

FUSE

MAGAZINE

WINTER 1992•93 Vol. XVI No.2 \$3.50

Obscenity Chill

Artists in a Post-Butler Era

by Claire Barkley and Elaine Carol



with • censorship and mainstream media: is someone massaging the message? by catherine creede • taking liberties: the fictionalization of rodney king by lisa godfrey • the rhetoric of degradation by christopher eamon

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Subscription rates: \$16 per year; Institutions \$26 per year (in Canada only). Outside Canada \$18 per year; Institutions \$30. Decisions regarding who qualifies as an individual subscriber remain the right of the publisher.

Printed on recycled, acid free paper, in vegetable based inks by the Rowco Printing Group Ltd.

ISSN 0838-603X

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FUSE is a member of the Canadian Magazine
Publisher's Association

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DANIEL DION

The Great Divide/Grande Barrière
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ROBERT HOULE

Hochelaga
November 19 - December 12

MILADA KOVACOVA

Searching for My Mother's Garden
Skin Flick
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YYZ acknowledges the support of The Canada Council; the Ontario Arts Council; the Province of Ontario, through the Ministry of Culture and Communications; the City of Toronto, through the Toronto Arts Council and the Municipality of Metro Toronto, Cultural Affairs Division.

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letters

Regarding ki namaste's "Fighting Back with Fashion—Pride Parade Perversions and the Tryanny of the Homogeneous" [FUSE, Volume 16, Number 1]:

Saturday October 3, 2:30 am

Dear Fuse,

After a long night of disco, poppers and backroom sex, I now remove my sweat-stained t-shirt and mirrored sunglasses and use my hairy, muscled forearm to put pen to paper. After undoing a button or two of my too-tight 501's—there, that's better—I lift my voice in protest. As a working class "clone" faggot, I must express my dismay at the faulty analysis displayed by ki namaste in his critique of Montréal's lesbian, bisexual and gay pride celebrations.

The article's surface subject, an intelligent critique of obnoxious assimilationist strategies on the part of organizers of Montréal's pride parade, appears to only be evidence toward namaste's broader thesis—that queers who exist within aesthetic modes that meet namaste's approval, named by him, as "drag queens, gender-fuckers, whores, bisexuals, s/mer's (and) transsexuals" are a vanguard of radical politics, while those of us who subscribe to "boring clone attire. attitudes and lifestyles" are reactionary enemies. In addition to disagreeing with this analysis, I am deeply and personally hurt.

A plethora of queer identities have been articulated in North America, from the late 19th century to the present, between, across and against lines of race, class, sex, gender, nationality and political and sexual self-identification. These identities have developed, at varying times and in varying ways, both in resistance to and in collusion with the white, male middle class heterosexual model that dominates in the Canadian context.

One of the many homosexual identities to have arisen is the male "clone" look first articulated in the mid-1970s, a sexual and cultural style that relies on a complex interplay between dominant and subcultural definitions of "masculinity". The simultaneous reinforcement and deconstruction of maleness posed by "butch clones" is a complex site of identity politics—one which namaste simply dismisses by calling us names and saying we're "boring". Fortunately, things are not so simple, and namaste's hallowed "gender-fuckers" do not have a monopoly on sexual or political subversion. The fact that namaste's variety of "fabulousness" is different from clone fabulousness does not a political argument make. His reading of cloneness is not unlike earlier arguments that lesbian butch/fem is an aping of heterosexuality—i.e., ignorant of social context and many layers of nuance.

While fashion, aesthetics and sexual style indeed can have deeply political implications, namaste's arguments on the subject are excruciatingly lame. His attempts to link



members of Queer Nation Rose and patrons of the stonewall Inn are rather dubious—indeed, the romanticism displayed by namaste toward the "drag queens, faggots, whores, and working class dykes (who) fought back" at Stonewall is a political embarrassment.

And namaste's manipulation of "how drag queens and effeminate men are denigrated in many gay male circles" to suit his anti-clone thesis is politically irresponsible. "Gay male circles", like "drag" circles, and "lesbian" circles and other circles, are rife with problematic notions about gender, race, and class. This feature is far from exclusive to clones and fags in general, but is related to the inequities of the dominant culture we should all be struggling to unlearn and disassemble. (Additionally, the usage of the term "denigrate" [verb - "to blacken"] has historically had racist implications—I was surprised at its appearance in FUSE.) For all of his postmodern nattering about "difference", namaste would do well to display some tolerance toward those whose sexual and cultural styles he sees as less hip than his own.

If this sounds like a highly personalized critique, I sincerely apologize, as it is not intended as such. I first met ki namaste at the late, lamented, trashy Toronto dyke bar The Chez Moi, and anyone who went to the Chez is a friend of mine. All the same, I feel a strong urge to protest the political naiveté of his unsophisticated conflation of personal aesthetics and political ideology (which can and do interrelate, in complex and contradictory ways). Fun but unsophisticated is how I like my men, but not my sexual politics.

Not everyone who shares ki's variety of aesthetic fabulousness necessarily shares his political perspectives—trendy haircuts or "unconventional" attire are not inherently revolutionary. Similarly, not every "boring bar clone" shares the assimilationist viewpoint so passionately assailed in namaste's thoughtful critique of Montréal's pride celebrations. Meanwhile, I must depart—my brushcut and moustache are in disparate need of a good trim.

Shawn Syms
Toronto, ON

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FUSE magazine
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After a long night of dyeing my hair, displaying my
body piercings and tattoos, and dancing to KMFDM and My
Life With the Thrill Kill Kult. I now remove my wig and
make-up and interact with my postmodern computer. After
releasing my too-tight push-up bra—there, that's better—I
whine in response to Shawn Syms' letter.

How, exactly, does Syms manage to read the "clone"
look in 1992 as a complex interplay between dominant and
subcultural definitions of "masculinity"? This is the age of
"straight-looking, straight-acting gay men, of classified ads
which ask "effeminate, obese or HIV+" men to abstain from
replying.

I agree with Syms—identity politics is a complex sight.
My article was intended (in part) to demonstrate the collaps-
ing of gender and sexuality within gay male constructions of
identity. The point was not to posit my fabulousness against
their boredom, but rather to understand how the constitution
of gay identity as "masculine" excludes a whole lotta people
and their experiences. More radically, it hoped to open the
possibility of conceptualizing sexual identities which may
intersect with, but are not reducible to, positions of gender
identification. Is that really such and "excruciatingly lame"
argument? (Additionally, the term "lame" has historically had
ableist implications—I was surprised to see it in Sym's letter.)

Syms' reading of my "unsophisticated conflation of per-
sonal aesthetics and political ideology" stems from an entire
tradition of Western thought which relies on easy notions of
binarity. Underlying his separation of the terms is a more
tenacious opposition between the individual and society.
That Syms is reduced to attacking my personal aesthetic
style, particularly when the article was not autobiographical,
attests to the stronghold of this dualism.

If this sounds like a highly personalized critique, I apolo-
gize, as it is not intended as such. All the same, I feel a strong
urge to protest the political naiveté of Syms' ideology.
Sophisticated and fun is how I like my men, women, and
transies, and my (bi)sexual politics.

Meanwhile, I must depart to read some Derrida. I would
hate for my "politically irresponsible", "naive", "postmodern"
politics to be theoretically uninformed.

ki namaste
Montréal, Québec

errata

Fuse Magazine would like to
apologize to Dennis Lewis for
errors made in the proofing and
layout of his review of (FUSE
Volume 16 Issue #1), to Roxana
Farrell and Bushra Junaid for
the omission and reduction,
respectively, of their architec-
tural drawings, and to Maria
Magdalena Campos-Pons and
Floyd Sinclair Sandiford for the
misspelling of their names, in
the same article.

Our apologies go out as well to
Shani Mootoo for the poor
printing quality of her artist's
project in the last FUSE, and to
Raj Pannu who was omitted
from Beverly Yhap's report of
the symposium "Cross-cultural
Politics in the Arts: Strategies
for Change", at the 1992
Women in View festival in
"Different Views" (FUSE
Volume 15 Issue # 5 + 6). The
panel did not include Sunera
Thobani but did in fact include
Raj Pannu.

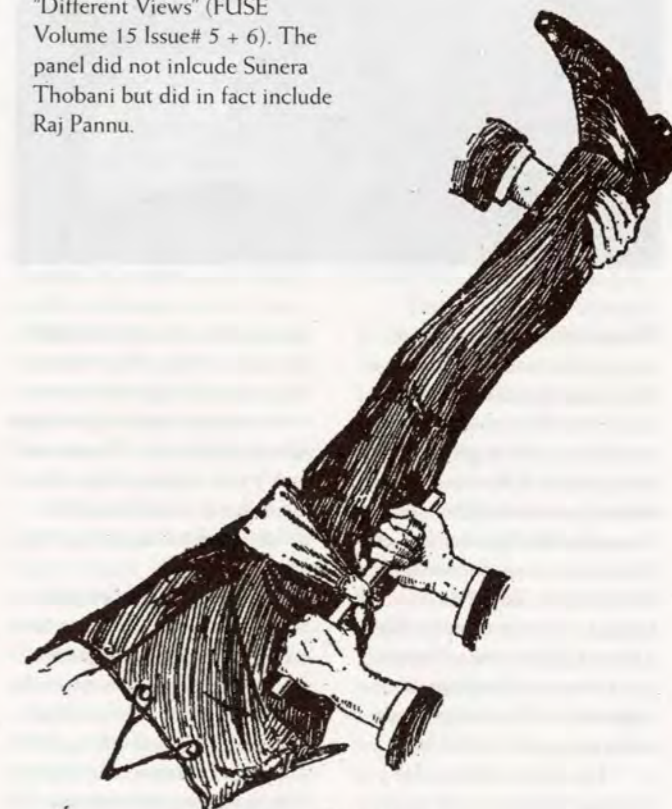


FIG. 52.

Dreamspeakers Showcases Aboriginal Talent

Dreamspeakers
An International Aboriginal, Cultural,
Artistic and Film Festival
Edmonton, Alberta
September 22 – September 27, 1992



Art Napoleon of Calgary, photo by Terry Lusty, 1992

Edmonton – It was a dream come true for the organizers of this September 22–27, Edmonton festival which showcased some of the premiere acts in the realm of Native arts, entertainment and film. Featuring Aboriginal artists and filmmakers from the Americas, Africa, Australia, Chile, Guinea, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, Taiwan, and other world nations, the organizers of Dreamspeakers really surpassed themselves.

The large scale six day event served as a portal in showcasing a broad spectrum of the creative and artistic skills and talents of First Nations

people from around the globe. Not since 1967, the centenary of Canada, had this province ever witnessed such a grandiose Aboriginal festival. There was such a raft of great talent out there that it would be almost sinful to omit discussion of anyone.

The festival's film symposia were segmented into four major categories that conducted "hands-on" workshops in the areas of directing, producing, screen-writing and acting, with a number of respected resource people leading the sessions. Of several Canadian actors, August Schellenberg, Gary Farmer and Denis Lacroix were included.

Schellenberg remarked that, "it was an honour to be part of this magnificent festival that twenty years ago would never have happened...we're going to write our own stories for our own people to be acted by, filmed by, to be shot by...people of Native descent." Directors included New Zealand's Barry Barclay (Ngati, Te Rua), and Canada's Maria Campbell (Tales of the Road Allowance People), Greg Coyes (Heartland), Willy Dunn (Ballad of Crowfoot; The Other Side of the Ledger), Gary Farmer (Pow Wow Highway), etc. Producers and writers such as Drew Taylor (Night Heat, Beachcombers), Christine Welsh (Women in the Shadows), and Ira Levy were also featured session leaders.

Although Churchill Square in Edmonton offered a wide assortment of Native arts and crafts to prospective buyers, the park also contained a stage set for the presentation of song, music and dance. And, what a line-up! All kinds of talent turned up to deliver a fine cross-section of songs—western, pop, rock, jazz, blues, bluegrass, folk ballads, and traditional First Nations songs and dances.

The bulk of the entertainment stemmed from Canadian and American soil—people like David Campbell, Rick Patterson, Shingoose, Joanelle Nadine Romero, Clyde Roulette, and Laura Vinson, all probably delivering the most impressive sets. Vancouver based Campbell, a long-established singer/songwriter of Arawak ancestry has performed overseas, and is best known for his soothing, lyrical, music, especially his trademark song, "Pretty Brown". As for Patterson, this man puts on a stupendous, high energy, one-man show that delights all peo-

ple regardless of age or station in life.

One of the most enjoyable artists throughout the six days was the combination of Joanelle Nadine Romero from Los Angeles who teamed up for the first time with Vancouver resident Clyde Roulette, an exciting and self-professed "aggressive blues" guitarist originally from Manitoba's Sandy Bay Reserve. He's jammed with the best—Colin James, Carey Bell, Bill Lucas, Willie Mabon and Matt "Guitar" Murphy. In his early life he was influenced by his father's love for country music, his mother's devotion to blues and his brother's passion for rock. Roulette first played drums at 13, graduating to guitar at the age of 17. He has performed at Winnipeg's folk festival, Stein Valley, Yellowknife's Folk on the Rocks, Sioux City, Iowa, and Rapid City, South Dakota.

As for Joanelle Romero, linking up with Roulette may well prove to be the magic that will carry them to great success. Primarily a blues singer, her solid, riveting delivery mesmerized a captivated audience. Romero is also fairly well acquainted with film. Her mother was an actress, her father a film editor. She has appeared in at least sixteen films including *The Doors*, *Pow Wow Highway*, and *The Girl Called Hatter Fox*. But, she has spent the past ten years as a professional singer and musician. She and Roulette have incisive opinions about the film industry, especially with respect to Aboriginal people. "It's a powerful means of presenting one's views, and a super means of putting across the right images and messages," claims Roulette.

The house band for Dreamspeakers was none other than the Edmonton-based Métis, Laura Vinson and her Free Spirit Band. She has six

albums out and has been nominated for countless country music awards. Her latest album, "Rise Like a Phoenix", is presently receiving a lot of airplay. Not to be overlooked is C-Weed and Spirit River led by Winnipeg's country rocker, Errol Ranville who now operates the C-Weed Cabaret. He, too, has several records to his credit, and continues to be in great demand.

There happened to be a few new musical artists on the scene, at Dreamspeakers outdoor musical event, and they will be people to watch out for. One is Susan Aglukark, a 25-year-old Inuk from the Arctic whose gentle vocals adorn two albums—"Dreams For You", and "Arctic Rose". Another singer, Sandy Scofield, rates highly as does Calgary based Art Napoleon who combines traditional and contemporary songs, music and instruments to present folk-country, blues and original compositions.

The festival also introduced theatrical performers, poets and storytellers such as Vancouver's highly talented Michelle Thrush, Shirley Cheechoo from James Bay, and poet/writer Chrystos of Washington. Alberta poets/writers included: Marilyn Dumont, Alice Lee, Peter Cole and Bing Cote.

However, Dreamspeakers was not without its share of problems. One of the few down sides to Dreamspeakers was the controversy over some films that were cancelled for what was purported to be insufficient Native content/control. The action was supported by some of the producers attending. Christine Welsh, for example, said that a festival which bills itself as an Aboriginal one, "should live up to just that." Concurring, was August Schellenberg who expressed a need for us to tell our own stories.

But, for a first time festival with a budget of approximately \$500,000s in tough economic times, it was even more surprising that the one funding body that did not contribute was the Department of Indian Affairs. Indian Affairs, historically, has always been a supporter of such events. Otherwise, the amount of "in kind" contributions and volunteer staff which went into this large scale, six-day event were evidence of the commitment of its organizers.

Executive Director, Loro Carmen, responsible for organizing the Edmonton Folk Festival in the past, expressed extreme pleasure with this first round, and hopes that the event becomes internationally renowned. She knows it is the type of festival that takes a long time to build, but staunchly believes that it will happen again. "I long for the day," she added, "when people from different world countries will flock to Edmonton just because of Dreamspeakers."

—Terry Lusty



RED, HOT, CHILL

Recent decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada pertaining to the definition of obscenity, seizures by Canada Customs and charges laid by Ontario's Provincial Police has sent a chill factor right across the country. In tandem with an increasingly punitive and vocal right, family values and all, winds of the chill like the one south of the border blow northward, creating a cool climate for artists and others.

The AIDS Committee of Toronto has recently been publicly threatened by the chair of

the Toronto Board of Health, Chris Korwin-Kuczynski, with funding cuts. The Board provides significant operational funding to ACT and many other AIDS service organizations in the city. At issue was the explicit language used in the organization's safer sex educational materials aimed at gay youth. The indignation stems from the public funds argument: "How-can-taxpayer-dollars-be-spent-on-foul-language-materials-used-to-promote-homosexuality?"

Pernicious personal attacks have also been made by citizens and the press against Ed Jackson, the Education Officer for ACT. His involvement with the now defunct *Body Politic* magazine, which was charged for running "Men Loving Boys Loving Men", has been dredged up to imply that he is some sort of child sex monster that has resurfaced and is using tax payers' dollars to promote sex with young boys.

Cooler heads have prevailed at Toronto City Council and they have recommended that groups like ACT be commended for using appropriate language in its materials. City Council has expressed its regret for the behaviour of the Chair of the Board of Health and the Council reaffirmed its commitment to all organizations working in AIDS education to disseminate information in culturally appropriate ways.

Despite these decisions and statements made by the City Council, Korwin-Kuczynski continues to try and strong-arm the AIDS Committee of Toronto. His next move concerns a safer SM educational pamphlet which will be reproduced by ACT without the assistance of city funding. In a recent memo, he is quoted as saying "I will be moving that the AIDS Committee of Toronto be

requested to *not* support the reprinting of this violent pamphlet."

In a similar concern for the use of public funds, arts funding in Manitoba has recently come under assault. A recent series of articles in *The Winnipeg Sun* have charged that the Manitoba Arts Council programs give no consideration to public benefit and in addition, charge the Council with conflicts of interest over the jury of peers evaluation process. No doubt taking cues from the controversy surrounding the National Endowment for the Arts, right-wing "concern" for public funding of art and artists is part of an increasingly hostile climate for artists and marginal voices. While no mention of obscenity has been made over any art produced by any council funded Manitoba artist, this attack, fuelled by a moral panic, is part of an increasing chill on expression. In a country where federal arts funding is continually threatened and provincial support is uneven, (Ontario and Manitoba are the only two provinces with arms-length, provincial arts funding agencies) it is to be applauded that Manitoba has an arts council to assist artists.

Toronto's lesbian and gay bookstore Glad Day has lost round one of its recent court battle over materials seized by Canada Customs. The Coalition Against Customs Censorship was hoping to clear materials seized on the grounds that the recent Butler ruling defined obscenity in terms of harm and since there is no evidence of harm between men in the gay community, gay male pornography should not be considered obscene under the terms of Butler. In what is clearly a homophobic decision without any reference to the Butler decision, Judge Hayes ruled that casual, consensual sex between two men was

degrading and therefore obscene. The Coalition which brought the case before the courts is strategizing its next move.

