

A PUZZLE FOR YOU

FUSE

MAGAZINE

Can you imagine yourself walking through a forest 50 years from now? What do you see? Will forests look like orchards with trees planted in straight rows? Perhaps radio controlled robots will grow up and down the rows, mowing the weeds, fertilizing the trees and spraying to control pests. Will there be much less forest for logging than there is today? Will Canadians use up most of the old growth forests and then decide it costs too much to plant new forests? Will it be cheaper to buy wood from other countries than to grow and harvest our own? Will Canada be one of the few countries in the world to keep some old growth forests? Will tourists pay to see these forests that have never been logged? Will film companies use these forests to shoot movies about long ago? Will scientists find ways to make trees grow much faster? What other qualities might these "super trees" have? Will people of the future grow trees that are free of knots, crooked sections or disease? How often have you thought, "There's got to be an easier way?" Will modern mills be completely run by computers and robots? Can you imagine a mill where logs go in one end, finished paper comes out the other end, and no workers are needed? Will forest managers make all their decisions without ever seeing a real forest? Will people of the future use different paper products from what we use today? Will they wear disposable paper clothing and eat high protein paper burgers? People in the forest industry know this. They are always developing new products they think people will find useful.



Marusia Bodurkiw takes an inside look at the international lesbian & gay film festival circuit.
 Rozena Maart examines the ascension of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court of the U.S.A.
 Oliver Kellhammer uncovers the language of corporate propaganda in the forest industry.
 Janisse Browning explains how racist depictions prevent self-determination.



M. WOOD.

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Dear FUSE:

IN "CULTURE JOCKS," A REVIEW of *Race to the Screen* in the Fall 1991 issue of FUSE (15:1&2), Larissa Lai quoted me as saying that "those of mixed Asian/European descent are merely confused." I in no way support this statement, although I understand how she could have taken this from my story. I don't believe that one's politics directly determine one's race, gender, class, or sexuality. This is not to say that consciousness is some free floating, transcendent entity either. I believe that there is a dialectical process.

The story referred to arose as I reflected on an anti-racist camp for high school students I attended, in which a part of the process called for students to situate themselves according to "the groups we belong to." Facilitators also told the students they could join others who are "seen" to be "like them." At this point, students who were of mixed African and European heritage automatically went to the black group, whereas students of white and Asian parents refused to join either the white or the Asian group, identifying themselves as separate from both. My purpose in telling this story was that it is yet another illustration of how racial identity is not natural but socially constructed. It underlined for me how, in the historical context of North America, any amount of Africanness constitutes a person as black, while Asian identity is not so overdetermined. My point is that, although there is a sense that people who are not white share a certain otherness in relation to the discourse of white supremacy, it is not productive to collapse and generalize our specific histories and locations into categories such as "people of colour," although other terms which we could use to articulate our solidarity are as unclear to me as it is obvious that this solidarity is necessary.

Another related point, though not communicated by this anecdote, is that it is important for us to acknowledge that what we "see" as "colour" is often deter-

mined by factors other than actual visible difference, and that the dividing lines between whiteness and otherness are constantly shifting not only by the mainstream, but also within oppositional politics. The thrust of the Nazi project after all was to demarcate "true" whites from "apparent" whites. And witness the recent "colouring" of all Arabs (who actually come in different colours) both by the dominant media and by progressives opposed to the Gulf War. As well, for someone whose experience of racism has always been linked to what I look like, it was a learning experience to work with aboriginal Canadians who stated quite clearly that for them neither racism nor native identity is primarily an issue of colour.

I see the debates that took place at *Race to the Screen* as ongoing. For me, the purpose of the event (of which I was an organizer) was to raise certain questions, to complicate models, and to develop a space for the critical reception of film and video dealing with issues of racism and racial identity within a Canadian context. It is also my feeling that the increasingly complex debates within the academy about race, gender, class, sexuality and popular culture, on the one hand, and the practice of grassroots activist politics and popular education, on the other, should confront each other more directly. With such an ambitious agenda, success is always mixed.

