always attacking someone else's essential being. It isn't. Humour need not be as pathetically offensive as much of the humour that I have heard. Those who scream (or whine) "Nothing is allowable anymore!" are lazy and completely witless. [aruna srivastava calls racism a "failure of the imagination".] I found it ironic that some of the most offensive racist jokes I ever heard in the city came from this friend of mine. But it tells me something.

Once [yet another story] he said he heard this joke being told by a few friends of his at a party. It was racist. I asked if he said anything about it. He said he didn't, it wasn't his place to do so. I guess I understood something that day. It wasn't his place. It was mine. Yet he had no problem repeating the joke to me—as a joke. The story about the guys who were saying it was merely a preamble and contextualization which would then distinguish him [the one who dares to say it to my face directly—the honest Archie Bunker-type figure, and the hypocrite, the type who would speak it in hiding—the insidious racist. For



him these were two different kinds of people involved in racism, the former being the positive, less-racist one—and in the arena of humour—the non-racist one. He could not appreciate that I found them both offensive; participants of equal status in the camp that has participated in the abuse and subjugation of my people for centuries]. He felt it was fine now that he was telling it to me and he didn't expect me to be offended. He found it funny.

Anyone who is trying to make a case for the "inherent" apolitical nature of humour on the basis that humour cancels out politics by the mere fact that it is funny, must deal with a host of questions about who is doing the telling, in what context, for whom, to what end, and so on. Kurtz's jokes might have been funny to a bunch of his white friends caucusing over a beer, but change the audience; place me as the audience, in the equation, and suddenly the meaning of the humour changes—it has to. Those black comedians who tell their jokes at the Apollo when there are no television cameras are doing something completely different when there are television cameras, and something different when they move to Caroline's Comedy Hour to tell their jokes. The same joke means something completely different with each audience, and in each instance, the listener is provided with a very powerful construct of words which can destroy the basis of self-affirmation and identity in a people.

My point is that humour, like all artistic constructs is deeply and incredibly complex. [i think of how many jamaicans grew up with deeply racist and seemingly funny readings of africans and africaness as part of a strategy by which blacks could create divisions among themselves which in turn, worked against their formation of a united front. jamaicans still try to deny their africaness because africans are 'primitive' while they, the jamaicans, have evolved from that state into something better. so it is fine

(continued on page 22)



White Skin, Black Make-up (continued from pg. 19)

in Fredericton give rise to a number of concerns. You see, it was clear that it did not matter to them that just an hour away, in St. John, New Brunswick, there is currently a controversy over the teaching of the novel in the schools. It did not matter either that the same debate is taking place in Halifax. It did not occur to them that many Black Canadians regard the work as offensive to their dignity and sense of identity. It did not seem to occur to them because they exist in a snug cocoon of ignorance which allows them to pretend that the world is made up of only white people and white opinions. It did not occur to them because they felt no sense of responsibility to the Black people who actually live in the community and attend the high school. For them, this was not an issue—it was just a play, after all. It was on Broadway. The songs are wonderful. They did not expect an outcry of protest nor did they anticipate that anybody would walk out of the shows in disgust. They did not because they did not feel even a smattering of responsibility toward the black segment of the community in which they lived. After all, a few years ago they managed to stage, with considerable success, a good old-fashioned *Black and White Minstrel Show*. This was small potatoes in comparison.

And as it turns out, they judged correctly. There was no great outcry. The local CBC radio station and the local newspaper gave the *Big River* show rave reviews; none even mentioned the potential offence inherent in their decision to paint white characters black to play the black parts. Yes, that is what I said. They actually cast white actors in parts for Blacks and painted them in black face in the tradition of the minstrel show (herein lies the rub). To her credit, one reviewer commented on how difficult it must be for these white actors to play Black characters. She seemed to feel, however, that they did a good job of overcoming this monumental obstacle. When I, filled with deep consternation, decided to write a commentary about this for the local CBC station, it became clear that I was doing the wrong thing. It was acceptable for me to write commentaries on Spring, on colours, and to participate in poetry writing experiments on air, but this deeply angry commentary was not something that would get the support of the producers at the station. I explained my case to one of the producers who suggested that I send him a draft of the piece. I did. I have not heard from him since...

The problem is that these people fail to see why it would be offensive to have to sit through a play in which

the Black characters are being played by whites painted black. They also failed to understand why a number of Black students who were approached to act in the play refused. When I spoke to some of the students they made their position quiet clear: "All of the sudden they want me in their theatre group? No thank you." These students were not stupid. They understood the absurdity of this quest for a black face conducted without sensitivity and without regard for cultural connection with the Mississippi Blacks of the United States. Kenyans were approached, Black Canadians were approached, and finally an East Indian was cast in the role of Jim.

Of course, I am not suggesting that in order to do the play they would have to have imported some African-Americans from the South to play the parts. Rather, my point is that by seeking out actors who looked the part, the teachers were participating in a simplistic process of reductionist thinking which represented a superficial reading of the play. In other words, the teachers were making the play a racial play structured around colour differences which had little to do with cultural distinctions. While such a casting strategy can be defended on the basis of the spectacular and visual nature of theatre, it pointed to a basic way of thinking that led, ultimately, to the decision to paint the faces of white actors. (If we can't find these Black people, we will pretend that we are them.) The teachers (and students who share some complicity in this effort) participated in an act that is tragically offensive. It surprised me that those involved in the production could not appreciate the echoes of minstrelsy inherent in the way in which the show was designed. It also appalls me that this was allowed to go on without the least bit of challenge from the media.

I have tried to rationalize the actions of these people. At first I simply called them ignorant. They just don't know. But this is not enough and it is too simple a solution. Why don't they know? It is as not as if Fredericton is located somewhere off the map; it is not as if there is no Black community in Fredericton; it is not as if there is no literature on race and theatre in the libraries of this city. Ignorance was just not enough of a reason.

I then decided to treat the act as an instance of limited artistic ability. Apparently, the director of the show failed to see how he could stage the play in an imaginative way such that the problems of face blackening would not have to occur. You know, paint all the white people white

(continued on page 23)

Lighten Up (cont. from pg. 20)

to laugh at africanness. they called my brother "uncka" at school and they called me "little uncka". the term comes from the tarzan-inspired cry of the african bush man "uncka-uncka kill-kill". this in a jamaica where bob marley sings "africa unite because we're moving right out of babylon." were these taunts funny? was eddie murphy's image of africa in "coming to america" funny because it came from a black—or did he steal it from someone else—some white man's idea conjured up from the journals of livingstone/conrad/rhodes?]

There are no easy solutions, but racist humour is at best a volatile and problematic entity which should be constantly studied and understood in the context of the socio-political and personal relationship between people of different races. Racist jokes are more often than not, offensive. I know this for a fact, and to hell with all those "brilliant wits" who want to think or argue otherwise. This story/narrative/personal journey/constructed non-fiction presented me with one of the more complex instances of racism that I have had to deal with. Contained in the story are insights into the out-working of racism within close interpersonal relationships. The tragedy is that when such interpersonal dealings have been so comfortably distanced from politics and history, they can easily generate and perpetuate racist behaviour which is securely obfuscated under the guise of friendship.

By bringing the political to bear on the personal (a self-conscious act) I somehow precipitated rupture and placed in jeopardy this so-called "friendship". You see, I could have sought to (as is the wont of many multicultural workers in this country—both white and of colour) simply suppress the inherent racism in Kurtz's humour, and instead celebrate our commonalities [same office, same town, same acquaintances, same interest in baseball and black players, same superficial reality]. The result would have been dishonesty and the negation of what I consider to be real friendship. The result would have been the perpetuation of the facade of multiculturalism which sublimates insidious prejudices and racist thoughts through an exercise of that much-vaunted (and overrated) Canadian trait called tolerance.