On the other side of the Rockies, Little Sister's, Vancouver's lesbian and gay bookstore finds itself in its own legal limbo. Two weeks prior to its trial date, in which they were to challenge Canada Customs on its seizures of titles like *Macho Sluts*, *Bad Attitude*, *Oriental Guys*, and *Homoture*, the federal government made an application to have the case reviewed through regular Canada Customs' procedures rather than civil court (where lawyers for the bookstore feel there is a better chance of winning the case). Needless to say, this kind of legal manoeuvring can drive the battle right into the ground. Fundraising is done by the bookstore themselves, so if you want to support your right to sexual expression, send them your dollars. (*Just before going to press, the B.C. Supreme Court dismissed the application by the federal government and Little Sister's will get its day in civil court.*)

The Ontario Law Reform Commission has just released its Report on the Powers of the Ontario Film Review Board. The report continues to utilize problematic terms such as violent, degrading and dehumanizing in reference to regulating images, and continues to support the Board's powers to regulate images. The new terminology is vague and susceptible to interpretations such as the recent Hayes ruling that stated sex between men was degrading and therefore the imagery was obscene. What's new in this report is that the Commission recommends the use of a sticker system to classify videos available for rental as an effort to provide consumers greater information with which to make decisions. Copies of

the report are available to the public through the Ontario Government Bookstore.

Finally, the chill on FUSE continues. As reported previously in FUSE, the Summer 1992, *Living with HIV* issue was refused by three different printers citing personal moral objections to an artist's project. This time, the images for this very issue were sent back by the Toronto image scanning company F1. They refused to scan the images claiming that they "don't support such subject matter" [sic]. When questioned about their unspoken policy, managers claimed that the way in which images of Christ were being used was offensive to their Christian sensibility. Was it Christ or the lesbian imagery?

—Lloyd Wong



Funding Watch

Multiculturalism's federal film and video monies

Montréal — Its hard enough finding funding sources for film and video, making the application, waiting for a jury's response, its harder still when you learn that your application has been recommended by a jury only to later receive an official rejection letter that includes the sentence: "I regret the disappointment that this decision will cause you."

The federal Ministry of Multiculturalism and Citizenship currently runs a Heritage Cultures and Languages Programme that awards some \$350,000–400,000 a year for film and video production and professional development. This programme, which had 10–12 applications at its inception in 1988, now receives 70–80 applications twice a year. Acceptance level is 30–40%.

Due to a government funding freeze, even successful applicants have had to wait—sometimes up to a year—for a final decision or for the issuing of cheques, thereby jeopardizing projects with joint commitments from other agencies. Whereas, according to a programme official, "a reasonable time-schedule should be 6–8 weeks from the deadline to allow for the jury to meet, a further 6–8 weeks for notification of rejection, and a further 2–3 weeks for political approval."

The process normally begins with a program officer compiling the materials and selecting a peer jury which then convenes in one of the various national regions. What follows is the review and prioritizing of the jury's recommendations. The officer or officers



then fill out a Recommendation For Approval Form and wait for ministerial approval.

Officially, Minister Gerry Weiner or one of his senior designates can reject recommended projects because of 'political sensitivities'. Alternatively, they can selectively speed-up the funding of specific projects or even bypass the process altogether and secure funding for projects that the jury has seen fit not to prioritize.

Clearly this is a government ministry and not an arms-length funding agency. Even so, the constituency, and the jury which derives from it, must have trust in the funding process; thus, it is important that these "quirks" should be clarified or corrected and not just written off as justifiable aspects of the political process. Community producers complain that there are too many off-again, on-again government programs, with legitimate applicants trying to find a current program which has the service of their specific community as its priority. But such priorities are unstable and seemingly ever-changing when Ministries compete with each other while simultaneously attempting to avoid any visible duplication of services. As a result, situations develop such as the one facing hearing impaired video or film producers who currently find they are neither a priority at the Disabled Secretariat, nor at Ministry of Multiculturalism and Citizenship.

Film and video production assistance remains a small but worthy program of Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada precisely because it has recognized the need for an informed representative jury. But no matter what other monies the Minister and his staff might dispense, a jury should know exactly the

amount of monies it is responsible for recommending, and be secure that its hard-made decisions will be final.

—Clive Robertson



photograph by Sabrina Matthews

Solidarity Mural

Montréal — Coordinated by Farzin Farzaneh and Elizabeth Littlejohn, this mural on boul. Saint-Laurent in Montréal was completed in October 1992 in support of the James Bay Cree against hydroelectric development in their territory. It features a Walking Out ceremony in the shadow of a towering hydro pylon, an urban demonstration, a scene of drowned caribou on the Caniapiscou River and quotes from John Petagumskin and Robbie Dick. Sponsored largely by the Grand Council of the Cree, the project was a collaboration between artists who worked on the Nitassinan mural in 1990, Native and non-Native artists who visited the Great Whale River in 1991, Librarie Alternative workers and other Montréal artists.

—Carole Beaulieu

Taking Liberties

The Fictionalization of Rodney King



Though it might have happened anywhere, it seems especially fitting that the Rodney King video incident should have its origins in that Baudrillardian wet-dream of a city, Los Angeles. It is a place, after all, where the image-as-postmodern-reality theory finds a most satisfying demonstration. The origins of the King video-tape seem as familiar and unlikely now as a Hollywood script. After a plumbing supply salesman captured part of the vicious L.A.P.D. assault on King with a brand new Sony camera, the tape became a 90's version of the shot heard around the world. Ironically, an incident of the sort of racist brutality that likely plays itself out in infinite variations every day across the globe had finally achieved a kind of public power and authenticity. And all because it was played out in 81 seconds of real time on our television news. Even the tape's inclusion in an actual Hollywood feature, Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*, seems a perfect postscript. With this, the video's actual images become a symbol for reality.

Understandably, the details surrounding the Rodney King videotape and the resulting court case were left behind in the smoky haze of the L.A. riots. But it is still important to look back at exactly what happened to turn fact into fiction in last May's L.A.P.D. trial, and the place that video images had in that infuriating transformation.

The King tape originated with an apparently disinterested bystander in a white, middle-class L.A. suburb—the kind of place where the violent arrest

of a black man might be unusual enough to warrant its capture on a HandyCam. With this "objective" pedigree, the tape found an almost immediate home on the news broadcast of a local L.A. television station, and from there, gained international notoriety. Predictably, the tape soon moved far beyond the status of mere evidence. Rarely had evidence in a criminal case been so media-friendly, providing an instantly recognizable emblem for the King case, and the trial of the L.A.P.D. officers charged with use of excessive force. In a frenzy of self-congratulation, the magazine *Film Comment* exulted the use of video cameras as "a new form of activism," with video as "the new standard of truth, the naked absolute" in the wake of the King video. Likewise, MTV video star Peter Gabriel announced the foundation of a program to provide free camcorders to members of oppressed communities.

Inevitably, the King video took on an ideological charge the instant it was publicly broadcast. The unforgettable image of Rodney King's prone body beneath the barrage of blows became synonymous with issues of racism, violence, and the misuses of power. Imbued with this politicized authority, the tape took on its own identity. It no longer functioned as a partial representation of the events of March 3, 1991. The video became the Rodney King case.

The images in the King video were truly shocking, but once made part of the continuous stream of televi-

sion images, they were levelled and easily recontextualized. The May trial became a battle of voice-over narrations. Lawyers for the accused officers then proceeded to interpret images that had seemed self-explanatory. In this way, a near-snuff film was transformed into an episode of *CrimeStoppers*. As Darryl Mounger, (freelance semiotician and) lawyer for one of the accused officers put it: "A picture is worth a thousand words, and a lot of times it takes a thousand words to explain a picture." Some of those thousand words included fictional play-by-plays such as defense attorney Stone's observation to the jury that "in the hundredths of a second between this photograph and this one, Mr. King is again coming off the ground and he charges Officer Powell."

But what about that visceral truth that the video conveyed to anyone who viewed it—those sixty-one blows in eighty-one seconds? And how is it possible to refer to videotape as "pictures" and "photographs" when after all, *Film Comment* asserted, the tape "froze the (beating) into a solid image...in real time, coolly bringing out the savageness involved." The defense simply co-opted a few time-honoured experimental film techniques to erode the impact of the tape. They re-played the video for the jury innumerable times, backward and forward, slowed and scanned and fast-forwarded, paused and frozen. The images became, for all intents and purposes, pictures divorced from their

more convincing whole. The horrifying trajectory of the incident on first viewing was utterly forgotten, and the questioning of the now indefinite images seemed quite appropriate to the jury. In the end, they could be convinced that the disoriented flailings of a stunned man were defiant gestures against a group of dutiful cops attempting to "obtain compliance" from a criminal using "power stroke" techniques learned in the police academy.

Because the King video had come to stand for the assault itself for the television viewing public and those at the trial, its wilful deconstruction and recasting as fiction by the defense proved disastrous. When the incredible verdict was delivered, it became apparent that the elevated importance of the video recording—which might have been treated as one kind of witnessing among the others—had been a dangerous thing.

Another problematic aspect of the King video's "special witness" status was fact that it became the jury's primary image of Rodney King himself. Before the trial, *Film Comment* had called the video King's "only...voice". If the violence of his attackers was intended to render King "inanimate", then the video became his human outcry, suggested the magazine. But was this the case?

The video consists of a long shot taken at night. The 81 second tape shows a prone black man making occasional, indistinct movements in response to the constant blows of sev-

eral white police officers, who are watched by several more. King's face and expressions are barely discernible in the semi-darkness. Any sounds are unintelligible. In short, Rodney King is unreadable as anything but a man on the ground—obscured, silent, unreadable. He is, in fact, defined only in relation to the officers, who are instantly recognizable to the viewer in their uniforms. Who is Rodney King?

The facts of Rodney King, courtesy of the media prior to the trial, are that he is a muscular 6'3" African-American male, aged 26, with a past conviction for armed robbery. This limited sketch of Rodney King renders him a white, middle-class American nightmare. One of the accused officers, Stacey Koon, later released a version of events that characterized Rodney King as having been sexually suggestive towards a white female highway patrol officer: "the fear," he explained, "was of a 'Mandingo'-type sexual encounter." For all the wrong reasons, this was disturbing stuff in Simi Valley—the Los Angeles bedroom community where the L.A.P.D. trial was eventually held. The fact of Simi Valley, courtesy of the media after the trial, is their 2% black population, compared to 10.5% in Los Angeles. This makeup was reflected in the jury itself which consisted of ten Caucasians, one Asian, and one Hispanic. With these factors facing them, the prosecution lawyers made the decision to capitalize on the obscured image of

Rodney King presented through the video—a faceless victim, a minor character in the drama.

The prosecution ensured that this two-dimensional portrayal of Rodney King would stand, by preventing him from testifying at the trial. One lawyer noted that King had been rather disturbed by the beating and his injuries, and subsequently made statements accusing the officers involved of having racist motivations in the attack, and of calling him a "nigger". Deputy District Attorney Terry White characterized King's remarks before the trial as inconsistent and "very angry...profanity spilling out." So despite the fact that King's behaviour was consistent with someone who had been emotionally traumatized by a brutal assault, who felt rage at his victimization, and frustration at his own lawyers for not allowing the racism factor into their prosecution of the officers, Rodney King was deemed an unsuitable witness in his own case. His voice was suppressed, and replaced by the more manageable silence of the video Rodney. Again, three dimensional reality was too dangerous to risk, especially when dealing with an "angry black man".

So, for both the defense and prosecution teams at the trial, the video was the Rodney King incident. A perfect, impartial witness. But this witness without subjectivity was equally committed to both sides of the argument. The jury, its audience, was the deciding factor.

Here we enter the realm of specu-



lation. It is a fact that nine of the jurors had military ties of some sort, and that the county in which Simi Valley is located has an unusually high number of law enforcement officers. This, in combination with the fear of black male violence, may have shifted the

jury towards a belief in the wild speculations of the L.A.P.D. defense. After the trial, a juror told the L.A. Times that King 'was obviously a dangerous person...massive and threatening...controlling the whole show with his actions. They're policemen, they're not angels. They're out there to do a low-down, dirty job.'

But given that the Rodney King case was almost entirely argued over a videotape, there may be a more complex motivation for the unlikely trial verdict. The documentary video image has gained a peculiar status and voyeuristic fascination for television audiences in North America during the last few years, especially with regard to issues of crime and law enforcement.

On prime time television in the U.S. and Canada, there are numerous popular programs that recount dramatic stories of real police investigations: *Top Cops*, *COPS*, *America's Most Wanted*, *CrimeStoppers*, etc. There is an attempt to make the crimes depicted in these events more dramatically involving for the viewer by including testimonies by family members, friends and police. Actual material and photographs are often combined with fictionalized accounts of the crime itself, involving actors and a speculative narrative. A program such as *COPS* attempts a verité approach, with the camera accompanying policemen on their rounds as they investigate crimes-in-progress and arrest suspects. In these programs, the handheld video camera is used to bring an immediacy and rough authenticity to

the dramas. It also achieves a visual surface that unites heterogeneous elements—facts and fictions—to form a seamless flow of narrative.

These dramatic programs are certainly played out from the law enforcement point of view. They consciously appropriate the visual characteristics of investigative journalism and surveillance techniques, even with fictionalized material. When the Hallwalls Contemporary Art Centre in Buffalo recently mounted their annual Video Witnesses Festival of New Journalism—international "activist expression, alternative perspectives, and critical voices" in video—representatives from major American TV networks actually contacted the curator to see if any sensational true-life dramas might be culled from the screenings. Right style, wrong agenda.

But even beyond their questionable stylistic tactics, these true crime infotainments have a propagandistic character. More than popular "cop dramas" like *Law & Order* or *Night Heat*, these shows convince the viewer that criminal horrors wait around the next corner, and that protection and justice are found through the actions of the police. The difference between documentary and fictional images, speculative and factual narratives, is minimized. What matters to the viewer is that these stories are "true".

So when jurors watched the videotape of Rodney King's beating, perhaps there was a kind of familiarity to its horrors: a black man under arrest, officers "working" to subdue him. The L.A.P.D. defense narrated the images in a manner that seemed utterly unlikely, yet their story was from a dominant perspective etched into American popular culture. When those images were distorted by lengthy formal analysis, they lost their anchor to the world of reality, and became fodder for fiction.

To elevate the Rodney King videotape to the status it achieved, as an impartial electronic witness, proved highly dangerous in this context. In

theory, the tape may have been a neutral account of King's beating, but the instant it became public—days after it was shot—it inevitably entered a world of ideological motivations. When the tape came to replace the more complex reality of the case, and of Rodney King himself, its 'neutral' images spelled disaster. Bizarrely, the very "objectivity" of the videotape brought greater credence to the arguments in favour of the accused officers. Power stayed with the powerful, and for the second time, Rodney King was a victim.

The power of video, however, is not in question in the wake of the trial. Police in several cities confiscated tape from television stations who had captured riot looting and violence for use as evidence in criminal cases. And on the other side, the *Deep Dish TV Network*, a series of documentary video programs by artists and activists available through satellite dish receivers across North America, broadcast an examination of the issues behind the L.A. riots called *Hands on the Verdict*. Video continues to capture reality, but if the travesty of the King verdict teaches us anything, it is to remember to ask: just whose "reality" might that be?

Lisa Godfrey lives in Toronto

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Is someone
managing
the message?

Censorship and

CATHERINE CREEDE

Mainstream

Media

The relationship between political groups and the media is a tentative and suspicious one. We feverishly plan a demo, write up a cogent analysis of our cause, send out a carefully crafted press release, make some media calls, assemble the crowd, wave our signs, shout our chants and demands for the cameras. And then we rush home to flip on the TV and find that either our 2,000-strong demo has been completely ignored, or has been reduced to a wildly skewed 30 second clip. We hurl invectives and agree that we've been silenced once again. We agree with the prevailing wisdom that says the mainstream media is not "on our side", and that the means of communication in this information-heavy culture are stacked against us.

The anti-censorship movement has had the same media experience as most other progressive political groups. The seizure of *Bad Attitude* from Glad Day Bookshop in April, for instance, was dramatically under-reported. The "Dirty Dozen" case that culminated in the Hayes decision in July actually made it to print, but much of the coverage was lazy, non-contextualized, and in some cases, downright homophobic. The two biggest anti-censorship demos in the last six months were only cursorily covered by news media. Except for updates and analysis by the alternative press, most notably *Xtra* and *NOW*, the anti-censorship movement has not been presented accurately, nor has the debate been presented in its entirety by the media.

The most unsettling aspect of the apparent media muffle on anti-censorship activities—and acts of censorship—is that it ignores the contradiction between the mainstream media's notorious reluctance to give voice to radical or progressive political causes, and the very real fact that censorship is probably the most relevant issue for the media in its very right to exist. Murky waters are further muddied by the way that feminism and violence against women have been used to legitimize the Butler decision.

Coverage of censorship issues in major mainstream media in the last eight months includes thoughtful pieces on obscenity and its ramifications, and fairly comprehensive factual reporting on both legal decisions and incidents of censorship of all kinds. But when the theoretical construct of anti-censorship becomes connected to issues of gay sexuality, this attentiveness becomes erratic.

The Globe and Mail—arguably the most influential daily media outlet—has racked up the most coverage of the issue: at least 25 reports, columns or editorials on censorship issues since the Butler decision was handed down in February. Coverage of

the Hayes trial was for the most part detailed and factual. In addition, *The Globe* also ran an editorial on June 30 condemning the Byzantine operations of Canada Customs and the on-going harassment of Glad Day.

While *The Globe's* approach is consistent and straightforward—the remainder of mainstream media outlets have skittered wildly around the issues. A few local TV news shows covered the demos in a somewhat sympathetic, but very brief, fashion. The closest thing to analysis has been vague noises on the part of some columnists about freedom of expression. But for the most part, when political orientation around freedom of expression has intersected issues of involving sexual orientation, homophobia and sensationalism have won out.

The most blatant example of this has been *The Toronto Star's* inability to handle issues "clouded" by the spectre of gay sexuality. For example, on May 14 both *The Star* and *The Globe* ran coverage of the events of the previous day's court proceedings in the Hayes case. *The Globe* led its story with a generally relevant piece of evidence: "Although Canada Customs intercepted material destined for Glad Day Bookshop in Toronto at the border, similar publications can be purchased in mainstream bookstores..." The story went on to briefly outline several aspects of the testimony, including Sociologist Barry Adams' discussion of gay community standards in terms of pornography.

The Star, on the other hand, headlined its story with "Rough Sex Seen as 'Sexual Theatre' by Gay Community, Activist Testifies," and stated, without reference to context, that "graphic portrayals of bondage and sadomasochism in homosexual literature are considered sexual theatre by the gay community..." There was

no mention of gay bookstores as special targets for police and customs harassment, nor any mention of the variety of gay male pornography condemned by this decision.

On the whole, the Canadian mainstream media analysis of censorship issues has been superficial and lacking in analysis. Praise for the Butler decision has interpreted the law as allowing, for the first time, depictions of adult consensual sex. Those who offer such praise, however, fail to notice or concern themselves with the fact that, in practice, this apparent affirmation of 'adult consent' does not extend to gay and lesbian sexuality.