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White Skin, Black Make-up (continued from pg. 21)

(full white) and paint all the black people black. The effect? Symbolic theatre—powerful stuff. Or, what of reversing the roles so as to foreground and subvert the entire race dynamic in the script, or perhaps casting blind? Not only would this have been politically astute but deeply imaginative and revealing as well. Quite frankly, I think the failure to try any of these options stemmed from a complete miscalculation about how seriously offensive the approach taken was.

I gather that there was some concern expressed by some people, for the director sought advice from a black woman who originates from the southern states of America as to what she felt about the use of black face. Apparently, she did not see it as a problem and this became the director's okay. I have no idea why this woman had no problem with the concept, but her approval should not have constituted the full approval of all people of African descent. Nor does this gesture relieve the director of the responsibility for having simply carried on as planned. It is clear that he expected there would be a problem, but he failed to respond to his instincts, finding himself an easy answer instead.

In light of all this, I could only conclude that the staging of the play in the manner in which it was staged represented yet another instance of the way in which white society continues to "diss" the non-white communities of this country; that is, in a manner that indicates that they do so largely because they know they can get away with it. And maybe in certain quarters they can. Hiding behind the claim that the matter is trivial they impatiently insist: "This was just a high school play, for God's sake. Lighten up." But to my mind it is all the more critical because it is a high school play, one which shows us something about the kind of institutionalized racism that we find in this country's educational system. And it goes further than that...

In the five and a half years that I have lived here I have noted with some concern that while there is an openness to the work of non-white artists there remains a tradition of relegating such work to the position of exotica—instances according to which white society proves to itself that it has the ability to be multi-cultural and accepting of other cultures. This is especially true in the mainstream arena. It remains, for instance, a concern of mine that

Theatre New Brunswick has not, in my few years here, staged what could be even vaguely termed a "minority" play. In my memory, the closest that they came was the staging of Athol Fugard's *The Road to Mecca*, or the casting of a black actress in the play *Saltwater Moon*. Significantly, all this took place during political playwright Sharon Pollock's brief stay as artistic director.

It should come as no surprise that the high school children have very limited exposure to professional work from non-white cultures, and that they have no sensitivity to the politics of representation in theatre. I would not like to place undue responsibility on Theatre New Brunswick for shaping the direction of theatre in the community; however, one cannot deny the role it plays in stirring up interest among young people in theatre and in presenting a model of what good theatre is to the community. I have met, in Fredericton, a few black youngsters who have an interest in theatre but remain convinced that their interest is futile. Most of them have decided to leave Fredericton and try and make it in larger centres. White aspiring actors have done the same, but they have a sense that someday they will be able to play to their hometown audience. Non-white actors have no such illusions.

One of the tragedies of this whole thing is that I have found it necessary to withhold the expression of praise for the High School for having dared to stage something that has even a few blacks in it and which breaks from their usual choice of production: *West Side Story* and material of that ilk. I will however have to continue to withhold it so as to drive home the point that with such liberal thinking comes considerable responsibility. I suspect that in light of the small wave of protest that has come from myself and a few students (things get around in Fredericton), there may be a reluctance to try and do anything different next year. The teachers responsible for theatre might conveniently conclude that since the non-whites are not interested in working on the stage, the company will just have to stick to white plays. I hope I am wrong. I hope that instead, the school will recognize the error of its way and seek to press on with the business of presenting images that all their students can identify with and be proud of.

"It is a crime..."

photomontage, 1992

Artist's Project

Shani Mootoo

Photocopy Artist

Video Artist

Writer

Painter

♀ /Brown

DublinbornIndoTrinidadianVancouverite



MOVING THE IMAGE: INDEPENDENT ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN MEDIA ARTS

Edited by Russell Leong
Los Angeles: Visual Communications and UCLA Asian
American Studies Center, 1991, 287 pp.



IF THE IDEA OF ASIAN AMERICAN MEDIA sounds even slightly oxymoronic, then *Moving the Image* seeks to rectify the very image of Asian American films and videos. Give it a history. Some critical mass. And a voice to the 'model minority' which traditionally has been perceived as a silent one. The critical enterprise of this sizeable anthology is as earnest as that, and its scope ambitious. Amid identity politics, there is a huge identity crisis where the texture and tone surrounding Asian American media arts differs substantially from the impassioned and radical discourse of African American, Latino and Native American media

movements. Although it surveys the last two decades of Asian Pacific American film and video activity in a comprehensive way, the barely-there sketches of Asian indies in America today are mere glimpses into one of the richest, if ill-defined, fields of independent media.

Published by Visual Communications, a Los Angeles based national media arts centre (much like Canada's artists-run centres) the book's west coast origin redefines, for easterners like me, the concept of Asian American. The term Asian Pacific American is inclusive of Hawaii, the Philippines, Guam and other post- and neo-colonial sites of cultural production

and resistance. Some of the regional bias is also reflected in notable omissions of New Yorkers such as Peter Chow, longtime director of Asian CineVision (Visual Communications' east coast counterpart), CineVue editor Bill Gee, and veteran video and filmmakers such as JT Takagi, Yuet Fung Ho, Rea Tajiri and Shu Lea Cheang. But that's almost quibbling since editor Russell Leong has assembled almost 50 contributors to this cause. The weightier critical essays function more as introductory pieces because the compilation is so artist driven, and anecdotal musings by filmmakers abound.

The best, a valentine of sorts, comes from

Helen Lee

the inimitable Christine Choy, one of the pioneers. "Dear V.C. (Viet Cong)... I don't like movies, I don't like TV shows. I hate those half-assed movie deals. All those directors, producers, agents, cocksuckers, porno generators are all pretenders.... 'Aesthetically' speaking, I'm pure and still a virgin.... It's a 'Choy' style, an image mover and shaker... Look where my concepts come from, right between my legs, be cool." (60-61)

Successors to this sassy talk, even if they'd deny the heritage, are the so-called bad boys of Asian American cinema: Jon Moritsugu, Gregg Araki and Roddy Bogawa. Not nearly as interesting as their films, however, they diss the Asian American media status quo and the litany of PBS-style documentaries and immigrant stories that characterize the medium.

One of the book's most effective points is the description of the growth of Asian American media as, in part, an earnest political movement which acted as a foundation for such rowdy and irreverent contemporary work. As critic and archivist Stephen Gong states, "...the Asian American media arts field is fundamentally a political (rather than a cultural or ethnic-based) movement," (8) citing the divergence between newly immigrated Southeast Asians and assimilated third-generation Asian Americans. Clearly, Asian American self-identity is not a given but a form of expression and self-definition. "One becomes Asian and Pacific American no longer by birth, but by choice," (xii) adds Leong. The nationalistic character which has bound (and tied?) African American cinema in recent years (and benefitted from the increased exposure) seems fundamentally problematic for an Asian American cinema which is historically rooted in different, multiple cultural expressions. The hybrid nature of Asian American experience and

its own involvement with dominant cultural forms creates work which knows itself but not yet how to tell it loud and clear.

Informed by cultural theorists and proponents of third cinema, Leong's overall critical framework is strategic in avoiding the sociological principles of the Ethnic Studies program at UC Berkeley which sparked the west coast Asian American media movement. He also engages more thoroughly with currents in cultural studies and cinema studies while not forsaking the movement's activist roots. He places a premium on experience as a way to scrutinize and to provide alternative readings of history. Thus, the results of years of vocal grassroots are hard-won but substantial: institutions and funding bodies devoted solely to Asian American independents and infrastructures of the sort that are only beginning to gel in Canada.

One imperative, it seems, is to develop more and better scholarship around race and media as it concerns Asian Americans (and Canadians), and the dearth of that critical writing is apparent here. Renee Tajima's in-depth essay is the book's centrepiece. Rather than taking Leong's celebratory approach, she delves into a keen historical analysis which is especially provocative in evaluating the aesthetic and political concerns of independents after the watershed feature film, *Chan Is Missing* (Wayne Wang, 1981). Different strains of video and filmmaking after the initiation of the "entitlement" period, when multiculturalism became course curricula and advocacy efforts made some inroads, are reflective of the increasing pluralistic tendency of Asian American perspectives. Non-confrontational documentaries positioned "from within", more works by women (notably Pam Tom and Kayo Hatta) and the pursuit of dramatic and feature filmmaking are named

as significant markers of this developing cinema. Tajima forecasts a promising future for artists of colour, and a clear challenge to overturning self-perpetuating systems of ghettoized culture.

Additional merits of *Moving the Image* include the section on Asians in Hollywood. There is not only discussion of Anna May Wong and Sessue Hayakawa as silent matinee stars, but also articles on unheralded folks working in the industry which are utterly absorbing. Imagine a top cinematographer (two-time Oscar winner James Wong Howe, of course), an editor, a studio extra's story, even a listing of a hundred names of Asians working in the pictures before talkies arrived in 1929. Another section provides Trinh Minh-ha's most direct engagement with issues concerning Asian Americans and an exploration of the "hyphen," a concatenation of racial identity and cultural displacements typical of a "between-world dilemma" (85); a hyphenated condition also touched upon by Bogawa.

There are also some bitter stones among the personal reminiscences, particularly by film technician Curtis Choy, and even director Wayne Wang who warns that if you want a hit film, then forget about an Asian protagonist. A hard pill to swallow, certainly, for some filmmakers with the ambition to do exactly that. Tajima also invokes the glass ceiling still hovering over Asian Americans in an entire field of independents: a ceiling broken by the likes of Spike Lee or John Sayles. Rather than saddling the task of breaking the mainstream on Mira Nair, I'd just as soon bet on Araki and the boyz, or girls like Kayo Hatta and Pam Tom.

Helen Lee is a filmmaker and critic.

FLUID EXCHANGES: ARTISTS AND CRITICS IN THE AIDS CRISIS

Edited with an introduction by James Miller

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992

(proceeds from sale to be donated by publishers to AIDS Action Now)

Fadi Abou-Rihan

PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST DISRUPTIVE AND potentially liberating phenomena to be witnessed on the North American academic front over the past two decades has been the introduction of concerns pertaining to the notion of sexuality, and to a sphere of activity which has traditionally seen itself as essentially objective, that is, disembodied and universal. As a site of intellectual, i.e., academic, artistic, political, and bodily production, sexuality is no longer to be articulated and refunctioned solely through the language of medico/psycho-pathology. In fact, in their endeavour at redefining the limits of the sexual and their insistence on localized and political forms of knowledge, such areas of inquiry as feminism and, more recently, queer theory, have actively pursued areas and strategies of research which challenge the traditional academic categories, both within and without, as well as the hierarchical relations they produce. It is no surprise then that the keepers of the ivory tower have adopted a defensive attitude vis à vis such a phenomenon and regarded it as an interference in the so-called steadily progressive and accumulative project of Knowledge.

But just as the scope and bearing of sexuality are being extended beyond the confines of the bedroom and the clinic, so has the significance of AIDS in so far as it has become a critically defining and operative element in our contemporary sexual behaviour, attitudes and sensibilities. This is witnessed by the emergence of grassroots direct-action groups such as SIDACTION and AIDS Action Now (AAN) in Canada, and the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP) in the U.S. and the proliferation of cultural products underlining the necessity to wrest the "AIDS crisis" out of the hands of medical and governmental agencies whose prejudiced Master Discourse

has distorted, if not negated, its social, psychological, and political manifestations.

Countering the Establishment's rhetoric which sees HIV infection as either a moral judgement on sexual minorities, women, immigrants and people of colour, or as an isolated, "scientific," and, therefore, non-human phenomenon, the contributors to *Fluid Exchanges: Artists and Critics in the AIDS Crisis* provide us with rich, insightful and diverse analyses of the various modes in which representations of AIDS are produced and made available. Borrowing from Foucault's research on confinement, sexuality and discourse analysis, and the strategies for cultural criticism and political activism proposed by Douglas Crimp (U.S.A.) and Simon Watney (Britain), the anthology attempts to uncover the forces at play in our encounter with AIDS imagery found in anything from the obituary pages to the legal discourse and passing through photojournalism and literature. Full length articles complete with multi-page endnotes (Brunet-Weinmann, Patton, Grover, Watney, Miller...), portfolios of photographs, posters, and art exhibits (Fabro, the *Visual AIDS* exhibit, the *Body & Society* exhibit...), reprints of newspaper articles (London Free Press), and a video script (by John Greyson), among others, coupled with an equally diverse array of critical strategies and sites of inquiry all make the anthology almost indispensable reading to anyone interested in the broader theme of the political aspects of cultural production.

Multiplicity of styles and subject matter, however, is all too often nothing but a thin veil for what is essentially a homogeneous ideological stance masquerading as a celebration of superficial difference and variety. This, however, is not the case with *Fluid Exchanges*. The

contributors are fairly divergent in their political perspectives, concerns, and approaches; and as Miller accurately puts it in his introduction "(w)hat you will find here is a very mixed crowd of radicals and liberals conferring with each other across the old and now entirely outmoded divide between the Establishment and the Counterculture. The rhetorical result is an unpredictable and therefore lively heteroglossia (not an ideal harmony) of discourses opposed to the deadening of the monologism of the 'AIDS-Staat.' No rigid symmetry has been imposed on the verbal or visual contents of the book. No single aesthetic agenda trims its edges. No single ideology trims its lines." (18)



APHASIA 1990, TORONTO INSTALLATION,
PHOTO BY TONY WILSON, MIXED MEDIA INSTALLATION

One of the more central concerns around which such a heteroglossia becomes very apparent is the by-now familiar debate around the relationship of art to politics and the extent to which either should be put to the services of the other. For while most if not all the contributors seem to agree on the failure of didactic art and the necessity for cultural production to be grounded in personal experience, differences and conflicts between them emerge as to the extent and manner in which such production should, or even could, be expressly political when the twists and turns specific to the realms of AIDS and queer sexuality are taken into account. While some attribute to the syndrome a silver lining contributing to an artistic revival celebrating lesbian and gay experience and sensibility, others insist on a much more pragmatic line requiring of art an explicit political agenda. The White and Miller essays, for example, highlight the ways in which the works of certain contemporary artists like Andy Fabro and André Durand problematize iconography and the tensions it creates in the act of representation. Miller and White articulate the sense of urgency in which each artist finds himself playing the part of activist as his art resists the traditional didactic lines when confronted with the heterosexist and AIDS-phobic mind-set of the general public. The reverential stance of aesthetic detachment imposed by academic painting is almost physically denied by these works and the viewer is required to participate in the act of representation and develop a felt experience which finds its logical extension in an activist position. However, the renaissance witnessed in Fabro's and Durand's elegiac portraits of Saint Sebastian and Richard Purdy's fantasy memorial (see the Brunet-Weinmann contribution) soon comes face to face with Douglas Crimp's now-famous words "We don't need to transcend the epidemic; we need to end it," the ideologically unequivocal agitprop they endorse, and their accusation that such an idea of renaissance in art can quickly translate itself into a non-political, and, therefore, conservative and suspect, aestheticism. Conversely, the effectiveness of



DIAGNOSIS/PROGNOSIS 1991, TRUCK GALLERY, MIXED MEDIA INSTALLATION

the alternative call-to-arms for a more radical aesthetic in combating the distortions of the mass media and promoting "the visibility of PWAs (Persons with AIDS) who are vibrant, angry, loving, sexy, beautiful, acting up and fighting back," as one ACT UP flyer would have it, is diagnosed as limited and perhaps even non-existent by Harris and Grover.