Clearly, the media is not "serving" the anti-censorship movement. Much of this can be attributed to the on-going twin influences of homophobia and heterosexism. A great deal more can be traced to what can be characterized as a "protective"—or paternalistic—approach to violence against women. The Butler decision was roundly hailed, even by *The Toronto Sun*, as "walking the tightrope between the basic right of freedom of expression and the need to curb violence against half of society..." (March 2).

The media's overwhelming acceptance of the notion that "porn is bad because it causes harm" represents an immense cultural shift in the understanding of female sexuality: fifteen years ago, rape was perceived as an act of sex, likely attributable to provocative acts by the victim. Today, violence against women is roundly deplored, and "causes" are rooted out and condemned.

Feminist action against violence has been stunningly successful in creating this new paradigm, but it has simultaneously managed to displace the concept of freedom of expression.

Questions of harm and its causes have remained virtually unexplored in the mainstream media, while the notion that wiping out "degrading" porn will somehow magically eradicate violence against women has entered virtually unchallenged. There is a new, albeit cautious, acceptance of "feminist" ideals with respect to violence against women which can be readily recognized as part of the climate of a post-Montréal social context. But along with this has come a new kind of untouchability surrounding female sexuality, one in which the need for women to achieve sexual self-determination is still completely unrecognized.

The mainstream Canadian media has completely failed to reflect the "other side" of the feminist debate on censorship and pornography. The most prominent current example is the movement by the US group "Feminists for Free Expression," who have mounted a very public campaign against a pending bill, known as the Pornography Victims' Compensation Act, which, if passed, would hold producers, distributors, and sellers of "obscene" material liable for sex offences that "were foreseeably caused, in substantial part, by the sexual offender's exposure to the obscene material." The debate around this bill has been essentially absent from Canadian reporting, along with any full critique of systemic violence against women.

Changes in the media understanding of obscenity does, however, suggest that if the media can be shifted in one direction, with careful work, it can also be shifted in another.

There is a common perception

that it is somehow "wrong" to attempt to influence media, that any effort to sway the balance of "free investigative reporting" is somehow morally repugnant. At the same time those who comprise the media are perceived as somehow shiftless if they don't, on their own, discover and reveal to the world all of the excesses and wrongs that we fight to correct.

But if we want to access the media to assure that our messages, causes and information make it to the mainstream, we have to stop assuming that the members of the media will do the work for us. In a very pragmatic way, we have to work to understand the impulses and motivations underlying the construction of media ideas.

Correctly or incorrectly, the media perceives itself as a "neutral" body. That is the most tremendous obstacle that we have to overcome—and that means both education of the media along with society, and finding ways to supply them with information in a form that is workable for them.

The "objective" media operates under one very essential guiding principle: that the "news"—literally, what is "new"—directs what is considered a priority or reportable. This is usually event-driven. When we try to get the media to cover an idea, not an event or specific incident, we enter very slippery territory. We are most often asking the people who need to have a "news hook" to cover something that is, in fact, about analysis and an evolving political movement, and which does not fit, in a very workable way, into the structure that they operate under. (For example, when media are lobbied to cover Customs censorship, the reaction is that as an on-going activity, it's not news.)

In addition, we have to recognize

that the whole concept of "objective" journalism has resulted in a model of reporting where "balance" means presenting two sides, usually the confrontational sides: where pro-choice must be counter-balanced by pro-life, and where to start with choice and move into the implications for women would, for the most part, be considered "biased" or one-sided reporting.

We can minimize the loss of our voice by giving the media information in a readily-understood format. For example, if they are not going to watchdog the application of Butler against its "intention," we have to do that for them, with facts. If they are not going to accept the censorship of queer sex without examining the difference between this and other issues of freedom of expression, we have to bring that to the fore wherever possible. If 'news' requires events, then we must make well thought out direct-action even more essential.

One other very important thing we have to do is to seize every opportunity to write for the media ourselves—letters at the least, and op-ed pieces wherever possible. And when we have the resources, we can turn to advertising, as Feminists for Free Expression have, with great impact.

Most of all, we have to recognize that educating the media to our issues is the same process as educating anyone else. The media structure means we can't expect them to do our lobbying or fighting for us—but we can find ways to deal with the media in a way that allows "our side" to present itself more successfully. Instead of throwing up our hands and saying, "See—they did it again," we have to become a more integral part of the process.

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Illustrations by TONY HAMILTON



The Rhetoric of Degradation

How the anti-porn lobby sold us out

In February of 1992 the Supreme Court of Canada, in its ruling on the Butler obscenity appeal trial, came up with a new harms-based definition of obscenity. It transformed the application of the community standards test based solely on the rather abstract notion of what one would or would not allow one's neighbour to see, into a very ambiguous one based also on the harm that "flows from it [pornography],"¹ focusing primarily on the harm to women and their right to equality.

In the May/June 1992 *Ms. Magazine*, an institution of the feminist establishment, Michele Landsberg declared the Canadian ruling a "stunning victory"² for feminists. Admittedly, the move to harms-based rulings stands as a radical shift in jurisprudence. At the same time it is evidence of the very effective manoeuvring of the feminist anti-porn lobby. LEAF, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, played a major role in informing the decision of the highest appeals court in Canada. Although LEAF was not involved in the Butler case in any of its earlier stages, it became evident that the particularities of the case would lend it very readily to LEAF's anti-porn lobby strategizing. And so, at the Supreme Court level, they got leave to intervene.

Ironically, the decision that was supposed to be a stunning victory for "feminists", led very directly to the seizure of a lesbian erotica magazine *Bad Attitude* and the laying of

charges against the Toronto lesbian and gay book store Glad Day Books, the first charge to be laid there in eleven years. Since that time, increased seizures of gay literature by customs, and the Hayes ruling in a case pending from 1989 in favour of Canada Customs and once again involving Glad Day, can be traced to the new obscenity ruling.

In the latter case, Glad Day and the Canadian Committee Against Customs Censorship had fought to overturn a decision on the part of Canada Customs to seize \$200,000 worth of soft erotic gay male magazines and comic strips in the fall of 1989. On July 16, 1992 Judge Hayes of the Ontario Court of Justice (General Division) ruled that the seizure was justified and that according to the Butler decision, the material could be ruled obscene because in his opinion, "casual sex between strangers is 'degrading without any human dimension'."³ A victory for "feminists", but a blow to those who could very possibly be considered feminism's most fervent supporters.

The applications of the Butler case have confirmed the Queer movement's strongest fears about it. The rhetoric of the Hayes decision can be seen as an historical regression to the mythology of queer culture's deleterious effect on the moral fibre of the status quo. It resembles the decadence myth traceable to Victorian England and which resurfaces in the Nazi clamp-down on lesbian and gay cul-

ture in post-Weimar Germany. Not only does the wording of Butler lend itself to the whims of the various policing bodies, Canada Customs included, but its rhetoric and that of the Hayes ruling probably poses more harm to the Queer movement's formation of self-identity, through its images in porn, art and film, than the language of any other Canadian obscenity ruling.

Over and above the rhetoric of the Supreme Court text itself, in importance, is the structure of the argument made by LEAF to the Supreme Court of Canada. The possibilities for a very broad application of the ruling are well recognized, even though it seems that, up to this point, mainly queer booksellers have been affected. The link between the ruling's broadly defined terms and the setting of sights on mainly lesbian and gay targets was revealed very smugly in a tidbit of information from Michele Landsberg in her *Ms. Magazine* article. After quoting Catharine A. MacKinnon's proclamation about this decision's world historical importance, Landsberg writes:

Kathleen E. Mahoney, professor of law at the University of Calgary, who represented LEAF in court, was equally jubilant. 'How did we do it?' she said. 'We showed them the porn—and among the seized videos were some horrifically vio-

lent and degrading gay movies. We made the point that the abused men in these films were being treated like women—and the judges got it. Otherwise, men can't put themselves in our shoes.'⁴

If what is disturbing in LEAF's exercise is the degradation implied in the so-called 'placing of men in women's shoes' by having them view gay male porn, what should be more disturbing is the fact that no evidence is ever presented at the Supreme Court level. It is specifically an appeals court. All evidence is presented and documented at lower levels in the judiciary system. The Supreme Court justices make their decisions based on issues of law, as well as on briefs presented to them by the legal representatives and concerned groups who have permission to intervene. When asked by telephone as to the verity of Landsberg's quote, Mahoney replied that they "referred to some of the tapes...to make [their] point." In other words, the tapes were not shown to the judges. In an unjust move, descriptions of the porn were made "quite graphically" in the written factum, as Mahoney revealed, and although this would seem to be a presentation of evidence, which is not part of the process, the fact that the tapes were cited "in relation to [LEAF's] substantive arguments" precluded the descriptions from being considered factual evidence.

With this re-narrativization of certain gay videos, the Supreme Court Justices were persuaded to empathize with the position of women in this society. Gay sexuality became a tool in an attempt to achieve a more broadly applicable basis for decision-making. If the transparency of language has not been convincingly argued, if the objectivity of reportage has lost its currency in many areas, the ruling which was handed down stands as a testament to the dangers of assuming a natural relation to the text. The rhetoric and homophobia of LEAF's

argument cannot help but overdetermine its object: gay porn.

The rhetoric takes two forms. First, it relies on the re-feminization of women according to outmoded models of gender, where women are always viewed as fragile, weak, and thus particularly susceptible to harm. Second, a false analogy is drawn between the position of the male actor in gay male porn and the position of the female in straight porn. It then goes on to collapse the categories of actor and viewer. In effect, gay porn is forced to represent an activity as degrading to men as straight porn is to women. Furthermore, the Mahoney quote reveals that gay porn is understood, even by the anti-porn feminists, to be exemplary of degradation to men and thus a perfect tool in the fight to have men 'comprehend' women at an 'immediate' level. It is evidence of how the anti-porn feminist lobby capitalizes on this culture's patriarchal homophobia.

What is interesting about this ruling is how more broadly based terms become, in practice, very narrowly applied. According to Mahoney, what made Butler such a good case for LEAF, was that 160 charges were laid. At least 160 objects provoked charges of obscenity by police. This meant that any or all of the material could be used as evidence in the argument of the prosecution in this case. It was, as Mahoney called it, a "real sample", rather than just one or two video tapes or magazines. LEAF could then draw on any of them to make an argument based on harm to women, even when the material cited involved no women. According to Mahoney, the morality-based decisions of the pre-Butler world were "all over the map." The multiple and heterogeneous nature of this "sample" were important to the argument put forth by LEAF, that a harms-based ruling would provide for more consistency because, we can assume, such decisions would not come from variable and relative notions of morality.

It can, however, be argued that although conceptions of morality may

have been the basis for court decision-making in the past, and although there is little evidence that this will ever change, these conceptions have nothing to do with the differences inherent to the objects in question—pornography in all of its forms. Harm to women has come to be the groundwork according to which the charges against male/male and lesbian erotica produced by lesbians, have been laid. But what has been overlooked by the judges are the differences to be found in the way that erotica functions according to who views it, as well as the varying ways in which these representations are structured, whether they valorize violence to women or children (as emphasized in the court ruling) or whether, on the other hand, they undo what supports the very possibility of the former representations in the first place. It is no wonder that the Supreme Court, comprised of two women and seven probably straight men, would find the activity in gay porn degrading. The way in which the patriarchally masculine motifs common to the status quo can be undermined is indeed threatening. In turn, this one conception of degradation and harm has come to transform the application of the community standards test. From bad to worse, the Butler decision's singular understanding of pornography has made possible the consolidation of many necessarily heterogeneous elements, under one rubric, in the name of consistency and equality.

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NOTES

¹ Val Ross, "Seizure of Books Upheld", in *The Globe and Mail*, July 7, 1992.

² Michele Landsberg, "Canada: Antipornography Breakthrough in the Law", in *Ms. Magazine*, May/June 1992 (Vol. II, No. 6), pp. 14, 15.

³ Ross

⁴ Landsberg

Obscenity Chill

Artists in a Post-Butler Era

CLARE BARCLAY

Is it "dirt for dirt's sake", or is it art? This is the question which the Supreme Court of Canada in all its wisdom has directed law enforcers and interpreters to ask themselves when they are trying to determine whether or not a particular work is obscene. If it is art, then the exploitation of sex in the work, with the work considered in its entirety, must advance the plot or the theme, and have "a legitimate role when measured by the internal necessities of the work itself." I think that what the Court is asking is how much sex does the work itself cry out for, and how much sex is gratuitous. But what if the work is about sex? Do we trust Project Pornography officers to assess what the "internal necessities" are? Or will they decide that if it is about sex it must be obscene? Welcome to Canada in the post-Butler era.

Donald Victor Butler was the operator of a store that sold and rented sex videos in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He was convicted of violating obscenity sections of the Criminal Code, and was able to appeal his convictions all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. That Court was asked to consider whether or not the definition of obscenity in the Code violated the guarantee of freedom of expression in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and if so, whether this infringement was justified under section 1 of the Charter. The Court unanimously answered both of these questions in the affirmative.

On February 27, 1992, all nine judges of the Supreme Court in *R. v. Butler* also agreed with each other on a 'new' definition of obscenity. Two judges stated that they would have liked the definition to have gone a little further. The fact that all nine judges were assigned to hear this case gives an indication of the importance that the Court placed upon the decision. A unanimous verdict of the entire Supreme Court is extraordinary. *Butler* is immovable. It is a legal brick wall. As we cannot in the near future make any changes in its definition of obscenity, the question then becomes how the decision will be interpreted.

ELAINE CAROL

If you are a Canadian woman or gay man who produces art about the body, beware. The chill is on. Though cops are slow to respond to neo-fascist assaults on people of colour and queers, they couldn't wait for the *Butler* decision to be announced to slap charges on merchants of lesbian S/M theatrical imagery and give warnings to exhibitors of homoerotic art. Consider the new "Hayes code" the next time you paint a penis, take a snapshot of a vagina, distribute explicit safe-sex information or video-tape two members of the same sex making love.

In a post-Butler era, who knows how many and which magazines, books and art exhibitions will receive warnings? How many and which films and videos will be cut and banned? How many charges will be laid? Who will make those decisions? In this climate of right-wing suppression, lesbians and gays, feminists, bookstore owners, film and video distributors and artists are already paying the price of a misconceived piece of legislation. The different dimensions of censorship are a means for defining the public sphere, of securing and reinforcing the established social order. This always involves a specific sexual order, which in a post-Butler world condemns any sort of sexual expression that does not conform to the homophobic status quo.

Where does the *Butler* decision leave artists? Will artists start to self-censor? Will curators, establishment artists and programmers start drawing the line? How will interpretations like Judge Hayes' affect feminist documentary film and video-makers, safe-sex educators, birth control educators and sex-trade workers, (most of whom are women and many who identify themselves as feminist)? Will the *Butler* and Hayes decisions have a "trickle-down effect" on how those who exhibit produce and advertise their work.

Ron Giii was subject to state censorship of his work by Project P when Sergeant Bob Matthews and a fellow officer issued a warning to La Hacienda restaurant owner Tom Patterson, who was exhibiting homoerotic photographs by artists Giii and Bruce Eves. Ron Giii comments on the incident:

Censorship is a form of brain-washing. I've always been an anti-fascist. I set out to make the fascists look like clowns for censoring my work. They want to let you know they are more important than culture. You have to laugh at them because to go into battle against their stupidity could render you financially bankrupt by the state.

Though Giii had not heard of American rapper Ice T's battle with censorship of his single "Cop Killer" and his ingenious impersonation of a Los Angeles uniformed police officer on the cover of the August 20th, 1992 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine, he had the same idea:

The only way to fight them is to dress up in police uniforms and have an opening in Toronto and give everyone a police uniform. Don't let anyone in unless they are in police drag. Do it! It will be the hit of the season!

Patterson entered his protest by taking down the twelve censored photos and replacing them with blown-up photocopies of one officer's business card with the word banned written across the top.

For Jennifer Gillmor, a photographer and musician who simultaneously had her first erotic photos exhibited in a Toronto "gay ghetto" cafe and published in *Bad Attitude*, a lesbian-produced SM magazine, it seemed ironic that the more public work remained untouched while the magazine was seized. While the warning at La Hacienda, and the seizure of *Bad Attitude* and laying of charges against the owner and manager of Glad Day show us the shapes of censorship to come, historically most acts of censorship have taken place in less obviously public places than restaurants and cafes. In fact, Canada Customs officials frequently use their capacities to seize printed material coming across the U.S.-Canada border to censor items en route to lesbian and gay book stores such as Vancouver's Little Sisters and Glad Day. What happened to Ron Giii and Bruce Eves could occur more frequently with the

An early indication of the interpretation accorded to *Butler* by Project P was the warning given to La Hacienda regarding photographs the Toronto Queen Street restaurant had hung on its walls. Two days prior to the publication of the *Butler* decision, Sergeant Bob Matthews warned La Hacienda that he considered some images "degrading and dehumanizing" —among them photos of a nude woman covered with tubing and saw blades, and the picture of a fully clothed man in work overalls in a dog collar and chains. It seems that Project P cannot tell the difference between pictures about exploitation and pictures of exploitation of sex.

Butler is very clear that obscenity requires sex. In fact, the Court helpfully drew up different categories of sex, and outlined the slippery slope that will slide sex into obscenity:

Pornography can be usefully divided into three categories:

- (1) explicit sex with violence, whether actual or threatened (almost always obscene)
- (2) explicit sex which is degrading or dehumanizing (may be obscene if the risk of harm is substantial)
- (3) explicit sex without violence which is neither degrading nor dehumanizing (not obscene unless it employs children)

It seems simple until you think about it. What constitutes explicit sex? Is interaction between at least two people a requirement? Project P doesn't think so. What constitutes violence? Is bondage violence, or is it degrading or dehumanizing? Is it none of the above? The answer depends on whom you are asking. And what sexual practises would police or a court of law consider degrading or dehumanizing? Will context or set decoration be enough to get a work included in this category? Will courts which are comprised of mostly male heterosexual judges find lesbian and



above: Jennifer Gillmor, *Commandant*, B&W photograph, previously published in *Bad Attitude*, 1992, courtesy of the artist
below: advertisement courtesy of Libra Films

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE VIRGIN MACHINE AND SEDUCTION: THE CRUEL WOMAN

"A cheerful cornucopia of kinkiness where genders and sexual preferences aren't simply bent- they're twisted into corkscrews."
-New York Times

"Naughty... Provocative... Jaded... Alfred Edel is superb!"
-Susan Granger, WICC / American Movie Classics

"An orgasmic opus..."
-Michael Murta, The Village Voice

"A wry comic look at the sexual and erotic underworld... hits the nail on the head."
-Variety

ALFREDEDEIL ANNIESPRINKLE
MY FATHER IS COMING
A FILM BY MONIKA TREUT
© 1991 US/Germany TARA RELEASING

kinds of homophobic misreading of the Butler decision that came from Project P's Bob Matthews, at the same time we should probably also expect less publicly visible forms of censorship to increase as well, at least until public protest and political action can succeed in limiting reactionary interpretations and applications of the Supreme Court ruling.