Harris looks at the obituaries in the San Francisco gay weekly *Bay Area Reporter* only to find that while the apt banalities traditionally reserved for such spaces have been replaced by a genuine and poignant amalgam of camp and sentimentality, "the reader is quickly exhausted with the monotonous displays of goodness, courage, amiability, gregariousness, and integrity that are exhibited in this morgue as each mourner in turn yanks the sheet back from the cadaver he is eulogizing to reveal, not different faces but precisely the same man, an abstract and exemplary figure, a martyred innocent." (168) Similarly, but perhaps with much more significant ramifications for public policy and safer sex education campaigns, Grover undermines the usefulness of positive representation by insisting that it is mainly personal experience which can effectively thwart the spread of HIV and AIDS-phobia. While maintaining that the dominant media discourse on AIDS has perpetuated and reinforced the discriminatory practices facing the PWA by portraying him as "the moribund AIDS victim, who was also (magically) a demon of sexuality, actively transmitting his condition to the 'general population' even as he lay dying off-stage," (33) Grover questions the legitimacy of the reversible causal connections uncritically, and almost naively, imposed on the twain representation-behaviour.

Apart from uncovering and problematizing some of the central points of tension located within the site of AIDS and its representations, one of the anthology's more interesting features is that it attempts to localize and deploy the Foucauldian framework and the Crimp/Watney styles of politicking in a community (London, Ontario) that prides itself on its capacity for bourgeois tolerance and its distinction in terms of societal and political norms and practices from other environments, such as in the U. S. and Britain, which have been saturated with the ideology and tactics of the New Right. In becoming the focus of two of the anthology's ten sections, London, Ontario is also turned into the setting for theorizing and developing political strategies of resistance exploring, in however limited a way, the possibilities for cross-cultural and cross-geographical affinities and alliances. As an example, the Visual AIDS Exhibition, which was originally conceived as a class project for a graduate seminar on AIDS and the arts offered at the University of Western Ontario, quickly mushroomed within two years into an archival collection of over 1000 AIDS awareness posters from over 50 countries establishing unforeseen links between isolated communities in Canada, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Zambia, and Sri Lanka to name a few. *Fluid Exchanges* thus manages to escape the political impasse characteristic of both the truisms of "global crisis" and the opposing relativism that has often accompanied and frustrated its analysis.

Fadi Abou-Rihan is a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at the University of Toronto, and an active participant in student politics.

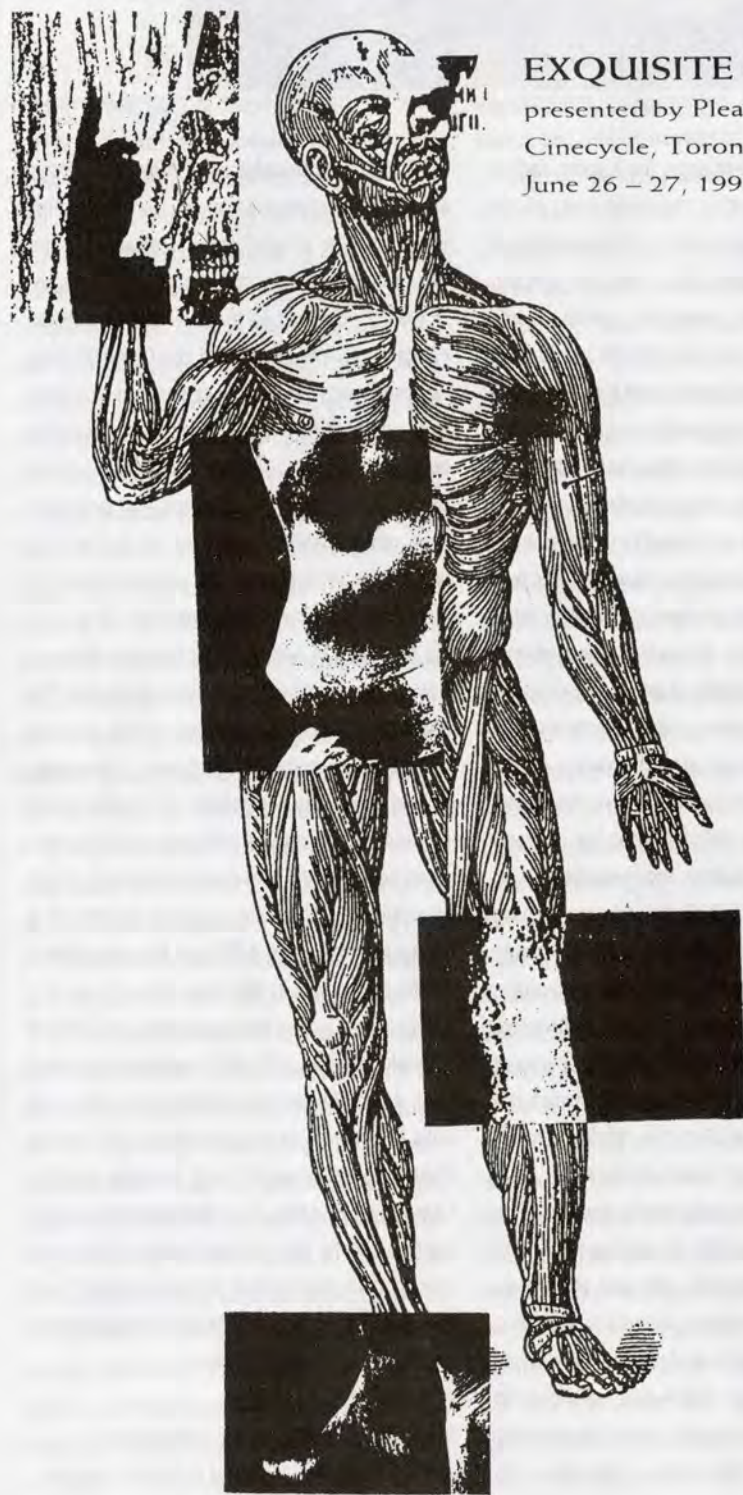


IMAGE: KIKI THORNE

EXQUISITE CORPSE

presented by Pleasure Dome
Cinecycle, Toronto
June 26 – 27, 1992

PLEASURE DOME'S PUBLIC SCREENING OF films that honoured, problematized or simply depicted individual body parts entitled *Exquisite Corpse*, was presented and promoted as a contemporary extension of an artistic activity with an evolving history. At the time of the French Revolution, *Exquisite Corpse* (*Cadavre Exquis*) was a children's game—a child would choose an individual bodily component and then represent it, unaware of who and how other bodily parts were being drawn. The Surrealists later seized upon this exercise; as a composition of fragments predestined a discontinuous whole. Still later, the Situationists imposed a quasi-Marxist perspective on this exercise, attempting to analyze bodily components in relation to their socio-economically perceived functions and to extend that analysis into what they considered to be the mainstream of representational capitalism.