Visnja Cuturic and Ron McCluskey operate Libra Films, a film company which distributes such reputable "art-house" films as Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. Dealing with potential cutting and banning from the Ontario Film and Video Review Board is, from a business perspective, an unavoidable practice that they are forced to tolerate; however, in the course of doing business with *NOW Magazine* they discovered another, unexpected and expensive form of censorship.

While attempting to run an ad for Monika Treut's *My Father is Coming*, shortly before publication of the issue in which the ad was to run, Cuturic received a phone call from a *NOW* representative who said 'We can't run it. We find it obscene. It constituted an act of sex to have Annie Sprinkle's breasts touching the forehead of Alfred Edel. It insulted our feminist viewpoint.' Cuturic comments:

We had the choice of cropping the whole bottom of the photo, so that it would stop at the top of her breasts and you would get a picture of Annie or to put a band across the 'offending breasts touching the forehead'. We opted for that thinking it would [make *NOW*] look really silly. But what offended me was that people had thought we had done it and didn't understand that it was totally a move on *NOW's* part. That's when I felt I had to write the letter to the editor of *NOW* because that's when it started to infringe on the way we are perceived as a film distributor and that was not at all my intent.

The ads were created in the United States, and made specifically for publication in newspapers. The campaign designer had air-brushed Annie Sprinkle's nipples out of the ads and added a cloak to cover her breasts. It was with this ad that Libra Films went into an agreement with *NOW* on one of their co-operative advertisement deals.

Libra Film's did not know exactly who made the decision to censor the ad. Cameron Bailey and Jon Harkness, film critics at *NOW*, expressed dismay and support to Cuturic and McCluskey after the issue of the "offending ad" came up at a *NOW* Board Meeting. McCluskey was particularly insulted because the ad as printed in *NOW* sent out the wrong message about both the film and the distributors of Treut's spirited sex comedy. McCluskey says:

By putting a band over the ad, this implied some sleazy porno film. It wasn't the message we wanted. And anyone who knows anything about Annie Sprinkle understands that about *My Father is Coming*.

Cuturic, who is an active member of the Ontario Coalition Against Film and Video Censorship (OCAFVC), went on to say:

It is censorship of the worst form because there is no clear policy at *NOW*. They do whatever they want. It's so subjective. They don't come to that Board Meeting with a clear policy. They'll take advertising for anything on their back pages where they are exploiting the exact same titillation. We paid \$600 for the privilege of being censored.

Other costs that inhibit the circulation of independent productions are embedded in the complicated and costly procedures of the Ontario Film and Video Review Board. Cuturic and McCluskey have many objections to OFVRB because it requires smaller-scale, alternative distributors like Libra Films to purchase two licences—one for 16mm and one for 35mm—in addition to paying \$4 per minute to have their films "reviewed." "They really soak you," says Cuturic:

It could cost \$800 a print to censor [a feature film] for just one province. This is a big investment to make before a film even opens. Now, if I get a film censored two weeks before the play date and all of a sudden everything goes wrong, I've just put a whole lot of money in this idiotic practice of politics in Canada. And, there isn't much of an appeal process.

Also, the Theatres Act and the Project P division of the police don't seem to agree with each other. I don't want to pay for their inability to make a decision. They should have to agree or—and this would be wonderful—be abolished.

The *Butler* decision has affected our acquisition policy because there are films we would like to acquire and show but don't have the time to fight stupid censorship battles over. Pragmatically speaking, I cannot take the time for this and still make a living. So, I have to bend to their rules. The *Butler* decision limits our choices now.... Ultimately there are a lot more voices that are going to be silenced in Canadian cinema because of *Butler*.

Feminist film and video artist Lisa Steele has been active in the anti-censorship movement for over fifteen years. She is active in the Ontario Coalition Against Film and Video Censorship (OCAFVC) and has written numerous articles on issues of censorship, one of which was included in Varda Burstyn's anthology *Women Against Censorship*. Currently, Steele organized a weekend forum entitled *Refusing Censorship* November 7th and 8th, 1992 at the CBC auditorium in Toronto. The purpose of the forum was to bring forward an analysis of the responses of lawyers, activists, safe-sex educators, academics and artists to the *Butler* decision, and to provide a critique of these from a feminist perspective. Offering an historical analysis of questions of state censorship and its effects on artists' production Steele says:

There was certainly a liberal view within the art world in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There was nudity in art but discussion of gender and sexual identity was primarily a radical feminist reading of



Ron Gill, photograph from the performance series *On the Artist as a Fascist*, 1975, courtesy of the artist

gay sex degrading by its very nature?

These three categories are not exactly the test for obscenity provided by *Butler*. The test is much more complicated. Before discussing three of the leading post-*Butler* obscenity cases, I am going to try to provide as clear and simple an explanation of *Butler* as I can manage.

Under the heading "Offences Tending to Corrupt Morals", section 163(8) of the Criminal Code of Canada defines 'obscene' as "any publication a dominant characteristic of which is the undue exploitation of sex, or of sex and any one or more of the following subjects, namely, crime, horror, cruelty and violence." So the question has been and still is: What is the *undue* exploitation of sex?

In attempting to define 'undue', courts developed the 'community standard of tolerance' test. What the community would not tolerate would be held to be obscene. This begs the questions of who is the community, and how will courts determine what this community will allow? Often the community is in the judge's mind, and it is not required that the court hear evidence as to levels of tolerance. Must the same standard be applied in large urban and small rural areas? *Butler* upholds the line of cases which state that there must be one single national community standard. It states that the community standards test is concerned not with what Canadians would not tolerate being exposed to themselves, but what they would not tolerate other Canadians being exposed to. The Supreme Court lifted this statement from an earlier Supreme Court decision on obscenity, *R. v. Towne Cinema Theatres Ltd.* In

sexuality. You saw very few women like Carolee Schneeman. And very few gay and lesbian artists were bringing issues of sexuality to the fore, very few were saying 'we have a right to discuss these things.' Now we have lesbians and gay men who produce massive amounts of self-representational imagery speaking for themselves, speaking about sexuality and their identity. I don't think that work is going to go away.

It seems that there is a certain kind of repetition of history with censorship, although now the discussion seems to have reached a higher level. We will have to debate some of the same issues again, but having had more than a decade of actual production on issues of sexuality and sexual orientation it is clear that the debate will have many more relevant examples, a whole history, and a more useful political vocabulary. We need to make a clear connection between right-wing politics and pro-censorship, particularly when it comes to sexual speech and the damage caused by the right wing agenda, which is mobilizing and utilizing feminist energies in an ultimately unproductive way by disorganizing women's groups and obscuring women's issues in this way that allows the debate to be manoeuvred around any issue of self-expression.

In June 1992, artist Martha Judge's recent poster series was included in LOCALMOTIVE, a collectively organized site-specific show that took place in stores and on the streets of the Junction area of Toronto. Judge experienced a most disquieting form of community censorship a few short weeks after the Butler decision was announced. Some of Judge's visual art, which is about being lesbian and about being out on the street, employs images of lesbian women being intimate juxtaposed with images of city streets or monumental architecture. She used nudity predominantly because she feels:

Most people don't get it unless you are really very obvious. But though those images involved very intimate poses they weren't very sexual poses because it was my intention to indicate the intimacy of the relationship so that people would read it—be taken in by it, and not immediately say 'fuck off' to it. However, I put up about sixty to seventy posters one night in a six to eight block stretch along Dundas at Keele.

Judge received a phone call at 9 a.m. the next morning before the opening of the exhibition from a collective member who informed her that all her posters had been taken down by a group of adults who seemed to be store owners in the neighbourhood. It seems that they had gotten together, gone down the street, and scrubbed and scraped the posters until the images were eliminated. Ironically, part of the project was acknowledging the fact that there is hostility towards Judge's existence as a lesbian. Judge commented on this example of community censorship:

These events makes it obvious that an affectionate moment can easily become a public act of defiance.



Martha Judge, from the site specific poster project for the exhibition LOCALMOTIVE, the Junction, Toronto, May 1992, reproduction courtesy of the artist, *in situ* photograph by Mario Scattoloni

And sure enough...that is what happened. I put more posters up and once again they were torn down. It happened four or five times. I gave up.

I don't want to blame it on the neighbourhood because that is one of the ways homophobia is routinely written off.... I live in a different neighbourhood and I experience the same thing. It may not be my posters that are ripped down, but certainly the stares, the hatred, people spit at me.... That can happen anywhere....

With regard to the Butler decision, there seems to be some question as to what the real issue is: the sex or the sexuality? But the answer is pretty obvious: ultimately all this decision does is give licence to the bigotry to run rampant. Most arrests and busts are targeted arrests and busts. The gay community has always been a target for regulation through obscenity laws. Other laws target other groups....

Judge says that she cannot be sure as to whether or not she will be censoring her work in the future, but she feels that self-censorship is greater than any other form of censorship. She also feels that Project P will find artists to be an easy target due to their marginal status.

Michael Balsler and Andy Fabo collaborate to produce erotic gay video art tapes. They also work individually to create projects that deal with AIDS and gay sexual politics. Currently they are working on a new tape entitled *Beyond the Helms of the Censors*. It is a work that explores the territory of artists making their own sexual imagery. Balsler explains:

Call it art or porn-art.... It's a territory that keeps expanding, because people want to represent themselves, their bodies, their sexuality.... We wanted to make it ourselves rather than have an exploitation expert out there doing it for us. The piece is framed by interviews with a few gay men who speak about their interests and one woman who finds gay pornography more interesting than straight.

Fabo says:

Beyond the Helms of the Censors is essentially a celebration of graphic sexual imagery in artistic works.

Balsler referred to his video installation *High Risk Safe Sex* shown at the MacDonald Stewart Arts Centre in Guelph. The exhibition was almost unilaterally cancelled by the Gallery director who had panicked because of the title of the piece. There was some nudity but no sex. The curator, Nancy Campbell, stepped in to defend the work and a warning sign was installed. Fabo says that no show he has ever done has actually been banned or closed down:

The closest to being censored that I've ever had was in Regina. There was a warning sign put outside for families saying, 'This art show is about AIDS and therefore it contains graphic images.' It was a show

that case three out of seven judges had gone on to say that the audience to which the allegedly obscene material is targeted must be relevant, and that it was quite conceivable that the Canadian community would tolerate varying degrees of explicitness depending upon the audience and the circumstances. Unfortunately, these three judges were in the minority, and this did not become the law. In any event, *Butler* maintains the single national standard.

In the last ten years, the 'degradation or dehumanization' test began to appear in court decisions as a means of defining community standards. This coincided with the growing body of anti-pornography work which developed within the feminist community, such as books by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, and reflected the efforts of the anti-pornography feminists to get their viewpoint across to the courts. Their position, stated simplistically, is that pornography leads not only to physical harm to women by men, but also to inequality between the sexes. The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) was granted intervenor status before the Supreme Court in *Butler*, and presented a factum on which the Court relied in writing its decision. LEAF argued that pornography constitutes sex discrimination against women. They stated that the 'degradation or dehumanization' test which had evolved had begun to acknowledge the harms pornography causes to women and to recognize the sex equality interest in its regulation. LEAF quoted studies by such experts as Donnerstein, Malamuth, and Check to support their position that "it is uncontroversial that exposure to such materials increases aggression against women in laboratory settings, increases attitudes which are related to violence against women in the real world, and increases self-reported likelihood to rape. As a result of exposure, a significant percentage of men...come to believe that violence against women is acceptable." Perhaps LEAF's most succinct statement of its position was as follows: "Restriction of pornography on a harms-based equality rationale is not regulation because of content, although clearly it is tied to content. The purpose of regulation is not to restrict freedom of expression but rather to prevent harm."

The Supreme Court in *Butler* bought this completely. "Degrading or dehumanizing materials place women (and sometimes men) in positions of subordination, servile submission or humiliation. They run against the principles of equality and dignity of all human beings.... This type of material would apparently fail the community standards test not because it offends against morals but because it is perceived by public opinion to be harmful to society, particularly to women. *While the accuracy of this position is not susceptible to exact proof* [author's emphasis], there is a substantial body of opinion that holds that the portrayal of persons being subjected to degrading or dehumanizing sexual treatment results in harm, particularly to women, and therefore to society as a whole."

What must be remarked upon and questioned is why only the voices of the pro-censorship feminists have been heard and adopted by the courts. Indeed, both in the judicial system and in society at large, the pro-censorship position is often assumed to be *the* feminist position. This

is not accurate, so why is this assumption made? My theory is that it is precisely because of the agreement between pro-censorship feminists and conservative and right wing groups that censorship should occur, that has led courts and other conservative groups in society to adopt the so-called feminist anti-porn position. The old rationale of prohibiting pornography to protect public morals (still reflected in the heading above the obscenity provisions in the Criminal Code, 'Offences Tending to Corrupt Morals') was looking a little time-worn. As the Supreme Court states in *Butler*, "...this particular objective is no longer defensible in view of the Charter." A new rationale was needed for censorship which would hold up in the modern world, and pro-censorship feminists were happy to supply it. The courts were happy to apply it. Censorship would occur to protect women, and everybody would be happy. The Supreme Court restated the community standards test as follows:

The courts must determine as best they can what the community would tolerate others being exposed to on the basis of the degree of harm that may flow from such exposure. Harm in this context means that it predisposes persons to act in an anti-social manner, as for example, the physical or mental mistreatment of women by men, or, what is perhaps debatable, the reverse. Anti-social conduct for this purpose is conduct which society formally recognizes as incompatible with its proper functioning. The stronger the inference of a risk of harm, the lesser the likelihood of tolerance. *This inference may be drawn from the material itself [author's emphasis] or from the material and other evidence. Similarly evidence as to the community standards is desirable but not essential.*

So it would seem that material will be obscene if it leads to behaviour that society formally recognizes as 'incompatible with its proper functioning'. A case could be made that only material which has a strong likelihood of causing criminal behaviour should be found obscene.

We come now to the "artistic defence", or "internal necessities" test. The need for this test only arises if the work could be found to be obscene. At this point, "the portrayal of sex must be viewed in context to determine whether that is the dominant theme of the work as a whole." "Is undue exploitation of sex the main object of the work or is this portrayal of sex essential to a wider artistic, literary, or other similar purpose?" Any doubt in the matter is supposed to be resolved in favour of freedom of expression. The catch is, when is this test going to be applied? Will law enforcement officers seriously consider the artistic merits of sexual expression, or will it be up to various accused to raise this as a defence once they have been charged in court? The second possibility seems the

called *Diagnosis*.... They did tell me they were putting up a sign and it was something that happened in the last day... local artists were very upset about it.... I personally don't think that kind of warning is a problem. I see no reason why children should be allowed to see my work, regardless of how sexual it is. I think it's up to a parent to decide what a kid can see.

Interestingly enough, not all artists and curators think that it is suitable to install warning signs in galleries. The Mendel Art Gallery and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography's 1989 travelling retrospective exhibition of Evergon's work is a case in point. Linda Milrod, the director of the Mendel maintained that warning signs were a form of censorship, however, right-wing bureaucratic players all the way to Saskatoon's city council were lobbying for Milrod's resignation and substantial cuts to the gallery's budget over the Evergon exhibition.¹ Balsler had an interesting view of on this aspect of the debate:

I think warning signs are completely appropriate. I really don't get kicks out of a church lady and her girlfriends going in there and being horrified by my images. I'm too mature for that. It's sad, however, that people can't look at things without getting their buns in a knot. I have no interest in educating people who are busy being horrified. I'm interested in educating people who are open to ideas and new ways of looking at things, and information about AIDS and AIDS education, in this case.

Fabo and Balsler discussed the more subtle forms of censorship that occur within the art world and how they have experienced it. Fabo commented on the undercurrent of discrimination he has encountered in the visual arts community:

I've never censored myself but I do think that I felt a lot of resistance from the art world...when I first came to Toronto in 1975 because my work was about being a gay man.... At that time it was okay to be a gay artist but...there was a way of being gay in the Toronto art world then. It was by being quite euphemistic and cloaking it in a lot of irony like General Idea and David Buchan. To actually be open about it or to take a stand was not that acceptable...if you did, your work wasn't as relevant. There wasn't a very developed discourse around identity at all then. The feminist discourse was happening but even it was in its infancy, really.... So, I just carried on.

Both commented on an environment that produces oppressive obscenity laws and encourages homophobia to flourish. Balsler says:

I think good political art comes out of resistance. And it seems there is always something to fight back against. The *Butler* decision is just one more nail in the coffin for the right. They are embarrassing them-



Brian Piltz, *untitled*, from the series *Pantomime of Complaint*, C Print, 1991, courtesy of the artist

selves in the eyes of people who are part of the avant-garde, people who are making things. It gives us one more instance to validate the fact that we have to speak out against things all the time because there are idiots in control.

I think self-censorship is at the centre of my concerns, especially in terms of how I'm perceived by my audience or peers. How do censorship decisions or laws or rulings effect the reception of my art? Are my peers willing to take part in viewing as a result of these decisions, in this context of censorship? Where does your audience disappear to? It's not going to stop me from making things, but it might have an effect on my audience. That's a concern.

In terms of shaping audiences and political climates what must be mentioned here is the inexplicit and highly problematic role of anti-porn feminists in securing the success of the *Butler* decision. Anti-censorship feminists understand that the right-wing are manipulating the political efforts of liberal feminist groups like the Women's Legal, Education and Action Fund (LEAF) in order to obliterate any expressions of lesbian, gay and women's sexuality.

The Canadian women's community has deep, ten year old rifts on the question of censorship, with the Catherine MacKinnons, Michelle Landsbergs and Susan G. Coles on the pro-censorship side and the Marianna Valverdes, Chris Bearchells and Varda Burstyns on the anti-censorship side. Now we see younger women taking up the Canadian struggle of anti-censorship, especially those who work in association with organizations like Xtra, Buddies in Bad Times, Toronto Socialist Feminist Action (TSFA), International Socialists, CENSORSTOP and OCAFVC, and newly active Toronto Women's Action Coalition (WAC).

However, all these organizations who have adopted an anti-censorship mandate operate on low-to-no budgets, while a national feminist organization like LEAF (who do have some unacknowledged opponents to censorship among their members) have the time, staff, power and money to have submitted one of the key briefs to the Supreme Court in the *Butler* decision.

Arguments from this document written by LEAF representatives were relied on in the drafting of the *Butler* decision. In

more likely. Hence, obscenity chill. Artists faced with the costs of asserting in court that their work is indeed art will either remove the work upon a warning, as did La Hacienda, or plead guilty and pay a fine rather than much heftier lawyers' fees. A third and even more chilling alternative is that faced with this prospect, artists will self-censor and avoid controversial work of any kind of sexual nature. And the most threatened work will be work dealing with women's sexuality, or lesbian and gay work.

One of the first post-*Butler* obscenity charges was laid by Project P against a lesbian magazine, *Bad Attitude*, purchased by Constable Pat MacVicar at Glad Day Bookshop in Toronto. It is odd that a decision made by the Supreme Court on the basis of women's equality would immediately be used to attack a lesbian magazine. The ironic result may be that women's sexual expression will be censored in order to protect women's equality. I do not know if this is an event that LEAF anticipated or would condone, but undoubtedly it is a result of some of the arguments in their factum. It illustrates that not all foes of pornography come from exactly the same ideological place, and that if the anti-pornography feminists start out with some strange bedfellows, so to speak, they may ultimately find themselves limited with respect to whom they are allowed to depict themselves going to bed with, and how.