This emphasis upon economically determined identities for bodily parts was of course co-opted by the vocabularies of advertising and consumer-capitalism in general. In response to this inevitable capitalistic fetishization and the subsequent formalization of body-part representation into 'manicured close-ups', Pleasure Dome announced its intention for *Exquisite Corpse* to "restore our multifarious and myriad bodies, giving us back the anatomy of representation."

Any project intending to restore the anatomy of human representations to humans in particular is laudable. Any project applying the word 'corpse' to the live body, especially in this age of life-threatening viruses and combinations

Andrew James Paterson

of viruses, is especially welcome. The degree to which *Exquisite Corpse* reclaimed different bodily components from the stranglehold of rote objectifying imagery, however, was variable among the twenty-five contributors.

Some of the filmmakers responded more directly than others to the challenge of critiquing the languages of commodification and fetishism. Many were content to nullify generic 'product shots' by recalling Structuralist film of the 1960s, playing with issues of focus/clarity or glorifying the bodily part in question by means of its repetition. But there were certainly some formidable investigations into the perception of certain bodily parts within a socio-political matrix. Lara Johnston's *Jaw*, combined references to deprivation of national or cultural identity (Argentina was posited as a country constantly colonized and misrepresented by impositions from other countries/cultures) with the artist's awareness of her own colonization due to gender. Thus, her literal loss of voice – the stiffness of her jaw forces her to reject the language she has been prescribed to swallow.

The Cartesian separation of mind and body tends to force an association of the body with sexuality, and the visual language of commerce answers this split with the displacement of all sexual activity into a commodity marketed as Sex. A couple of the films in particular attempted to subvert the reductivist codes of both advertising and its pornographic cousin. Lisa Brown's *Lips*, for example, was a perfectly formulaic cigarette commercial – the cigarette in between heavily lipsticked lips with accompaniment by a French yeye pop tune – except that

the model's face resembled that which is often labelled as 'punk lesbian'. *It and Job*, credited to Anonymous, tampered with the codes of the low-budget hand-held camera variety of gay male porn. The hand masturbating the penis, upon examination, is revealed to be the hand of a woman. Definitely an intervention, but to what end beyond posing the question of what could be wrong with this picture?

It was fitting that the programme visualized the body from bottom to top, since the pinnacle of the map was located at eye level (forehead and hair were among the omissions). The eye has always been both the apparatus for seeing and the subject of many of the most striking images in the history of cinema—both avant-garde and populist. Over the course of the screening, I began to view the eye as a mirror image of both the camera and the projector lens. In this light it was perhaps apt that the ear was another omitted bodily part.

As opposed to critiquing the objectification of the gaze in mainstream cinema and television, many of the participants chose to redefine the object by asserting themselves as subjects—recalling the heyday of the Structuralist avant-garde. The majority of the submissions were on the comparatively accessible Super 8; and Toronto Super 8 guru John Porter was the event's principal projectionist. Contributions centred on the same bodily parts were occasionally projected in parallel; and Wayne Snell's *Wandering Hand* often threatened to claim other bodily parts for itself. Perhaps further cinematic juxtaposition might have created a few more unsettling

dichotomies than were visible, but the presentation/performance systematically followed its biological narrative and thus became more and more celebratory while progressing closer and closer to its eye level climax.

The word 'celebration' implies community; the word 'community' implies exclusion as well as inclusion; and as a result *Exquisite Corpse* seemed more unified or homogeneous than perhaps it could have been. While there were some variations of formal strategies among the contributions, there was a similarity of demography as almost all of the bodily parts were white. Perhaps this is a reflection of the history of avant-garde film, if not its practice. But to what degree is the *Exquisite Corpse* expected to be unified or singular? To what degree are individual bodily parts ever perceived as being isolated from the remainder of the body? A similarity of formal strategies tends to have a homogenizing effect; and the body itself supplies a narrative trajectory which begs completion or fulfillment. *Exquisite Corpse* for the most part recognized that individual bodily parts have been largely co-opted by an abstracted concept referred to as the BODY; and it attempted to combat this economically motivated objectification by returning bodily parts and their functions to the activist subjectivity of the contributing filmmakers.

Andrew James Paterson is a Toronto based writer, video and performance artist.

MY FATHER WAS AN ENGLISHMAN

Peter Karuna
 NIIPA Gallery, Hamilton
 March 6, 1992

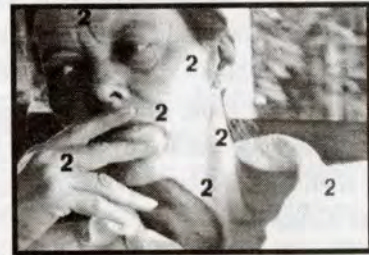
Video tape distributed by Careless Productions, Hamilton
 V Tape, Toronto

Jane Gordon



HAMILTON ARTIST PETER KARUNA'S recent work is an intellectually complex and beautiful video entitled, *My Father Was An Englishman*. The video, which premiered at Hamilton's NIIPA Gallery, March 6, is dedicated to Karuna's three daughters, the youngest of whom was born during pre-production and to Karuna's father, "in loving memory." This is one of the "Father(s)" of the title. A native of Sri Lanka, he joined the British army in what was then Ceylon, and later emigrated to England. Peter Karuna's father died in England midway through the creation of this video. The death of a parent and the subject matter of racism are bridges linking the video presentation to Bernice Morrison's exhibition of photography *We Don't Live In Igloos* in the Native Indian and Inuit Photographers' Association Gallery.

It is rare for an artist's personal emotional reservoir to be so full (we lose a father only once in a lifetime and encounter each of our



youngest offspring for the first time only once). The wellspring of the personal flows through this work and provides a kind of juice, a fluid matrix, in which the rest of the constructed complexity of the video is suspended. Karuna's earlier work has shown him to be consistently interested in mass culture and the effects of cultural ideologies on personal constructions of gender, race and the self. As in previous exhibitions of still photography and assemblage works, the site we occupy as a viewer becomes an inner space pierced and pried open by a symmetrical and carefully orchestrated sequence of voices and visions

Footnoted texts, excerpts from *MacLeans Magazine*, *Mister Johnson* by Joyce Carey, and two sociology texts are superimposed over video images to create a grid-like framework for the action of the video. The box-like sectioning frustrates any linear or simply narrative urges to follow the historical sequence of Karuna's father's life. The texts reveal the voices of R.B. Bennett, The Ontario K.K.K., The Confederation of Regions Party, and Mr. Johnson himself emerging on screen from seemingly candid dialogue. Transformed into the spoken word as portions of scripts, these



texts insert institutionalized racism into the framework of colonized or colonizing voices. These voices are spoken by a young woman of African heritage, and two white "Charter Canadians", as Karuna calls them.

Within each box or segment, where appearance and meaning are analyzed and constructed, complex and unexpected layerings of cultural signs force open to question the broad field of assumptions about racism. I can construct layers of meaning specific to my history as I lip read the mouth of the "colonized African voice" saying "England is my home" while the voice over of a white "charter Canadian" continues to colonize. The experience of the scene brings to mind another mass culture experience of colonialism, those poorly dubbed Japanese horror/disaster movies. The image of the black woman descending a staircase to speak to the camera refers visually to Marcel Duchamp and raises the white male Eurocentric art world in which Karuna must work. The wonderfully painterly shots of the garden of the fifth generation white liberal "charter Canadian", raise the issue of class within the context of colonialism in Canada. Visually a rhythm of black and white, dark and light punctuate the video. Formally this allows for the integration of black and white snap shots which provide the historical underpinnings of Karuna's personal discourse. Black and white underlie the work technically and conceptually. It is interesting to note that Karuna chose to overexpose white backgrounds

for shots of "the colonized African voice", rather than "sacrifice the black visage to white technology through underexposure."

There is great irony in the framing of the work with references to the church of England. Missionaries of the Church provided religious legitimization of the process of colonization. Karuna, the son, grew up in England, where there is no separation of church and state, and the influence of the church of England is profound. The video begins with the textual dedication accompanied by organ music, and ends with the same organ accompaniment to a singing of that most Church of England of all hymns, "Jerusalem." The text informs us that Karuna's father's only wish at his death was for a traditional Buddhist ceremony and cremation.

In the system of British Colonialism, human existence is fundamentally defined through skin colour. The phenomena of everyday life within a colonial system eat away at our potential for something authentic in the lived life. Peter Karuna's father was an Englishman, so was mine. We have discovered that we have lived in towns not twenty miles apart in southern England. Yet, Peter's heritage is of the colonized, mine of the colonizer. This is video not about the anger that is provoked by racism. It is a video about loss—not just about the loss of a father as suffered by his son—but also about the loss suffered by that father in turn. It is also about Karuna's fears for his daughters, as he reminds us that "...the familiar hierarchy of British colonialism recongeals in Canada."

Jane Gordon is an artist and writer based in Hamilton. She was a founding member of *Bay Area Artists for Women's Art* and is Currently Woman of the Year for the Arts in Hamilton.

STILLS FROM MY FATHER WAS AN ENGLISHMAN
 PETER KARUNA



THE BLACK LINE

curated by Roxana Farrell and Bushra Junaid
The Community Gallery, Harbourfront Centre
June 26 – July 12, 1992

ETHOS

curated by Alana McKnight
with the assistance of June Clark-Greenberg
York Quay Gallery, Harbourfront Centre
June 26 – July 26, 1992
(Both exhibitions organized by CAN:BAIA, for CELAFI)

Dennis Lewis

THE BLACK LINE, AN EXHIBITION OF work by contemporary African-Canadian architects—presented as part of the Canadian Artist's Network: Black Artists in Action conference *Celebrating African Identity*—was the first exhibition of its kind in Canada. It testified not only to an African-Canadian presence in architecture but also demonstrated the viability and vitality of an African-Canadian aesthetic in architectural practice: an alternative praxis with many qualities in common with the oppositional praxis of African visual artists in/of the diaspora.

In an essay entitled *Finding Our Voice in a Dominant Key* African-American architect Sharon E. Sutton advocates an alternative architectural praxis which she views as characterized by a desire to "achieve power in the dominant culture" and at the same time to "reject, critique, and work to undermine" that culture of dominance.¹ This is valid in a Canadian context because African-Canadians share a similar marginalization and economic vulnerability with their African-American counterparts. They have the added disadvantage of being in a country with a smaller and more dispersed network of Black architects. While this oppositional praxis shares certain of the concerns of the critical architectural praxis proposed by several post-modernist theorists, exhibitions such as *The Black Line* indicate that the African-Canadian oppositional praxis has a different stimulus than that of postmodernism. The gradual destruction

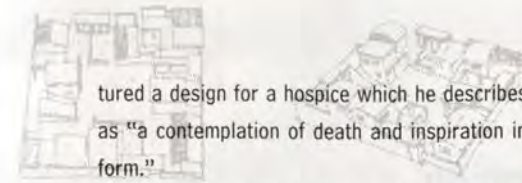
and fragmentation of distinctive local communities and vernacular traditions through the homogenizing force of modern technological development of which critic Kenneth Frampton speaks, for instance, very closely mirrors the rupture, damage, and dispersal which have characterised the history of Africans in the diaspora but with less sense of its personal resonance. As well, the postmodern critique ignores the specific historical conditions which characterize the African diaspora: slavery, political disenfranchisement, traditions of cultural resistance, etcetera.² It is an awareness of the singularity of this situation and the identity which emerges from it that these African-Canadian architects bring to their architectural praxis. As a result, their work is informed by a sense of architecture's agency and an awareness of the critical role it has in facilitating the restoration of identity, coherence, wholeness, and balance.

In Bushra Junaid's *Urban Housing – Growth of Form*, (see illustration) we see a reflection on a traditional African identity as well as a desire to harmonize that identity with technological modernity. She audaciously uses the elements of the modern housing estate in combination with the "good" features of Ghanaian slum settlements: high density, mixed land use, and variety of plot size. In the course of doing this she has suggested a unique solution to what Kenneth Frampton cites as the key problem for postmodern architecture: "How to become modern and

to return to sources" by demonstrating a sensitivity to local tradition and a mastery of modern technique which allows the inhabitants' full communion with their culture.

A similar sensitivity to environment appeared in the works of Maxim James, Roger Kwadzo Amenyogbe and Victor St. Hugo Holt. Deion Green and Rohan Walter's work show how the building site can be used to foster the viewer's experience of architecture as a critical and participatory activity. Using the image of a railway track, Green's collage emphasizes the notion of varying perspectives while Walters' piece *Modern Roman Tea Garden* gives the observer a multilayered view of an archeological city in a way which emphasizes his site's tactile elements. In the statement which accompanies his work, Louis Headley complains about the architect's loss of control over what is built in the city. To remedy this he emphasized his design's sculptural features in a way which serves to re-assert the architect's creative presence. Devon Tully addressed Headley's complaint by blending the institutional elements of a government building with elements of a public theatre, thereby creating a sense of dialogue between institution and individual. Clive McKenzie's solution, meanwhile, is to pose his architecture as a medium for both personal reflection and social critique. His panels fea-

HELD IN SUSPENSION, FLOYD SINCLAIR SANDFORD
PHOTO: MICHEL VERRAULT



ture a design for a hospice which he describes as "a contemplation of death and inspiration in form."

Roxana Farrell's design for a small villa in Antigua is suggestively titled *A Place of Sense* (see illustration). The spare manner in which she uses modern technology renders the interaction between site and environment in tactile terms. Amidst these uncluttered open surfaces we seem to see the play of light on the walls and scent the fresh Caribbean sea-air. Her simple arrangement of cisterns, earth ramp, and outside shower stall, combine with the presence of the "floating" dining table and rolling bed to express a beautiful "structural poetic". As the title of her piece suggests Farrell's villa is a place of human refuge, of coherence and environmental harmony.

The Black Line exhibit introduces an architectural praxis which resists in diverse ways the homogenizing impact of modern universalist technological culture. It is a praxis especially attuned to the distinctive identities of communities and places. It is a praxis expressive of an ethos which derives in part from the African-Canadian architect's position on the margins of mainstream architectural practice.

The notion of ethos is also at the heart of the *Ethos* exhibit at Harbourfront's York Quay Gallery. The CELAFI catalogue defines "ethos" as the "character, customs, and habits which distinguish a people or community from another". The exhibit proclaims that Montréal native Floyd Sinclair Sandiford and Cuban artist Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, as artists in the African diaspora, share an ethos. Given that "ethos" is usually understood to derive from a sense of identity in a particular relation to place, many might query this claim. Yet the exhibit showed that it is precisely through the artists' awareness of their identity as children of the diaspora that their distinct ethos becomes articulated.

When I entered the gallery I was struck immediately by the dramatic power of Sandiford's sculptures. That power derives not so much from their size (only one was larger than life-size) but from the supple way he uses the human body and face as canvasses for emo-

tional and spiritual drama. His sculpted forms seem to writhe, ripple, and gesticulate as if oppressed by various aspects of psychic torment. In the end, however, the effect is celebratory rather than dispiriting because each of the forms provides a site where dense layers of personal, historical, and political meaning converge to render significance to the pieces, without completely fixing them. His piece entitled *Held in Suspension*, for example, speaks of "the physical and mental obstacles a man confined to a wheel chair had to face when confronting inflexible government bureaucracies" (see illustration). Its seemingly mutilated, bound and hanging torso with its contorted facial expression, evokes a more generalised violence, however. Informed by Sandiford's sense of the history of blacks in the Americas we can recognise it as an archetypal representation of the violence perpetrated against Africans in the Americas, as well as an index of a variety of other types of violence.