Another result of their factum to which LEAF may not have given any consideration is the reaction of the gay community to LEAF's interpretation of gay male pornography. Some of the material in question in *Butler* was gay, and LEAF described this material as analogous to the way women are treated. Yet LEAF's description of some aspects of gay male sex, such as penises down throats, or men ejaculating into mouths sounds like plain old explicit gay male or heterosexual sex. Michele Landsberg, in *Ms. Magazine*, quoted Kathleen Mahoney as saying that LEAF called the attention of the Supreme Court to the gay material as a way of helping the court understand the harm present in the heterosexual material. It seems that LEAF may have counted on judicial homophobia to spark a reaction that would then be extended to the heterosexual material. The Canadian Committee Against Customs Censorship (CCACC), a group formed to help Glad Day Bookshop fight its ongoing battle with customs seizures, was incensed at

what it saw as a betrayal by LEAF.

CCACC was already in the process of an appeal of a customs seizure of exclusively gay male pornography when the *Butler* decision came down. Lawyer Charles Campbell argued that the category of plain old explicit sex, which *Butler* said was tolerated by the community, had to include plain explicit gay sex, which would therefore include anal sex between men. Campbell further argued, pursuant to *Butler*, that community tolerance must be evaluated on the basis of the degree of risk of harm that would flow from the material in question. Harm had to mean that persons would be predisposed to act in an antisocial manner, which is conduct that society formally recognizes as incompatible with its proper functioning, i.e. conduct proscribed by the Criminal Code. Consenting anal sex between two of age males is not proscribed by the Code, hence it ought not to be held to be obscene. Campbell tried to extend this rationale to some more difficult sado-masochistic material, and in a memorable courtroom interlude showed Judge Hayes a gay male videotape that had been passed by the Ontario Board of Censors. It was to no avail; Judge Hayes found himself swayed by the arguments of the Crown, even though the Crown had refused to call any evidence. The Crown made the rather alarming claim that what the Supreme Court had meant in *Butler* by plain explicit sex was sex which was 'sexually explicit erotica', which the Crown defined as "positive, affectionate, and human". In other words, all sex which was not "positive, affectionate, and human" was obscene. This is certainly not what the Supreme Court said in *Butler*, but Hayes was not deterred from incorporating the Crown's reasoning into his judgment. Hayes found all of the material in question to be obscene, even the gay equivalent of *Playboy* magazine, because it was degrading, dehumanizing, and not positive, affectionate, and human.

To a homophobic court, is all gay and lesbian sex going to be held to be degrading and dehumanizing by its very nature? The Crown in the Hayes decision argued that the gay community was too small a group to have a say in what community standards should be. By that interpretation, we would end up with the tyranny of the moral minority over what the rest of Canada will be permitted to look at and read. Taking the Hayes decision to its next step, will conservative judges find all sex outside of married sex in the context of 'family values' to be obscene? One envisions a future of pornographic magazines full of pictures of heterosexual couples doing it near kitchen sinks or wedding cakes, or, God forbid, with signs of children somewhere in evidence.

On a serious note, the Hayes decision as it stands at trial level may even be used to hurt Glad Day. In a letter received July 30, 1992, by Svend Robinson, Otto Jelinek states that his legal advisers are reviewing the Hayes decision to assess whether any revision or clarification is required to Custom's interpretive policy for obscene material. He continues, "Let me assure you that Revenue Canada will follow any direction given by the courts as it relates to Custom's administrative policy regarding obscenity." CCACC has filed a notice of intent to appeal

the spring and summer months of 1992, after charges were laid against Glad Day for selling *Bad Attitude* and after Judge Hayes ruled that all twelve examples of gay porn should be considered obscene, the media paid little attention to the effect of *Butler* on the lesbian and gay community. Many individuals in the feminist community have called upon LEAF to respond to this. Although LEAF recently held a day-long lesbian workshop on legal issues in Toronto, when CENSORSTOP Women's Caucus members called to see if *Butler* was being discussed, they were told that the agenda was going to focus on matters relating to family benefits and child custody, and was not able to include discussion of the new obscenity law.

Within another national feminist organization, a debate concerning issues of censorship was recently thwarted by a small number of anti-porn feminists. Longtime socialist feminist activist Carolyn Egan, was present at the National Action Committee on the Status of Women's (NAC) Annual General Meeting when an emergency resolution was put on the table in response to the seizure of *Bad Attitude* and the state oppression targeted at Glad Day, Toronto's only lesbian and gay bookstore. The original draft of the resolution was written by the Women's Caucus of CENSORSTOP and was officially put forward at NAC's Annual General Meeting by TSFA. The draft read as follows:

Be it resolved that NAC affirm its position opposing discrimination against lesbians and condemn obscenity laws being used to suppress the lesbian expression of sexuality. Be it further resolved that NAC condemn the prosecution of Glad Day Books, an important venue within the lesbian and gay community of Toronto.

Egan gave us her account of how the issue got clouded through a series of political and NAC constitutional manoeuvres. TSFA submitted the resolution. Initially it was rejected because it was not perceived to be an emergency. Through the persistence of anti-censorship feminists, it was brought to the lesbian caucus. Sheila Day, the Vice-President of NAC, who was at the caucus suggested a change of wording so that it would have read, "lesbian-produced, lesbian erotica" even though it is unlikely that feminists would endorse a publication produced by patriarchal corporations for male consumption. Although unsatisfactory to some women from LEAF, most of the women in the caucus supported the proposed resolution.

The resolution was motivated by Jocelyn Piercy and then taken to the floor. She said the resolution was reiterating NAC's position in defense and support of lesbians, and that NAC already had a position that was opposed to state censorship. Because there were new attacks, it was critical that NAC come out clearly in favour of the resolution. It was seconded by Michelle Robideau who made the link between police attacks on Blacks and queers. Three women spoke against it. One woman from B.C. (who Egan did not know) said this "was a very, very complicated issue, many aspects to it and too complicated for us to make a decision on." The Chair then said, "Are we ready to proceed to a vote?" The general sentiment was that it was going to proceed to a vote and that it was

going to pass. Sheila MacIntyre, a lawyer from LEAF and a professor at Queen's University made the argument that the issue was a question of lesbian self-determination. According to Egan, MacIntyre claimed that: "This is something that we [the lesbian caucus] have to deal with. The floor as a whole can't deal with it. This is a debating tactic to say police attacks on racial minorities are the same."

Egan recounts what followed:

People were getting totally confused. I said, 'This is not a complicated question. It's a very, very simple question. The police are coming down on lesbian and gay erotica. They're coming down on lesbian and gay bookstores. It is the same kind of attack and we have to appreciate the role of the state here. If we don't speak out, who will speak out? It's very important for a group like NAC that already does have a policy to be four-square on the side of any oppressed community when it is under attack like this.'

Ellen Wordsworth from B.C. then spoke, obscuring the issue even further. She made the recommendation that it be referred to the Lesbian Issues Committee. In the confusion of the obstructed debate of the core problem of state censorship, this was accepted. Egan says:

Frankly, my own feeling is that the method that those who were opposed to the resolution used, saying there is no link between police attacks on the Black and gay communities, in effect supported homophobia because it was trying to separate rather than bring people together. I believe all three who spoke were lesbians. I think the critical thing for them was not the fight against lesbian oppression or drawing people on side or drawing different oppressed communities together to fight back against state oppression, but their opposition to any form of pornography or erotica. That was the single-minded pursuit that they had.

The Lesbian Issues Committee of NAC has yet to meet. Many heterosexual anti-censorship feminists at NAC are, unfortunately, left out of the debate even though the issue unquestionably affects them. Both within and beyond NAC the voices of the anti-censorship feminist constituency are further marginalized because, in contrast to the majority of anti-porn feminists who have the resources available to those who are educated, middle-class, 'professional', and politically connected, they, as feminist artists, lesbian activists, film and video distributors, book sellers, socialists, safe-sex educators and sex-trade workers, lack the time, legal expertise, connections, or the money to manoeuvre the courts.

The difficulties in organizing against censorship are manifold: silencing within feminist organizations, apathy in the arts community, fear of the powers of a state which engages in practices designed to suppress sexual self-expression. In addition there are also the internal rifts which create tensions between different approaches to the questions of civil and sexual liberties, sexual self-determination, and access to cultural

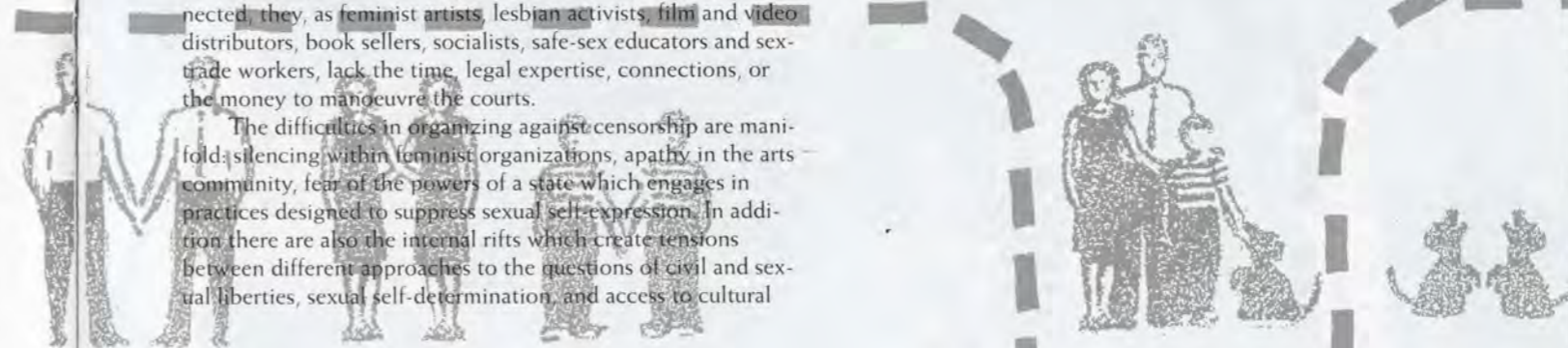
the Hayes decision, but in reality their ability to appeal hinges on their ability to raise funds, and they have not yet paid for the first trial in full.

It does seem that Glad Day Bookshop has an unfair burden. In addition to the ongoing customs problems, they are also fighting the *Bad Attitude* obscenity charge. We intend to argue, among other things, that since sexual orientation has been included by implication under the forbidden grounds for discrimination under section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in both the Leshner and Haig and Birch decisions, it would be unconstitutional to exclude lesbians and gays from forming a part of the hypothetical group which is used by judges to determine community standards of tolerance. In addition, there is very little in the issue of *Bad Attitude* in question that is not contained in Madonna's book, *Sex*. The sales figures for that book are an excellent indication of just what the community is willing to tolerate, indeed, even pay great sums of money for.

There was another post-*Butler* obscenity case in which a court came to a radically different decision than Judge Hayes. Mark Carl Laliberté, a high school student in Windsor, Ontario was charged over a fanzine that he was producing himself. Some of the images which the Crown contended were obscene were drawings of distorted animals, semi-human figures with knives or saws, and a take-off of the Peanuts cartoon in which Snoopy appears to have sex with Sally, although this was not explicitly depicted. The Crown attempted to argue that this was bestiality and child sexual abuse. Judge Nosanchuk did not agree. He found the fanzine to have literary and artistic merit, and mentioned that the young accused showed considerable creativity and talent. He held that the Crown had not demonstrated any undue exploitation of sex in the materials, and that it was inconceivable that they would have predisposed persons to act in an anti-social manner.

The *Laliberté* case illustrates that there is more than one way that a court can interpret the *Butler* decision. As time goes on, more case law will develop, and we will see where it takes us. But so far in the post-*Butler* era, the temperature has been a little chilly for artists and gay/lesbian bookstores. As for women's equality, personally, I have not noticed any sweeping changes.

Clare Barclay is a Toronto actor, writer, and entertainment lawyer. As such, she has a passionate interest in all issues of freedom of expression.



resources.

Using Gary Kinsman's argument that anti-censorship activism need not seek to 'align with the hetero porn industries and the existing cultural monopolies' which 'obscures from our view the struggle against the forms of social censorship in this market context', many feminists interested in organizing against censorship have refused to 'marginalize concerns over violence and danger' or ignore the contexts in which sexual freedom and freedom of expression are exercised.²

Whereas civil libertarianism would seem to assume that state regulation is all that stands in the way of democracy, anti-censorship feminists refuse to take up this line, recognizing that democracy in North America rarely exists for people of colour, Aboriginals, Blacks, disabled people, working-class people, gays and lesbians or others not fully enfranchised within the dominant patriarchal, capitalistic culture.

For anti-censorship feminists the projects of sexual emancipation include, but can not be reduced to, issues of legal restriction and state policing functions. As a result, our political strategy must not be defined by the **Butler** decision alone—even as we engage in a whole-hearted battle to refuse its homophobic application, and illuminate its complete inadequacy as a means for insuring or supporting women in their efforts to secure sexual freedom, freedom from violence, and a place in the public sphere.

For artists the effect of the **Butler** decision, especially those producing feminist, queer, or lesbian and gay work, is potentially devastating. It will encourage artists to self-censor and therefore stifle a truly creative, innovative Canadian identity in contemporary art. Even a heterosexual artist like Brian Pitz, who exclusively uses his own body in work that has been described as 'romantic', is getting nervous about the new law:

In some ways I think it [**Butler**] does subtly change the direction of your work. Instead of dealing with the real subject matter of the work, you couch in certain ways that don't look so threatening. You make it more aestheticized. You change it so much that it doesn't look threatening—it looks swoony.

Faced with the **Butler** decision, the strongest statement artists can make is to mobilize, organize, lobby, demonstrate in the streets, make political demands, write letters, publish articles, conduct public education campaigns, build broad-based coalitions, and continue to make art as honestly and openly as we can.

Elaine Carol is an artist and activist who lives in Toronto. She is currently developing a multidisciplinary performance entitled GOSSIP.

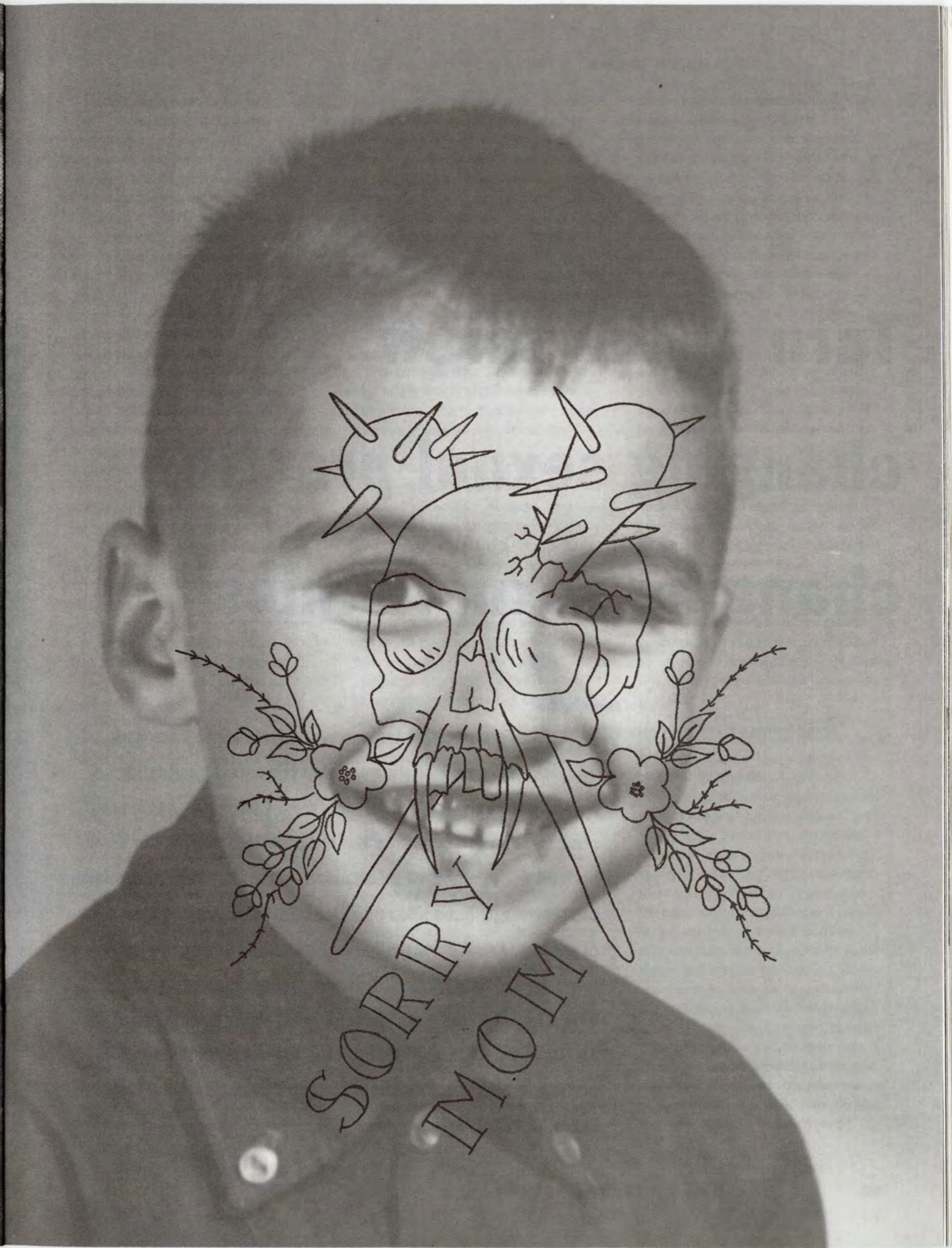
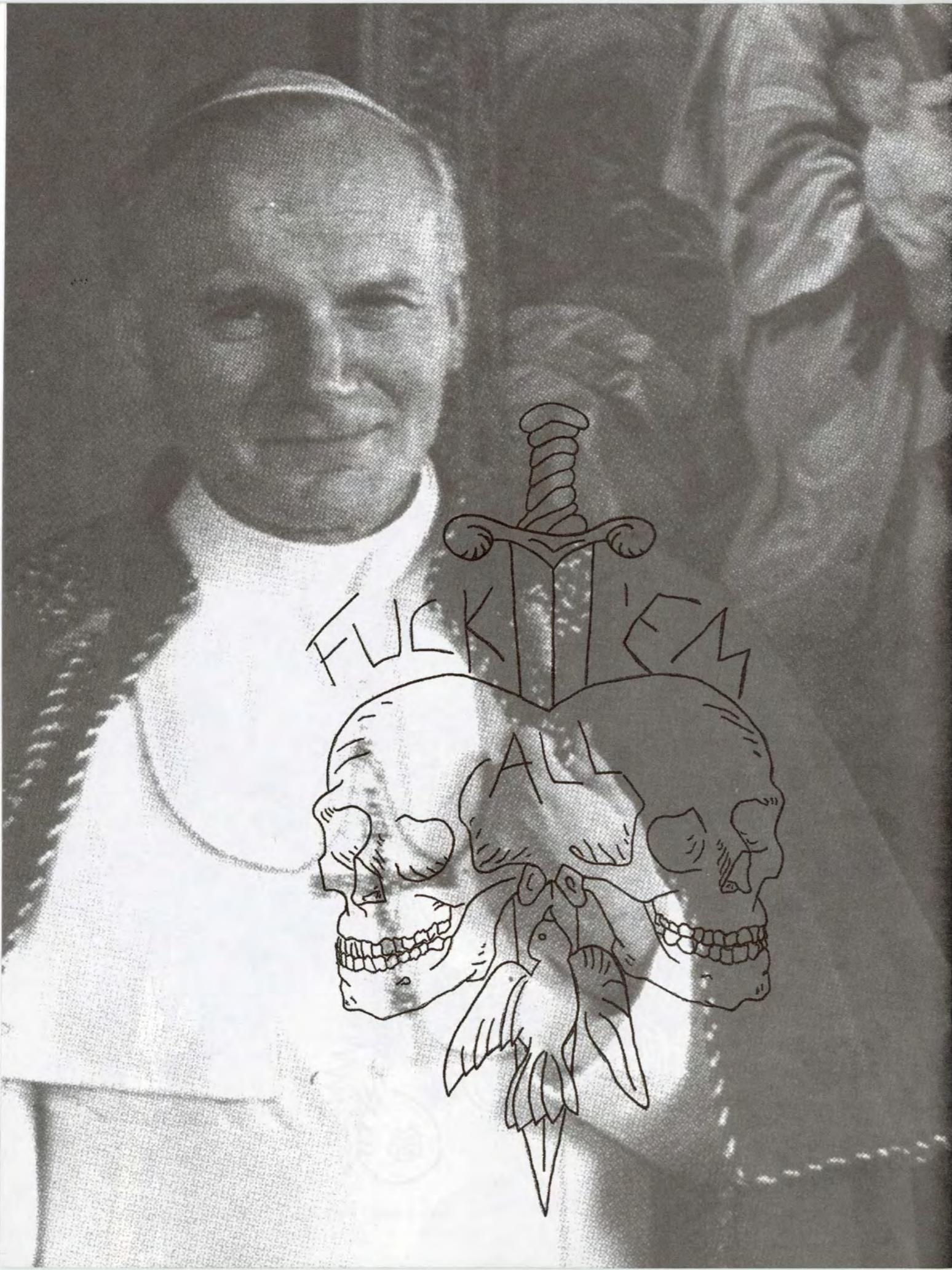
NOTES

¹ Jim Graham, "The Language of Censorship—The Evergon Controversy at the Mendel Art Gallery", *Parallelogramme*, Volume 16, Number 4, 1991.

² Gary Kinsman, "Porn/Censor Wars and the Battlefields of Sex", *Issues of Censorship*, A Space, 1985.

Illustrations by TONY HAMILTON





Turn of the screw changing sexual practice changing sexual ethics

Review of **Embattled Eros**
Sexual Politics and Ethics in Contemporary America
by Steven Seidman.
New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

Feminist and lesbian and gay activists have generated a prolific discourse on the social implications of sexual practices and sexual identities. Contesting hegemonic structures which constrain the meaning and morality of sex is high on the agendas of these movements; they have, therefore, unsurprisingly been sites of bitter internal struggles over sexual politics. From community presses and volunteer collectives to elite academic circles, differing conceptions of sexual ethics have ignited passionate debate. Many people spent the 1970s and 1980s arguing over the meanings of such issues as pornographic representation, lesbian sadomasochism and the age of consent.

But to what end? By the late 1980s, these heated discussions seemed to be at an impasse. Meanwhile, conservative attacks both on sexual and reproductive choice and on cultural representations of autonomous counterhegemonic sexualities have also proliferated. The effect of this continued assault, along with the impact of the AIDS pandemic on most sexually and politically disenfranchised groups, indicates a pressing need to expand and transcend the limits of current debate on sexuality.

Meeting this need is the project of Steven Seidman's **Embattled Eros: Sexual Politics and Ethics in Contemporary America**. Seidman, a gay sociology professor at the State University of New York, Albany, charts a history of struggle around sexual ethics in America from the 1920s to the present. Focusing on the heady debates of the 1970's and 1980's, Seidman argues that feminist and gay and lesbian discussions of sexuality have almost always relied on antecedent concepts of romanticism and libertarianism.

In the interests of his thesis, Seidman conceives of each ideology rather broadly: to the extent that anti-porn and anti-SM feminists, "family values" Republicans and morally conservative leftists all co-exist in the romanticist camp. Romanticists believe, he argues, that "eros must be connected to and kept intertwined with emotional, social and spiritual intimacies. Sex...should exhibit tender, caring, loving qualities, or qualities that are always respectful of the other as a(n) integrated, whole person...so as not to reduce the other to a mere body or vessel of pleasure"(6). Libertarians, on the other hand, view sex primarily as "a positive, beneficial, joyous phenomenon...connected to personal health, happiness, self fulfilment, and social progress" (6). While romanticists advocate restraint in order to counteract the pervasive dangers of the sexual arena, libertarians, he argues, regard mutual consent as the only relevant factor in any sexual interchange.

The book concentrates on feminist

and gay male communities, but is not confined to an insular interpretation of their significance. Utilizing what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has termed a "universalizing" perspective, sexual politics are seen as "an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities."¹ According to Seidman, not only have romantic and libertarian ideologies from the broader culture shaped gay and feminist sex discourse, but the resultant discussions have in turn been reintroduced into the cultural mainstream. The author cites the furor around the 1990 tour of the Robert Mapplethorpe photography exhibit *The Perfect Moment* as an example of this sort of cultural interchange.²

In the final section of the book, which reflects the primary "moral impulse" of the work, Seidman attempts to construct an alternative to the polarized ideologies of romanticism and libertarianism. While his book provides a valuable historic overview of critical political moments in both feminist and gay male communities and a lucid dissection of the ethical positions coming from all sides of the "sex debates", his suggestions for ethical reform in the final chapter are somewhat underwhelming.

Seidman provides a thoughtful examination of the rise of what Alice Echols has termed "cultural feminism", a strain of radical feminist thought that exercised a strong hold over ideological discussions in the women's movement throughout the 1980s. Inclusive of such theorists as Mary Daly, Robin Morgan and Andrea Dworkin, cultural feminism posited an essential female sexuality "reflecting women's basic orientation to organic, empathetic and nurturing values...characterized by a diffuse body eroticism, gentleness, romance, and monogamy"(105). For cultural feminists, women's interest in pornography, sadomasochism and other "non-egalitarian" sex is deluded and "male-identified".³

The basic premise of cultural feminism is that there are essential and distinct female and male sexualities, which

are irrevocably polarized. Within cultural feminism, particular contempt is reserved for gay male sexuality, which is seen as the ultimate expression of a misogynist, instrumental and objectifying desire.⁴ By focusing exclusively on debates around porn and SM, however, Seidman fails to elaborate fully on this point. For many cultural feminists, constructing theories about the violence against women inherent in SM and pornography is part of a more fully articulated conception of (particularly gay) male sexuality as an essentially destructive force.⁵ An examination of cultural feminist critiques of male intergenerational relationships, transsexuality and heterosexuality would have served to flesh out this discussion usefully. It would also have been helpful if Seidman had not relied so exclusively on theoretical texts, but also examined feminist grassroots publications (such as **off our backs**) and other areas of radical feminist cultural production (such as womyn's music). Indeed, the lack of an examination of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival is a particularly glaring omission, as it is a terrain upon which struggles over the meanings of "female" and "male" sexualities have been vividly enacted.

Contrary to Seidman's assertion that opponents of cultural feminism tend to ignore social context, seeing sex at times as "genderless", women who have contested cultural feminist perceptions of correct "woman-identified" sexuality have not been strictly or primarily libertarian in perspective. Many in the "pro-sex" camp have demonstrated a keen analysis of women's oppression on the basis of not only gender and sexuality, but also race and class, and have criticised cultural feminism for its essentialism and ethnocentric bias.⁶ It is also unnecessarily reductive to characterize SM advocacy as essentially libertarian. While Seidman goes to lengths to distinguish between the various strains of sexual romanticism, pro-SM forces are universally described in the most narrow of libertarian terms. Even within **Coming to Power**, a critical lesbian SM text

heavily cited in *Embattled Eros*, perspectives range from the strict civil libertarianism of Pat Califia to Margaret Hunt's sociohistorical critique of cultural feminism, to the social constructivist analysis of Gayle Rubin.⁷ There has been a trend since the late 1980s in SM discourse to reconfigure sexual romanticism, imbuing sadomasochist, casual and "anonymous" sex with "social, emotional and spiritual intimacies."⁸

Embattled Eros also provides a useful section on AIDS discourse and the sexual politics of gay male communities. Charting gay politics from the Foucauldian notion of the emergence of the "homosexual" as a product of 19th century medical-scientific discourse to the civil-rights-aspirant gay communities of the 1970's, Seidman argues that societal responses to AIDS fit cultural narratives prefigured by the earlier romanticist anti-gay backlash most commonly signified by such figures as Anita Bryant. Reactions to the post-World War II development of burgeoning urban gay communities set the stage so that "through the 1980s, AIDS was the most socially consequential site where the public discussion over the moral boundaries of sexuality transpired" (146).

Within gay male communities themselves, Seidman argues, ethical discourse on AIDS began where earlier community debate on "public" sex, inter-generational sex and sadomasochism left off. Again, he sees these discussions as exemplary of the romanticist/libertarian split. Gay male sexual romanticists, he argues, see AIDS as punishment for immorality and argue for a sexual ethic that conforms to a middle class heterosexual ideal. Libertarians argue for the maintenance of the unique cultural values of the gay male sexual economy, with the implementation of a safer sex consciousness as the only adjustment.

While Seidman extensively explores reactions of the purveyors of restraint both within and outside the gay community to AIDS, his examination of liberationist/libertarian responses is relatively underdeveloped. Notably absent was a

discussion of the "sex-positive" discourse generated by both AIDS activists and AIDS service organizations, whose writings, brochures, posters and campaigns have had a marked impact on homosexual male sexualities. Seidman also renders invisible the perspectives of "AIDS dissidents", those who challenge the assertion that HIV is the (sole) cause of AIDS. Although the arguments surrounding this assertion have problematic aspects, their relations to medico-moral discourse on sexuality are highly revealing. Seidman's deliberate omission of this unorthodox perspective weakens his study of AIDS and sexual ethics.⁹

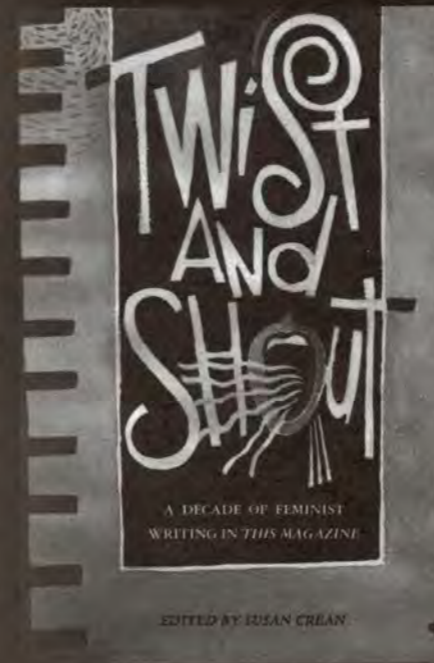
In the final section of the book, Seidman argues for a sexual ethic that combines the libertarian defense of sexual choice and diversity with the romanticist concern for the qualitative aspects of sex. As the concept of consent is necessarily skewed in a capitalist society, he suggest the additional ethical concept of "responsibility" as useful in developing normative guidelines for a progressive sexual ethic. Admittedly a slippery notion, responsibility as outlined by Seidman entails "assessing the morality of acts by situating them in their specific social historical context and analyzing them not only in terms of whether they include choice of intentionality, but in terms of...consequences or impact on the individual, society and the world of natural and cultural objects" (200).

The recognition that consent is conditional and that sexual acts occur within social contexts is not particularly new. The value of Seidman's proposal is that he posits the use of consent and responsibility as the beginnings of a broad, socially engaged set of guidelines for sexual ethics. In a field prone to authoritarian models of social regulation, this is a healthy intervention. Indeed, as Seidman concludes *Embattled Eros*, "a pragmatic, formalistic ethic...is unlikely to produce the discredited, stigmatized identities characteristic of a substantive ethic that relies on some sexual ontology."

A 22 year old working class queer, Shawn Syms is a practical romantic who claims an incontinent nostalgia for the feminist "sex debates" even though he was born a decade to late to have experienced them directly. He submitted this review late, after spending the night before it was due being initiated as a fisting top by a hot man he had just met, nearly twice his age.

NOTES

- 1 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1.
- 2 The Mapplethorpe exhibit was a site of great controversy within queer communities as well. On issues of race, see Kobena Mercer and Issac Julien, "True Confessions: A Discourse on Images of Black Male Sexuality" in *Brother to Brother*, ed. Essex Hemphill (Boston: Alyson 1991). On issues of disability, see Kenny Fries, "Disability and Sexuality" conference tape, 1991 OutWrite conference, San Francisco. On the displacement of Mapplethorpe's work from an SM community context, see Michael Bronski, "It's Not the Flesh, It's the Flowers" *Gay Community News* 18 (6), 7.
- 3 For a brief discussion of the problematic nature of the concept of "male-identification" see Gayle Rubin, "Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender and Boundaries" in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, ed. Joan Nestle (Boston: Alyson 1992).
- 4 This viewpoint is most fully articulated in Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax* (London: Women's Press (U.K.) 1990). *Anticlimax* is also noteworthy for containing a phenomenal number of personal attacks on lesbian and gay male theorists Jeffreys disagrees with.
- 5 See Jeffreys, *Anticlimax* (Chapter 6) for an exhaustive catalogue of the problematic elements of gay male sexuality.
- 6 See Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (London: Routledge 1984).
- 7 Samois, ed., *Coming to Power* (Boston: Alyson 1982).
- 8 See Pat Califia, *Doc and Fluff* (Boston: Alyson 1991); Dorothy Allison, "Her body, mine, and his" in *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics and Practice*, ed. Mark Thompson (Boston: Alyson 1991); Tina Portillo, "I Get Real: Celebrating My Sadomasochistic Soul" in *Leatherfolk*, Geoff Mains, "Gentle Warriors" *Drummer* 127: 6-14.
- 9 see page 169 of *Embattled Eros*.



Like most anthologies, *Twist & Shout: A Decade of Feminist Writing in This Magazine*, contains both hits and misses. One of its problems for me is its insiders feel, heightened by an introduction that seems to assume most readers will be fans of *This Magazine* who share the politics it represents. Susan Crean's brief history of the magazine and her version of the development of modern feminism in Canada are useful as ways to contextualize the writing, but her conspiratorial tone may deter readers who don't feel part of the magazine's implicit community.

In spite of this, the anthology is worth reading, partly for what it tells us about prevailing political climates within which the articles were written, and partly for the quality & variety of the writing. As Crean indicates in her introduction, the anthology provides a map of the kind of work fostered by *This Magazine* over the last decade; it also serves to make us aware of how much feminism has changed even since 1989—the cutoff point for most of the articles.

One of the temptations that faces anyone trying to analyze a historical event or political situation is to speak

DIANA BRYDEN

Twist and Shout

A Decade of Feminist Writing in *This Magazine*

Edited by Susan Crean
Toronto: Second Story Press Feminist Publishers, 1992

for or about large, disparate groups, and to simplify or ignore the differences between them. Many of the writers in the anthology are acutely aware of this dilemma, and either write about it explicitly or overcome it, with both grace and passion. In Myrna Kostash's "Will the Real Natasha Please Stand Up?", she takes author Heather Robertson to task for a *Chatelaine* article about a "typical" Soviet woman whose picture had caught her eye in a Toronto newspaper." As Kostash points out, this typical woman is, like Robertson, "a member of the intelligentsia...[and] both have access to their society's 'good life'." She goes on to lampoon Robertson's naive comments about the economy of the former Soviet Union and the experiences of the women who live there. The article is ascerbic, to say the least, and we're told by Crean that it engendered some angry responses from readers and from Robertson, its target.

Similarly, in "Hunger", Maggie Helwig's article about anorexia and bulimia, the author draws on personal experience and historical research to blast media trivializations of a complex and deep spiritual hunger; she criticizes popular representations of eating disorders as fashion-related tics, "nothing more than an exaggerated conformity..."

One of the most infuriating pieces in the book, for its whole-hearted use of the kind of generalization that both Kostash and Helwig critique, is Theadora Jensen's "Roots of Dissent: Pursuing Bitter History in Basque Country". In the article, Jensen describes her research of witch trials and executions, and her concurrent discovery of Basque nationalism. She refers several times to the Nazi Holocaust, drawing superficial and ill-

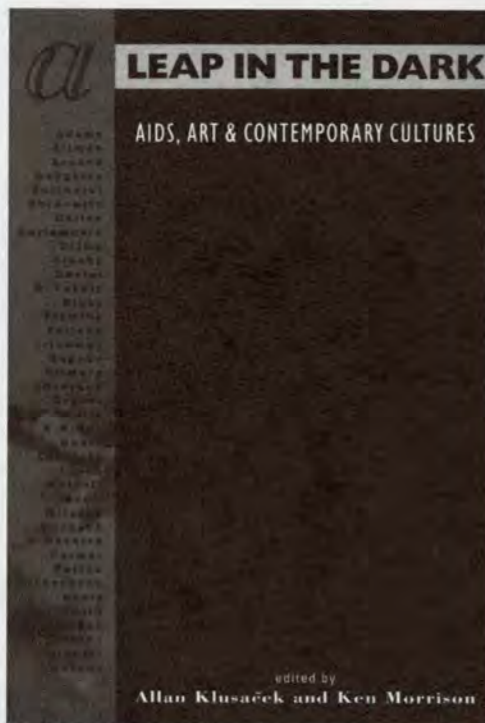
informed parallels between Jews and witches as objects of persecution. In doing so she interferes with our understanding of either group by reducing one to a cipher in order to support her claims about the other. She also shows supreme ignorance of prevailing attitudes and beliefs about Jewish people, during WWII and since.

Fortunately, Jensen is in a minority. Some writers, such as Dionne Brand in her piece entitled "Abortion Justice and the Rise of the Right", describe what they see as the implications for women of different political developments, using excellent research & passionate opinion as tools. Others have created idiosyncratic and fascinating pieces of artistic experimentation, such as Timothy Findley's "Lana Speaks: C-54, Where Are You?" and Fauzia Rafiq's "The Birth of a Murderer". It's worth skimming or avoiding the weaker articles in this anthology for such rewards, though Jensen and a couple of others could benefit from the advice given recently by Canadian poet Anne Michaels in another collection of feminist writing: "Save us from the writer who claims she's speaking for anyone other than herself; no writer speaks for her tribe, only from her place in it. What gives power to a poet's words is not, for example, her attempt to sum up a corrupt political system by speaking on behalf of a particular group, but instead to say simply: this is what I see." The best of the writers in *Twist & Shout* do exactly this.