Like Sandiford, Campos-Pons' expressions are infused by the sense of a distinct world view bestowed on her as an African in the Americas. Her pieces skillfully blend African symbols with icons and myths drawn from Native American and European cultures. At the centre of her work is the presence of the black female body. In a series of photographs she shows a woman with Spanish text superimposed on her black skin. The very body of the black woman thus becomes a dense cultural site of political, historical and mythic memory: neither essentialized nor commodified into an erotic object. Campos-Pons' emphasis remains on the body of the black woman as a specific corporeal entity in a manner which renders its representation a powerful political affirmation.

Her piece *Talking about Trees. White Pine, Black Pine, Endangered Species* provides for a convergence of race, gender, and environmental issues (see illustration). In this piece two central figures are chained to the cross at the centre and thereby separated from the two groups of trees on either side of them. The cross has the words *History/ Memory, Pain/Pleasure* written at its corners. The figures resemble both trees and the stylized figures found in traditional

African art, and it is clear that here Campos-Pons is suggesting a parallel between the threat posed to the environment and the vulnerability of Africans in the diaspora. It is the figures at the piece's centre, chained to the cross, cut off from the other two groups, who seem especially under threat. The piece suggests the singular pleasures and pains afforded by the artist's understanding of the histories and memories that belong to gender and race.



TALKING ABOUT TREES, WHITE PINE, BLACK PINE, ENDANGERED SPECIES.
1990, MARIA MAGDALENA CAMPOS-PONS
PHOTO: MICHEL VERRAULT

The art and architecture exhibits at the CELAFI conference were a remarkable sample of various critical and oppositional strategies used by artists and architects of African heritage. With their approach to their respective practices being conditioned by an awareness of their distinct identity—which is simultaneously connected to, yet separate from, mainstream Western culture—the works of these artists and architects are models of a cultural production which can both affirm and reconstitute that identity.

Dennis Lewis is completing his M.A. in English at the University of Toronto.

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1 "Finding Our Voice in a Dominant Key", in *African-American Architects in Current Practice*, ed. Jack Travis (Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), p.14

2 "Towards a Critical Regionalism", in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), p.17

MOHAWKS IN BEEHIVES

Shelley Niro

Mercer Union Centre for Contemporary Art

June 25 – July 25, 1992

Lloyd Wong

IN A CONTEXT OF ISSUE ORIENTED ART AND identity politics, Shelley Niro's photographic work is a breath of fresh air. *Mohawks in Beehives*, her recent show at Mercer Union Gallery in Toronto is characterized by a sense of camp humour and a celebration of life in spite of oppressive forces that impact on the lives of First Nations women. The work ranges from a down-right silly playfulness to a sombre poignancy with still a sneaky side-ways glance to a tongue-in-cheek aesthetic. Beads and feathers are replaced with "dangly glittery jewellery" and red high heels.

A great strength of Niro's work is how her work is situated in a contemporary reality of what it means to be a First Nations woman. Her references to soap operas, the Canadian national anthem, Hollywood and fifties' lifestyle complete with hairdryers, articulate an identity that has to do with lived experience rather than some essentialist or nostalgic cultural identity. Niro explains "I don't start out saying 'I'm Indian, I'm going to do Indian work.' I start out thinking about myself as an individual and I start thinking about all these ideas and break them down to a point where it's pretty simple...and in turn the art does come out as being very Native and very Woman."

For example, *In Her Lifetime* is a narrative composition of six photos and hand-written text which reads "In her younger years, she was quite carefree, laughing, singing and dancing.... She would look out to the horizons and let thoughts drift with the never ending tide. As maturity set in she became depressed over the fact that soap operas had no ending, country music reminded her of soggy cornflakes and she could never find the matching sock to the one she had in her hand..." The story continues, "Native issues would never be resolved in her



Left: From the series: *Mohawks in Beehives*

Below: *Mohawk on a Cloud*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

lifetime. She would give herself a shake and realize Christmas was six months away, the kids would be out of school soon, and Friday was just a day away." The photos are a series of close-ups of a woman in various states of smirking and contemplation. The flow of compositions is animated and lyrical and Niro has perforated the matte board with designs reminiscent of art nouveau. Not only does *In Her Lifetime* exemplify Niro's ability to find inspiration in a hostile world of endless soap operas, she does it with a characteristic poignancy and sense of humour.

Her camp aesthetic is also found in the titles she chooses for her other pieces. *Mohawk on a Cloud* features what one presumes to be a Mohawk woman, dressed in a Hollywood cheese glamour, complete with scarf around the head, dark sunglasses, and a lit cigarette, posing with her legs crossed on cushions (hand-tinted hot pink) thrown onto the floor. Other titles include *I Enjoy Being a (Mohawk) Girl* and *Standing on Guard for Thee* (which is actually more ironic than



camp). Niro's aesthetic is underlined by the hand tinting of many of the photographs in bright enthusiastic tones of pinks, blues and yellows.

Niro's work is also a significant departure in a discourse of identity politics that seeks to formulate racial identity as a pure historical fact rather than the shifting terrain it always is. As a strategy for making art, Niro's sense of humour and camp resists the temptation to congeal racial identity into a fixed thing.

Curator Carol Podedworny writes that Niro's work "...continues to question the validity of Western hegemony...confront issues of stereotyping and the erasure of culture." While this suggests that Niro is working in response to dominant culture, the photos actually operate at a more complex level than one of action/reaction. Niro takes for granted the realities of First Nations lives and explores what that means without burdening the work with history. She is forging a new language with which race and identity are articulated as complex lived experiences.

Lloyd Wong is a writer and critic, as well as administrator of FUSE and an active member of the FUSE editorial board.

A GENDER OF SELF-DETERMINATION:

Lesbian Transsexual Playwright Kate Bornstein

Buddies in Bad Times Theatre

July 22 – August 2, 1992

"EVEN IF YOU WIN YOUR REVOLUTION, I'M still an outlaw." For Kat, an activist transsexual lesbian, queer and feminist, politics are a primer in exclusion and invisibility. She is shut out of pro-choice marches, and told that "'Keep your laws off our bodies' doesn't refer to transsexuals"; she is alienated from lesbian and gay rights rallies, which steadfastly refuse to acknowledge her existence. She is a queer among queers.

Kat is one of six "gender outlaws" who inhabit *The Opposite Sex ... is Neither!*, a one-woman performance piece by transsexual lesbian playwright Kate Bornstein, recently performed in Toronto at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. The central character, Maggie, a "goddess-in-training," takes a wrong turn at the moon and ends up in 20th-century North America. Looking us up in her guidebook, she is incredulous. She addresses the audience: "You really think it's important what gender you are?" Noting that we do seem to think there are only two, she adds, "You're in for a real treat in the next century!"

Maggie's job is to enlighten, and she focuses on gender—the area where our lack of sophistication appears most blatant. In a somewhat violent shamanistic rite of possession, her body is entered by six individuals who challenge conventional gender rules in a variety of ways.