Diana Bryden is a poet and a member of the FUSE editorial collective.

A Leap in the Dark

AIDS, Art and Contemporary Cultures



Edited by Allan Klusaček and Ken Morrison
 Montréal: Véhicule Press, an Artexte edition, 1992
 available at Artexte, 3575 boul. St. Laurent, #303, Montréal
 and Artexte at the Art Gallery of York University, North York

"Modern man has been made ready for AIDS," writes University of Laval anthropologist Bernard Arcand in the ambitious but uneven anthology **A Leap in the Dark: AIDS, Art and Contemporary Cultures**. By this disturbing and richly suggestive tag line, Arcand simply means AIDS could not have found a more appropriate and willing target than "a society that seems remarkably well suited to instruct the individual to stay home, close

the doors, and wait until the doctors declare it safe to come out again." (175) It can be similarly argued that critical theorists and queer activists in the West have been made "ready for AIDS", ready, that is, with the oppositional discursive strategies and organizational structures in place to counter the dominant scientific and moralistic discourses of AIDS. The rise of AIDS coincides "opportunistically", not only with the psychic fragmentation of the individual in post-industrial societies as Arcand implies, but also with a time when the

central questions of culture: sexuality and death, power and knowledge, language and representation, and attendant questions of race, class and gender are being critically re-examined and re-invigorated by a burgeoning Queer activism informed by the intertwined theoretical strains of feminism and Foucauldian discourse analysis. AIDS cultural activism, as formulated by American art critic Douglas Crimp and British writer Simon Watney, borrows this discursive framework wholesale and turns it to the realm of collective practice and lived experience. Crimp's Winter 1987 edition of the journal **October**, **AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism** (later reprinted as a monograph), stands as the exemplar of engaged critical practice in the age of AIDS. By extension, the theatrics of ACT-UP in New York and the emblematic art of Gran Fury are the conscious embodiment of this critical/activist project.

A Leap in the Dark brings together the writings of thirty-two contributors involved in AIDS activism on a variety of cultural fronts, some familiar names in the literature of AIDS (Crimp, Watney, Altman, Patton), some not. The project grew out of SIDART, an international series of cultural events and exhibitions which took place during the Fifth International Conference on AIDS in Montréal in June of 1989. What editors Allan Klusaček and Ken Morrison have

assembled here is a sampling of the spirit and diversity which characterized that event, and the range is impressive: essays from deep in the heart of the academy (Elbaz & Murbach, Crosby, Arcand); critical interventions (Altman, Crimp, Grover, Greyson, Watney, Gagnon & Folland); private musings (Kalin, Daniel, Navarre); safe sex pedagogies (Patton, Baggaley, Speck, Carlomusto & Bordowitz); theatrical excerpts (Adams, Stetson, Metcalf & Smith, Sealy), punctuated by an occasional angry poem (Lynch); an embarrassingly trite song lyric or two (Callen); or a raunchy cartoon (Konig). The intent and effect here is to be inclusionary and polyphonous (the same strategy employed in the "heteroglossia" of Miller's anthology, only more so), even if this means an apparent abandonment of editorial guidance and control. Although grouped tenuously into six thematic sections (historical, activist aesthetics, film and video representations, pornography and safe sex education, AIDS and literature, AIDS and theatre), the voices here speak for themselves, in dialogue across the pages and to the culturally specific communities for which they were intended.

Some voices are stronger than others, none are privileged by any organizing principle. The editors are emphatic in the introduction: "We make no apologies about the sense of specificity inherent to this collection. We do not claim in any way to speak for Others....This book is not organized according to any hierarchy of aesthetic expression (a debate that surprisingly in the late twentieth century still inspires controversy) nor in order to give particular legitimacy to any one culture, form of expression, or author"(xii). What the contributors do share, for the most part, is a refusal, in Crimp's words, to partake in any of the "personal, elegiac expressions that appear to dominate the art world response to AIDS", and offer instead critical, theoretical, activist alternatives. The deliciously subversive videos of John Greyson, and the hardcore safe sex educational videos by Gay Men's Health Crisis' Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz in New

York and Weiland Speck in Berlin described in this anthology are models of the ethical, artistic response to the crisis.

Neither marginal nor valorized in this collection are several pieces by contributors from developing countries, and their attempts to speak to their respective communities through literature or theatrical ceremony. There is Doumbi-Fakoly who surveys the terrain of African literature in order to better position a literary response to AIDS; Chandra Mouli and K. N. Rao who write movingly of travelling theatrical performances of AIDS educational theatre in Zambia; and the puppeteers Mike Milvase and Gary Friedman who share their experiences with "Puppets Against AIDS" (stifle your laugh) in Namibia. Closer to home, there is Evan Adams' hard-edged script of **Snapshot**, a theatre-in-education piece intended for native communities.

Several of the essayists in **A Leap in the Dark** wrestle with the contradictions inherent in any representation of AIDS, whether those of the mainstream variety or those directed towards our own communities. Thus Simon Watney confronts the ambiguity surrounding gay men's reception of the film **Longtime Companion**; Tom Kalin (of **Swoon** fame) meditates on the paradoxes of **Cruising**, Randy Shilts and the advertising of Klein, Weber and Warhol; and Cindy Patton critiques the rhetoric of "cultural sensitivity" of public health officials, and defends the use of safe sex "vernaculars" and the simultaneously positive and negative roles of sexually explicit materials deemed pornographic as effective outreach.

If each piece in this wonderfully schizophrenic volume seems tentative and fragmentary, collectively they amount to a colourful group "snapshot" themselves, in this moment in time in the fight against AIDS.

Paul Della Penna is a great big fag and writer living in Toronto.

Historical Revisions:

Sex, Gender and the Past

What was it like to be a woman, a male homosexual or a lesbian before the women's liberation and gay rights movements of the sixties? In cinema, what vocabulary can be used to describe those experiences without colonizing the past with perspectives of the present? Indeed, is it possible or even desirable? These are the questions tackled by three independent feature films screened at this year's Toronto International Film Festival of Festivals. **Swoon**, **Gerda** and **Legal Memory** are films that concern themselves as much with the politics of representing history as with the historical incidents they seek to interpret.

The time honoured approach to historical filmmaking has been the simple appeal to authenticity. Just think of the hype generated around **Dances With Wolves**. Gratitude aside, that Hollywood should ever feel accountable to the peoples and cultures it represents, one problem with claims to authenticity is that they inevitably challenge the viewer to notice every little anachronism, every updated hairdo or substituted language. Another is that historical films reveal more about the obsessions of the societies in which they are produced than the ones they portray. **Dances with Wolves** tells us as much about contemporary fixations on the nuclear family, changing models of masculinity and the rise of green politics as it sheds light on the early encounters between Native Americans and the encroaching white

presence. I'm picking on Hollywood here, but a transparent authenticity has also been the goal of many historical documentaries—including politically progressive documentaries—as they attempt to open windows onto the past.

Rather than mask the viewpoint of the present, **Swoon**, **Legal Memory** and **Gerda** proclaim a contingent, explicitly revisionist view of history. All of these films revisit famous, public incidents in which discourses about sexuality and gender impacted on judicial and state processes. **Swoon**, directed by Tom Kalin, revisits the 1924 Leopold and Loeb murder case in which two rich and well educated Chicago 18-year-olds were convicted of murdering a young boy they had kidnapped for money...and fun. **Legal Memory**, by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, probes the story of Leo Mantha, who in 1959 was the last man hanged in British Columbia, convicted of

Films at the Toronto Festival of Festivals
September 10 - September 20, 1992

Distribution

Gerda: Full Frame, 394 Euclid Ave., Toronto

Legal Memory: V Tape, 183 Bathurst St., Toronto



murdering his lover on a Victoria naval base. **Gerda**, by Brenda Longfellow, reconsiders the 1966 scandal involving John Diefenbaker's associate defence minister, Pierre Seigny and Gerda Munsinger, a German immigrant with a penchant for partying, who was accused of being a communist spy.

All three films set out to lay bare the discourses about sexuality and gender that informed how these events were played out and especially how they were interpreted by the public and the government at the time. **Gerda**, for example, explores a pre-feminist deployment of femininity. With great clarity, the film demonstrates how, in the period before gender equity and affirmative action, sex appeal was one of the few levers through which working class women could rise in the world. Yet, as a contingent form of power—entirely dependent on the ability to render favours from men of money and authority—sexiness was undependable.

Without her MPs, Seigny and Hees, Gerda was a nobody and after the scandal she fell back into ordinary, working class life. What the film also shows is

that while patriarchy created the conditions and maintained the necessity for this exercise of strategic femininity, the only way it could interpret women like Gerda was as prostitute or spy.

Unlike Alfred Hitchcock's treatment of the Leopold and Loeb case in his 1948 film, **Rope**, the sexuality of the young murderers in **Swoon** is neither absent nor looming. The two men had sex with each other and as the court is told, Leopold would be allowed to rub his penis between Loeb's legs in exchange for his complicity in various crimes. Yet **Swoon** intelligently frustrates the desire to codify this hetero-, homo- and bi-. Both men planned to marry after the murder and Leopold did so when he was eventually released from jail in 1958. (Loeb was murdered in jail.) Similarly, whereas the prosecution continuously asserts that this is a clear instance of "sexual perversion," the film also resists any knee jerk recuperation of these two killers as early gay martyr-heroes. **Swoon's** publicity material and its poster suggest that rather than attempt a simplistic (and unnecessary) defense of homosexuality, the film is rather about the functioning of homophobia and anti-Semitism. However, the complexity of its analysis and the subtlety of its presentation make for a project in which meaning and politics remain relatively embedded. Homophobia only becomes sharply focused during the trial and acquittal of Loeb's murderer. And while there are several references to Jewish identity by the men themselves, the role of anti-Semitism in both the trial and the film remains undeveloped.

Although by no means an unobtrusive work, **Legal Memory** is more definitive in articulating its political purpose. After an absence of twenty years, Helen visits a dying aunt in British Columbia. Returned to her childhood home, she is flooded by remembrances, including that of a male cousin who inexplicably disappears from her memories. Confronted with the knowledge of Leo's execution, Helen becomes obsessed with investigating the circumstances. Her persistent inter-

views and dogged archival research produce a picture of a pre-gay homosexual subculture subsisting within a conservative and repressive society, of RCMP interrogations and harassment, of homophobic witch-hunting within the military, and of people with power afraid or unwilling to stick their necks out. **Legal Memory** asks the question "would Leo Mantha have been hung had he not been homosexual?"

The tone of each film is distinct. **Gerda** is campy and wickedly ironic, **Legal Memory** is introspective and enquiring, **Swoon** is cool and confident. Yet, given the similarity of their endeavours, it isn't surprising that these films devise similar tools for (de)constructing a meta-cinema. To some extent all employ a postmodern pastiche of documentary, dramatic and experimental forms. All films incorporate archival footage as more than a simple illustrative technique: ironically, lyrically, as political counterpoint. Each film uses a different approach to deal with the representation of time, although the effect is always to unsettle a facile contemporary reading of the material presented, but also to resist the notion that through the film the viewer can unproblematically enter the era in which the drama is set. At the beginning of **Gerda**, for example, archival footage of the real Gerda Munsinger is juxtaposed with the actress who plays her, producing a tension between past and present, truth and fiction. The world of **Swoon** is sprinkled with wildly anachronistic props, producing a disturbing temporal fluidity. **Legal Memory**, on the other hand, which is partly about the play of memory and history, marks off its period sequences visually and aurally: artfully slowed down black and white backed by an ominous, brooding hum, while the rest of the film is rendered in naturalistic colour and sound.

These are first features for their directors and the freshness evident in each of these projects derives partly from the appropriation of other forms into the conventions of feature filmmaking. Kalin, Steele and Tomczak have all

worked previously in video. **Legal Memory** was actually shot and edited on video, evidenced by the abundance of wipes and dissolves. Further, rooted in the tradition of performance-based video art, the film stars Tomczak as Mantha, Steele as Helen, and Laroux Peoples, Steele's daughter, as the young Helen. Tom Kalin's last project was an experimental videotape about AIDS. **Swoon's** stunning visual impact, however, could as easily be compared to commercial music video as to video art, composed as it is of a seemingly continuous sweep of perfect compositions, fragmented images and astonishing angles in grainy black and white. Film scholar Brenda Longfellow, on the other hand, draws on a wide range of techniques learned from radical documentary, feminist film theory and of course the German tradition, from Brecht through Fassbinder and beyond.

None of these films tries to displace old interpretations of their character's motivations with new correct readings. Kalin's unwillingness to psychologize his lead characters is striking, and in **Legal Memory** we learn precious little about Leo Mantha and what propelled him. Even in **Gerda**, in which the protagonist is very much present, the overall emphasis is more on the social than on concocting alternative sympathetic psychological explanations. The focus of these films is in foregrounding and deconstructing the discourses surrounding each incident at the time. The fact that none of these highly public events are as yet lost from living memory means that a lively tension with the viewer's own memory is provoked. So, rather than comprehending some distant and deviant figure, the viewer is seduced into pondering her or his own implication in the (re)production of discourse.

Richard Fung makes videos and lives in Toronto.

Part II by Kathleen Pirrie Adams upcoming in Vol. 16 #3

ROBERT F. REID-PHARR

Fire



Programme at the 6th New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival
Anthology Film Archives, New York
September 10 – September 20, 1992

The one thing that the organizers of the 6th New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival clearly wanted represented in this year's series of programs was the diversity of lesbian and gay life. Films and videos from Japan and Brazil were screened alongside (white) works dealing with AIDS, the "zine aesthetic," body image, sex and a host of other topics. This emphasis on diversity was underscored by the screening of seven videos and one film collectively known as **Fire**.

Fire, curated by videomakers Thomas Allen Harris and Cheryl Dunye, represented a huge success for the festival organizers, the curators and the artists. It was the opening program of the festival, and as such, it was surrounded by nearly as much hoopla as hip, gay, Lower East Side New York could muster. Speeches were made, flowers were given away, hugs and kisses were passed about liberally and a largely Black audience crackled with anticipation as they eagerly awaited the representation of "experimental Blackness." It was during this screening—and the repeat of it the following week—that I

was struck by the fact that the most basic questions about the practice of progressive multiculturalism had not been asked.

Fire was indeed successful and the eight works included within it were, for the most part, smart and refreshingly entertaining. At the same time, however, **Fire** was first and foremost a Black event. I hazard to say that ninety percent of the Black patrons of the festival came to one or both of the screenings of **Fire** and to nothing else. Moreover, I know of only one work by an African American (Jack Waters and Peter Cramer's **Derringsdesnibelungensieg-friedstodvolsungasagaedda**) that was actually screened apart from the **Fire** collection. The festival was, then, a microcosm of New York life. That is to say, while the city has as rich a mix of people as anywhere on the planet, it remains steadfastly and unapologetically segregated. Is this what we mean, then, when we speak of multiculturalism?

My thinking on these issues was further confused by the fact that several of the works dealt either explicitly or

implicitly with the manner in which Blackness and Black people are represented to themselves and to the rest of the world, particularly the lesbian and gay world. Thomas Harris' **Black Body** invites the audience to take a long hard look at the artist's own (naked) Black body. The end of a metal cord that has been wrapped around his writhing form juts out from his buttocks, creating the image of a tail, thereby reinscribing the spectre of animality onto the Black subject. Cheryl Dunye, on the other hand, looks directly at the question of cross-racial lesbian desire in her **Potluck and the Passion**. This work, which features wisecracking interviews with he "actors" interspersed with their "performances", lampoons cross-racial desire as it chronicles the development of racial and sexual identity within (Black) lesbian life.

Ruppert Gabriel's **Rage and Desire** and Raul Ferrera-Belanquet's **Ebbo for Elegua** also take up the questions surrounding "Black" identity. They stood out in the program, however, because of the artists' styles and their backgrounds, British and Cuban, respectively.

Gabriel's piece, the only film in the series, told the story of Rotimi Fani-Kayode, the Nigerian/British photographer who died of AIDS in 1989. It should hardly be thought of as experimental given its reliance on the rather hackneyed device of representing the artist with AIDS as the quintessential tragic figure lying helplessly on his hospital bed awaiting death. As a consequence this work appeared thoroughly trite and predictable, the dance sequence, interviews with Rotimi's lover, and the home videos notwithstanding. The inclusion of Ferrera-Belanquet's **Ebbo for Elegua** was also intended to demonstrate the diversity of the African diaspora by juxtaposing the Latino piece against those produced by African Americans. Unfortunately, however, the work gets bogged as the artist continuously repeats the video's two primary elements: an interview with a working-class gay Chicano man and footage of Ferrera-Belanquet painting his body and extemporizing on issues of identity and (African-based) spirituality.

The four remaining pieces: Dawn Suggs' **I Never Danced the Way Girls Were Supposed To**, Carlo Carmona's **Slap Rap**, Vejan Smith's **Mother's Hands** and Shari Frlot's **A Cosmic Demonstration of Sexuality** were striking precisely because their focus was primarily on the texture of Black gay and lesbian life, not the thick morass of tentativeness and ambiguity that typifies the relationship of "Blacks" to our various "outsiders". Both Suggs and Carmona play with the stereotypes of Blackness and homosexuality to advance their works' narratives. Suggs' piece opens with the sequence of a Black lesbian couple leaving their Manhattan apartment as, presumably, heterosexual Black female voices comment on the tragedy of the couple's lesbianism. After the audience is treated to a full ten minutes of workaday images of Black lesbian life, the scene is repeated. The same female voices are used, but this time the commentators are lesbians themselves who revel in a fit of same-sex lust for the unsuspecting cou-

ple. Carmona's piece opens with an image of a Black man forcibly pushing an Asian man against the side of a building, thereby invoking the notion of Blacks as hyper-aggressive and Asians as passive. By the end of the work, however, we find that the two characters are actually lovers. The shoving sequence was, moreover, the first heated and excited consummation of their passion.

I would like to end with a discussion of Vejan Smith's **Mother's Hands** and Shari Frlot's **A Cosmic Demonstration of Sexuality** because of the way that these works eloquently illustrate the issues that I raised at the beginning of this piece. Smith's video examines child abuse and incest from the perspective of both the Black subject and the child. The work opens with shots of an obviously poor, single mother scrubbing her apartment and kneading bread. This is precisely the image of the good Black mother. Her hands both feed and cleanse, thereby providing the basics, as it were, of (Black) life, sustenance and cleanliness (read respectability) that construct the Black subject as "fit" to enter "The Mainstream". Smith spoils our expectations, however, as we see the mother's hands washing a doll while the phrase "Shut your mouth and open your legs" repeats in the background. The viewer is forced to the horrid recognition, therefore, that as the mother feeds, cleanses and cares for the child, she also abuses it. The good mother and the bad mother are one and the same. Frlot's piece makes a valiant and successful effort to connect sexuality with the rhythms of the universe: the flow of the tides, the phases of the moon, the changes of the seasons. The work revolves around a series of thoroughly illuminating interviews with Black women who talk about their periods, their sex lives, birth, death and the nature of the universe. These women's voices are at once funny and profound, specific and universal.

It is this juxtaposition of the local to the worldly that makes these two pieces—and indeed most of the others as well—so exciting. Smith and Frlot

have constructed work that is unmistakably Black while at the same time making statements about the general nature of human existence. Strangely enough, however, their audience was limited to just those people most interested in that infinitely indecipherable entity, "Blackness". This leads me to wonder if the 6th New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival was precisely (un)experimental in its race politics. That is to say, the expectation is always that any progressive event will include its Black section in which immensely talented Black artists display their work. There is nothing radical or new about this. It seems to me that the challenge now is still to integrate, as it were, to push beyond the limits of received notions of what constitutes good multicultural practice to struggle beyond the idea of separate spheres, to construct a community that is as messy, funky, difficult, exciting and unsure as the streets of New York themselves. The road still lies before us.

Robert Reid-Pharr is a cultural critic who teaches at the Department of English at the City College of New York.



still from **Black Body**, Thomas Allen Harris, video, 1992

reviews

reviews

Ellen Flanders

Looking Beyond Identity: Coalition Initiatives from the Left

SANDRA HAAR

In recent years, "identity politics" has come under increased critical scrutiny; more often than not the proposed alternative is "coalition politics". Proponents of this later position often decry identity politics as a concept whose usefulness has passed, or as a fragmentary force that has diffused and immobilized the work of Left forces, rendering even the idea of "the Left" a political relic. The ideas that one's politics are (necessarily or exclusively) based on one's oppressed identity—be it female, Black, gay—or, that it is only among those sim-

ilarly oppressed that one can effectively organize or undertake political action, have been seriously called into question.

A show with the title **Looking Beyond Identity: Coalition Initiatives from the Left** would thus seem to occur

py a clearly marked position in the growing scepticism towards an identity politic. But while Flanders' "artist's statement" is something of a short treatise delineating the necessity of coalition efforts for combating fascist movements, the ten photographs that comprise the show offer a considerably

more complex treatment of the issue than the statement provided.

Looking Beyond Identity is unique in a number of respects: firstly, it looks at identity within the context of anti-oppression politics, weaving one into the other so that identity is created by politics and vice versa, rather than following the identity-into-politics direction we are used to seeing; and secondly, because it does so from a Jewish perspective.

While using documentary photographs as "raw material", the pictures deconstruct the traditional assumptions about the documentary tradition. Each piece utilizes two, sometimes more, burned-in or overlaid images which are printed from black-&-white negatives in solid bright colours. Each photograph is accompanied by a short text that explains the origins, history, or meaning of the various elements used in the piece. Using photographs taken in England, Israel, Palestine and elsewhere, Flanders presents meditations on nationalism and dislocation, allusions to the spectre of fascism, and calls to action.

The incitements to activism involve images of anti-fascist demonstrations in London, where a range of placards indicate the active presence of gay, socialist, Black and Jewish groups. Although selecting political examples from outside Canada offers a useful global perspective, it nevertheless runs the risk of ignoring the many examples of both fascism and racism—and the fights against them—which take place in the local context.

In a luminous yellow-orange photo-

graph, a double woman's symbol traced in the sand is flanked by lesbians demonstrating against fascism—a comment on the ephemerality of "identities" and the meaning of the double venus, in the face of the necessity of political organizing across communities.

A photograph of a mikveh (a ritual bath used primarily by women) overlaid with an image of several Torahs, both from the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam, brings together images that denote, on the one hand, uncleanness and shame, on the other, holiness and sanctity. But this incongruity, which speaks of the dislocation of women within Judaism, is also related to the photographs **Searching in Kew Gardens, Whose Land Is It Anyway** and **Bedouins Harvesting** which deal with the themes of Jews in a strange land and Palestinians displaced from their land.

Another piece uses a photo of a London subway advertisement featuring a large photograph of Adolf Hitler, accompanied by a caption which reads: "Do Something He Always Wanted To Do, Visit Churchill's Bunker". Off to one side, a small graphic image of an enraged face appears with the caption "Silence=Death"; below is a war memorial connoting history, memory, and the Holocaust. In the short statement accompanying the photograph we are told that the advertisement has remained in this public space despite opposition by Jewish groups. The lower picture provides a context, and a reminder of the reasons for the Jewish protest, while the **Silence=Death** image emphasizes the necessity of this protest. It also reflects Flanders' loca-

tion in both Jewish and gay communities; so that this "borrowing" becomes a way of integrating the knowledge that comes with living in both places. For it is a continual struggle for those of us who are marginalized by virtue of our culture, gender, sexuality and politics, to connect these aspects of ourselves.

As well as linking these efforts on the part of Jews to the struggles of gay people, it also freely borrows the symbols and slogans from one struggle into another context, assuming a common basis for doing so. Flanders does this in order to show the similarity of these political positions and these histories of struggle, just as, in a parallel fashion, she indicates the need for different communities to ally with one another in political struggle.

Looking Beyond Identity is, in many ways, a deeply personal show. Infused throughout with searching perceptions and personal history—**All That Remains**, for example, shows the artist and her mother at a Holocaust memorial inside a tunnel-like form surrounded by sombre colouring, and deals with the destruction of much of the artist's family in the past century—they provide a basis which informs the politics.

Oppression and liberation, diaspora

and nationalism, have been integral themes in Jewish identity for over two thousand years. In this show, Flanders threads this historical Jewishness into contemporary political responsibility activism and coalition. It is significant that this is a perspective that has gone virtually unrecognized in anti-racist, progressive movements and organizations—in this city in particular. **Looking Beyond Identity** articulates, personally and politically, a Jewish perspective and its place in progressive—in this case anti-fascist—politics.

Tangle Gallery, Toronto
September 20 – November 13, 1992



above: **Anti-Nazi Demonstration, London, July 1992.**
colour photograph
opposite: **Houses of Parliament, London, July 1992.**
colour photograph



Sandra Haar is a member of the **Fireweed** and **Toronto Women's Bookstore** collectives.

reviews

reviews

Touching: The Self:

Diana Thorneycroft

Folio Gallery, Calgary

September 19 – November 13, 1992

In the artist's statement that accompanies her exhibition, **Touching: The Self**, Diana Thorneycroft explains that her photographs are intended to "explore personal and universal issues of sexuality. Informed by feminist theory and psychoanalysis, [Thorneycroft has] pursued themes that have assisted [her] in understanding the construction of the self." Dutifully, several writers seem to have engaged in a reading of her work following this lead. Keith Louise Fulton and Shirley J.R. Madill, in essays for the Winnipeg Art Gallery catalogue of Thorneycroft's spring 1992 exhibition, offer quick overviews of the relevant psychoanalytic and feminist theories of gender identity, and limit their investigation of Thorneycroft's work to how they see the photographs as illustrative of these theories.

While these texts are excellent readings, they are seduced by the intent of the artist, to at once reveal and conceal, to weave a protective psychic veil while simultaneously spinning a confession. Although Thorneycroft describes her photographs as "exploring personal and universal issues of sexuality," her emphasis on her relationship to theory is a sleight of hand directing attention away from the more disturbing "personal" aspects of these photographs. When, in their turn, Fulton and Madill relate Thorneycroft's photographs to general, theoretical concepts, the con-

tent of the images also becomes generalized; a self-portrait of Diana Thorneycroft's body becomes equivalent to "woman", and masks made from photographs of her individual family members become "father, mother, brother, sister". This depersonalization further distances the intimate movement already initiated by the artist herself: even her self becomes generalized "universalized", through the exhibition title, to "The Self". When works are so obviously loaded with personal and familial content as Thorneycroft's are, translating them into theory seems to be a too comfortable evasion of a potentially volatile personal content.

The black and white photographs in **Touching: The Self** are heavily chiaroscuroed images ranging in size from 14 to 34 inches square. Most are self-portraits in which the artist, "in total darkness, lock(s) the shutter open and then place(s) herself in front of the camera. The only light coming from a hand-held flashlight moved at random, exposing light to some areas and not to others" [artist's statement]. The light reveals the artist costumed with artificial gender signifiers: a rubber penis, large plastic breast. There are also toys, suspended WWII war planes, a variety of plastic dolls, the occasional toy gun—further signifiers of cultured gender difference.

Initially, the artist appears to be play-

ing with gender role construction. Thorneycroft employs what she describes as her androgynous body (small breasts, slim hips, sinewy arms, short hair) with the fake breasts and penis, gendered masks, slight costumes (most of the photographs are nudes) and lighting to create a series of gender blended images. She explains that "if the photographs are erotic, they could also create discomfort in the way they threaten sexual identity, which from birth has been defined in difference." Certainly a quick glance at **Self-Portrait (Brother Mask With Toy Gun)**, with its male-masked face and penis, may leave the viewer with the impression that the image is of a young man. A second look may reveal female breasts and a feminine body, perhaps causing some slight anxiety about one's attraction to ambiguously gendered bodies, or discomfort with sexually indeterminate bodies.

Thorneycroft explains that "the androgynous looking figure represents a denial of rigid gender roles, erases the notion of difference and ignores the rules that make us absolutely male or female." But what may be true of "the androgynous looking figure" is not necessarily true of a lean, heterosexual woman photographing herself trying-on these exaggerated appendages.

Everywhere in this exhibition staged slippages tell the viewer that these photographs are dress-up, masquerade,



Self-portrait (Brother Mask with Toy Gun), silver print, 1990



Untitled (Fish Bride), silver print, 1992

playful identification and performance. The shiny, parodic, erotic "breasts" with their straps showing are undisguisedly store-bought, the plastic penis is forever turgid but never erect. But most importantly, many of the works are titled "self-portrait", and the same body appears in most of the photographs, indicating that the artist, Diana Thorneycroft, clearly a woman, is trying on difference. That she uses her own body suggests that she is working or playing out personal meanings over and above the possible social meanings.

Thorneycroft's images are better read as the staged residue of personal exploration than as coherent political statements. These images do not "erase the notion of difference and ignore the rules that make us absolutely male or female" [artist's statement]; rather, they play with the borders. Thorneycroft's photographs represent one player's enactment of the limits of her game.

The photographs in this exhibition are not by an artist illustrating gender theory, but are the partial records of a woman exploring and performing gender and familial relations. The theoretical and personal importance of such play is that the very fact of its self-contradiction is a demonstration or performance of the contradictions in selves constructed in late capitalist patriarchy. On the other hand, private performance differs from a public exhibition of an image from that

performance. The luxury to play (with) these roles in public is usually reserved for stably gendered heterosexuals for whom it can be momentary play, instead of being.

The inadequacy of the theorizing of these photographs is that the female nude is already an overdetermined site. The erotics of the male gaze has so penetrated the genre that it is rare for any photograph of an unclothed woman, however masked, to escape being contained within the visual history of female nudes as the objectified site of visualized, heterosexual, male desire. With this in mind, most of Thorneycroft's photographs can not be read as an evasion of the visual codes of conventional erotics. Photographs like **Dream, Man With Dolls, Hermes With Infant** are especially unlikely to slip from their resemblance to heterotopia. A photograph like **Bride**, with its sleeping or dead woman discovered by flashlight lying splayed on the earth at night, is unashamedly beautiful, romantic, even erotic, but it is a vision of narcissistic romance threatened by the haunting possibility of violence. However, in disturbing the male gaze, these photographs have also diffused the erotic or gender identification anxiety thought to be the project of the earlier photographs.

The feature that most disrupts a generalized gender theory reading of

Touching: The Self are the family photographs. The masks do not only represent, for example, an archetypal or universal "Father". A mask and an artificial penis might enable the artist to "appropriate the symbol of fatherhood... and feel [what it was like to be] endowed with patriarchal power". But when Diana Thorneycroft wears a rubber penis and a photo-mask of her own father's face, "universal" readings quickly become less intriguing than this specific staging of the family romance.

In every picture Thorneycroft's face is either cropped, averted from the camera and obscured by shadows, veiled, or masked by photo-masks made variously from the faces of Thorneycroft's father, mother, sister and brother. It is as though the artist will not face the camera except in the guise of another, or that facing the family requires disguise. She must literally put on the mask for the camera. The slippages she allows to happen in these photographs, the exposure of the familial body, peels back the skin of the family photo to reveal the conflicting desires that make the skin-mask necessary.

In many ways these photographs seem part of a complex critique/vengeance strategy; a reading of and a revenge on the institution of the nuclear family. But because she chooses to wear the images of her own family members on her naked body, who are then placed in situations beyond their control, the artist is exacting her judgement on those particular persons as well. These people, identified only in their relationship to the artist, have their images swept up in the unconscious of the artist. It is in this respect that Thorneycroft takes the greatest personal risk.

David Garneau is a practising artist and a student completing his Master's degree in English at the University of Calgary. He is also a founding member and editor of Artichoke Magazine.

LLOYD WONG

Chaotic Kinds of Dreams

The new kid on the block in Vancouver, with big plans to set up a national network, is the Rungh Cultural Society. Established to document, promote, produce and facilitate contemporary South Asian art, Rungh's most ambitious project to date has been the publication of *Rungh* magazine. This hip new addition to the magazine rack is a collaborative effort of many people across the country and began, like so many great ideas, with living room conversations. After two years, the results of these conversations began to materialize, gathering steam as two of the driving forces, Sherazad Jamal and Zool Suleman, took to the road to find out what the cultural terrain was like across Canada. Stopping in Toronto proved to be a critical point in Rungh's development, as the debates and concerns raised by events like *Desh: Pradesh*, *Race To The Screen*, and the *Images Film and Video Festival* played a significant role in shaping the first issue.

Vancouver is not without its own community of artists of colour who have begun to mobilize and organize. The birth of *Rungh* coincided with the controversial *Fabled Territories* exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The ensuing community responses provided energy and focus for *Rungh* as well as *Rungh* providing a forum for many artists. To some Toronto audiences, it seemed that there were much more exciting things happening on the west coast. To Suleman, this meant it was critical to

have a national forum for dialogue and exchange.

In speaking with Suleman and Jamal, it becomes evident that *Rungh* is borne out of a complex history of colonization, South Asian arts and politics. Jamal explains: "South Asia, the sub continent has had a long history, even before colonialism, of using the arts to propagate messages. Whether it was a religious message or a political one, the arts were heavily used in mostly oral tradition type things, some performance, music for sure. The interesting part about South Asian communities is that they are already diverse and have a history of taking in and absorbing elements from other cultures. I think that British culture gave certain things like the novel and the short story as forms which were then adopted and transmuted to fit a particular agenda whether you're talking about Rabindranath Tagore or contemporary writers. One of the 'gifts' of colonialism, was to actually separate art from everyday life within South Asian communities. For example, we've been looking at the built environment and the relationship between the architect/designer and the craftsman. Before colonization it was a really integrated relationship; in fact there was a reciprocal dependency in terms of the design and execution of a building. The British brought architect as god as an ethic and they systematically destroyed the entire craft system, the results of which are coming to bear now because there are a lot of

buildings that need restoration but the craftsmen no longer exist.

In terms of there being a tradition of expressing an ideology through the arts, it's been there for a really long time. There hasn't been a lot of validation and encouragement for the arts and hence they tend to be seen as marginal. We're hoping to turn that around."

Suleman adds, "I think resistance takes energy, so the good aspect of being colonized, if one wants to call it that, is that it engenders a resistance, because I don't think the human spirit likes being trodden upon that much. The challenge becomes then what to do with that energy. There are times when you need it to overthrow the oppressor and there are times when that same energy can be transformed in a very creative kind of way. *Rungh* is trying to deal with the definition of that channelling, and the product of that energy. It's still political. It's still dealing with the oppressions, whatever they may be. It's not necessarily about an integration but it's more about playing a role in the defining. For instance, the art projects we commission, we feel like we helped to create and get more work done, by the same token we allow other people to speak about it. Other parts of the society try to produce work which we will hopefully cover in this magazine and other people will cover. It's an integrated approach, to create work, to document work, to allow the magazine to be a platform for other people's ideas, to have other people look in on those conversations, to have these conversations speak out to those audiences. It's those layers that we're hoping to bring together. I don't think you can say any longer, 'I'm just a recipient of information, I only do this one thing and that's it.' I think the time for that is past. If you want to engage in these discussions, you have to become an active participant in them."

Reaching a broader South Asian audience remains a complicated task. The support from the alternative arts

communities stems from a progressive politics that have put issues of inclusion and diversity onto the cultural agenda, but *Rungh* also wants to reach out to the audience which includes our mothers, fathers and grandparents. The first issue has been met with support from some of the commercial concerns of the South Asian communities. The magazine is available in stores along Main street (Vancouver's little India) and Gerrard (Toronto's version). As well, the community cable channel has provided support for the project.

Suleman comments on the complexity of *Rungh's* audience; "How many people really come out to challenging events in the mainstream, however you define the dominant culture? I think that all we can do is to try and make ourselves relevant to the younger generations of those communities, because those who are second generation—meaning born and grown up here—have to deal with the problems of media representation and racism in very different ways than their parents did. The reality is that a lot of these people are into becoming dentists and driving a BMW. Those sorts of issues of commerce and capitalism exist very much in all [immigrant communities]."

He continues, "I find that a lot of the younger voices in the South Asian communities don't want to speak about difference. They want to homogenize it because they somehow see it as a mechanism of survival for themselves and they buy into this notion of merit, that there is an even playing field and that merit will be recognized somehow, a very liberal individual model. We want to crack that belief to show that there's a skewed playing field."

While *Rungh* seeks to challenge ideas within the communities, approval is also important for the project. But that's not a simple thing either. "I think the South Asian community is very good at recognizing the obvious. Until it becomes obvious the

Rungh has something to say that's of interest to the larger community, interviews like this will legitimate it. Then they can embrace it, but they won't do the legitimating themselves. For example, with Ian's book [Ian Iqbal Rashid, *Black Markets: White Boyfriends and Other Acts of Elision*, published by the TSAR]. He may have been writing poetry for a long time but since he's been published, which was seen as an indicator of legitimacy, and then it got reviewed in *The Globe and Mail*, there's a sense of (pride)—'he's one of ours'."

In addition to the magazine, *Rungh's* other activities include working with the *Toronto South Asian Review* on west coast launches of their books, working with the Vancouver International Writer's Festival and Vancouver International Film Festival, highlighting work by South Asian artists. *Rungh's* larger cultural project is a broad one which includes lesbian and gay voices, feminist insights and anti-racism. And they're not afraid to cross the boundaries between grass roots activism and more theoretical explorations like the upcoming performance series on the body. Recent developments in cultural analysis and the impact of non-dominant perspectives suggest that the time is right for a project such as *Rungh*. Suleman is quick to point out however that as timely a project it may seem to be, *Rungh* owes much to other South Asian community publications and the history and work of other South Asian artists that have come before *Rungh*. It is hoped that the magazine can provide a forum among many others for dialogue, expression and inquiry.

Lloyd Wong is a member of the Editorial Collective of FUSE Magazine.



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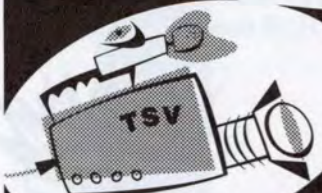
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