According to Bornstein, "In this society, gender is a fairly impenetrable wall." Exhibiting tremendous courage, transsexuals break through this wall, whether travelling from one gender to another, or creating new genders. This is demonstrated in one of the most moving moments in the play, when a working class female-to-male transsexual talks about being labelled a "freak" because of his gender choices. It is true: "I am a freak," he says, reclaiming the term with pride. And when the time comes for his operation, he decides to keep his



Kate Bornstein

PHOTO: JAIME SMITH / COURTESY BUDDIES IN BAD TIMES THEATRE

Shawn Syms

vagina, a move with powerful implications in a society with a rigidly bipolar gender system. With this character Bornstein makes her most pointed argument for gender self-determination: gender identity is not limited to who you are told to be, it is who you feel you are and who you make yourself.

The Opposite Sex... is grounded in a consciousness of the differences in questions posed by gender identity and sexual orientation. (Am I male or female or...? To whom am I attracted? etcetera). This distinction, generally obscured in both hegemonic and "progressive" theoretical frameworks, allows for what Bornstein names "a dazzling array" of individual gender and sexual identities: the female-to-male transsexual gay man, the dyke transsexual, the non-transsexual butch 'bi' woman and so on.

A Queer Culture

Bornstein's work has found an audience in lesbian/gay cultural circles, where gender rebellion

is heterosexuality," she says. Heterosexism holds gender oppression and sexual oppression in place by linking them: "What we have in common isn't so much our sexuality, because a lot of transgendered people are heterosexual. What we have in common is that we transgress gender laws. We break the laws that say you have to be straight, and that you can't change from one gender to another."

The developing solidarity fostered within this discourse of gender non-conformity has been crucial to the mapping of a queer cultural terrain. This territory is defined not so much by uniformity of deviant sexual identity or homogeneous notions of cultural and political action. Rather, it is the home of a loose affiliation of homos, transgenderists and sex-positive feminists united by a general anti-assimilationist stance on gender and sexuality and an agency rooted in intransigent alienation from the status quo. This is the link between Bornstein's work and that of other queer artists such as Holly

form; she sought to construct a "transsexual theatre," a genre marked by a flexibility that reflected the fluidity of her conception of gender.

At this point Bornstein sees limits to such formal experimentation: "As soon as you name it, it steps outside the realm of transsexual theatre. My point of view on (transsexual theatre as a genre) has shifted. While (the format of *The Opposite Sex...*) is incredibly conventional, it's really wild in its content and has a layer of mysticism to it that academics don't get along with very well. That's the dangerous part of this show."

The freakshow motif employed by Bornstein in *Hidden: A Gender* was intended as an ironic reflection on the history of cultural representations of transsexuality, which have always been imbued with a sense of essential freakishness and abnormality and a determinative marginality.

In Western film, fiction and theatre, there has never been a transsexual character in a central position. Bornstein cites the play *Come*



Kate Bornstein

is not unfamiliar territory. In this century, queers have maintained complex and unorthodox relationships to hegemonic conceptions of gender identity. Femme and butch women, "tomboys" and dykes who pass for men have all carved out lives that represent a visible resistance to male power. Many gay men have journeyed from shamed sissy to reappropriated masculinity, creating butch likenesses that range from the compelling to the unconvincing. Transsexuals enter more forbidden territory, challenging the iron-clad cultural assumption that gender is biologically determined and immutable.

Bornstein articulates this cultural alliance in political terms: "In this culture, the imperative

Hughes, Karen Finlay, Michael Kerns, Gwendolyn and David Bateman, who mount sexual challenges to social constructs.

A Transsexual Theatre

Bornstein's second play, *The Opposite Sex...* employs a rather traditional narrative structure. In this sense, it differs from her earlier, more experimental work. Her first play, *Hidden: A Gender*, was a dense, somewhat didactic piece that took the form of a talkshow/freakshow featuring a 19th century French hermaphrodite named Herculine Barbin and a 20th century male-to-female transsexual. In her earlier work, Bornstein concerned herself with experiments in



Sydney Erskine

Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean as coming close, but not quite. "It is a brilliant piece of theatre, but uses the transsexual more as a pivot point for the rest of what's going on, rather than as a character in his/her own right, and rather than dealing with issues of gender or transsexuality." This is a reflection of the fact that transsexuals "have been used, not so much as their own characters, but as points around which a crisis can coalesce." Rather than being agents of change, transsexuals become the field of change. As Bornstein notes, "There's never been a story about a transsexual, there have always been stories in which transsexuals facilitate change for others."

A Feminist Transsexuality

Bornstein has been invited to speak on gender at women's theatre conferences and strongly identifies herself with feminism. The majority of the Toronto opening-night audience of *The Opposite Sex...* were women. Bornstein says this is usually the case, and that many women strongly identify with her work. "Women grow up questioning gender because, in this culture, 'the male' is the norm. When a show comes along that says 'Question gender,' most men, including gay men, say 'What's there to question?'"

Within feminism, reactions to male-to-female transsexuality have varied. Janice Raymond, in *The Transsexual Empire*, argued that male-to-female transsexuals represented the ultimate example of male attempts to infiltrate and discredit the feminist movement. And in 1991, controversy around male-to-female transsexuals became a major issue at one of the largest lesbian-centred cultural festivals in the world, the highly politicized Michigan Womyn's



Justin Bond

Music Festival. After one of the women present at the festival, Nancy Jean Burkholder, was discovered to be transsexual and forcibly ejected from the festival in the middle of the night, festival organizers announced that only "womyn-born-womyn" would be allowed to attend.

Some women reacted with outrage to the anti-transsexual dictum. Feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin argued that "after decades of feminist insistence that women are 'made, not born,' after fighting to establish that 'anatomy is not destiny,' it is astounding that ostensibly progressive events can get away with discriminatory policies based so blatantly on recycled biological determinism." An organization called

Lesbians For Justice has formed to demand that the rule be retracted.

Bornstein takes a different perspective. Referring to the issue of transsexuals at Michigan, she says, "Why would anyone go where they clearly aren't wanted?" Bornstein is sympathetic to the particular situation faced by Burkholder, but feels that the ambivalent sentiments expressed by many feminists about transsexuals raise broader issues. "Much of feminists' complaints regarding male-to-female transsexuals are the transsexual's responsibility. Raised as men, transsexuals often bring a sense of entitlement with them, and go around saying 'I'm a real woman now.' bullshit! You are a transsexual woman, and that's a very particular kind of thing. You have to recognize that it's not the same."

This sensitivity is reflected in Bornstein's art. The complex characters that populate *The Opposite Sex...* are rendered with passion and depth, and with a surprising amount of humour. "The only way to approach an issue that's filled with pain is by laughing about it," she says. "The absence of humour would surely be death."

Representing a radical repositioning of the transsexual in a cultural context, Bornstein's theatre presents a challenge to the gender politics at work in cultural production, and to society more generally. "In terms of questioning the gender system, the id doesn't like to be questioned, and it has its staunch defenders. Right now, I don't think anyone who depends on the existence of a gender system (for their power) is taking my work or the work of other gender outlaws very seriously, but there will come a time when they will. At that point, there's probably gonna be some trouble." She definitely seems up to the challenge. And if her work is any indication of what to expect, an upsetting of the gender applecart sounds less like a threat than a promise.

Shawn Syms is a 22-year-old working class queer, and works as Communications Coordinator at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto.

NOTE

1. Herculine Barbin, a 19th century hermaphrodite, was identified as female at birth. She lived the first 22 years of her life as a woman, until doctors and then the Church forcibly reclassified her as male. Several years later, she committed suicide. Her autobiographical writings have been published as *Herculine Barbin, being the recently discovered memoirs of a 19th century French hermaphrodite*, edited and with an introduction by Michel Foucault (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

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