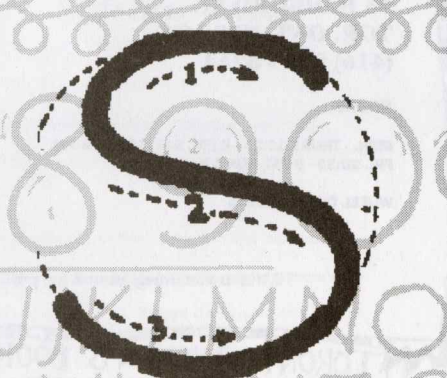
One final point is that I wonder if Larissa really intended to describe Marlene Nourbese Philip's stance on the panel as "reactionary." If she did, I don't agree with her. If she didn't, where are those FUSE editors? The work that FUSE does is incredibly significant to the development of culture and politics in Canada but I often feel that submitted work could stand more editing, clarification, and verification than is currently the practice. This applies equally to my own writing. I recognize a shortage of resources but it would certainly enhance your already important work.

Sincerely, Richard Fung

Dear FUSE:

IS LARISSA LAI BEING DELIBERATELY mischievous, simply obtuse, or is she as ignorant of the more fundamental issues around racism, and what my position was at the *Race to the Screen* symposium, as she appears to be in her article "Culture Jocks"? (FUSE 15:1&2)

Early in her piece Ms. Lai sets up a specious but confusing dichotomy: "[W]hen we speak of race and racial discrimination, are we talking in terms of skin colour or in terms of culture?" Ms. Lai never answers this question but further on in her article she writes that I "adhered to a reactionary stance vis-a-vis identification on the basis of culture" (my emphasis). I expected to be described as an essentialist, one of the more recent post-modernist buzzwords. I must, however, rest content with being a reactionary. I can only assume that the acceptable (to Ms. Lai) and non-reactionary stance would have been for me to accept that I belonged to one happy family, distinguished by its diversity and sharing in the largesse of the dominant culture's racism. My experience of racism, therefore, as a black woman in Toronto would become the same as an Italian Jewish woman's experience, which in turn would be just the same as a First Nations man's experience and so on to infinity. If this is Ms. Lai's definition of a non-reactionary stance then I am, for the first time in my life, happy to be called a reactionary.



In the interests of setting the record straight for those who will only have seen Ms. Lai's piece, and in the hope that her woefully and regrettable ignorance on issues will be somewhat remedied, I will reiterate what my "reactionary" position was at the *Race to the Screen* festival, and still is. I understand racism, or white supremacy as I prefer to describe it, as a mode of thought that explains that white-skinned peoples are innately superior to Africans, Asians and Aboriginal peoples of colour. (More recently Rushton has put a new spin on this.) This ideology also hierarchizes the inferiority in such a way that the African is often positioned at the bottom, as being without those physical markers of a civilization—literacy, a written literature, organized religion, stone buildings, ancient heritage, and whatever other indicia the European cared to demand.

That racism manifests itself in very specific ways in the white western democracies like Canada. In Toronto, for instance, it translates into a criminalization of the black population; it results in violence perpetrated by the police on black youth; it is also visible in a profound lack of respect, by the dominant culture, for the concerns of the black communities who are seen and treated in a monolithic way, except when it suits the media to portray those very same communities as fragmented and not being able to speak with one voice on matters—usually on matters related to the police. While other racially visible groups, such as native people, are treated in a similar fashion, it behooves us all not to lump these groups together under this great umbrella of "culture" Ms. Lai appears to advocate. To do so is to disrespect the particularity of the cultures and the oppression. To understand the history and lived experiences of one's group in no way precludes the formation of coalitions or alliances with other groups; neither should the latter process mean the reduction of one's history and experiences to one happy common denominator of "difference."

What is most peculiar, however, is that in her last paragraph, Ms. Lai writes that "there is no monolithic, unified 'racial marginalization.'" Why then does she describe my stance as reactionary when I reject that very "monolithic, unified racial marginalization"? Mischievousness perhaps?

Where I have the greatest difficulty, however, deciding on the *bona fides* of Ms. Lai's motives is when she writes that my position at the conference was that "until . . . overt instances of racial aggression cease [against black people], the question of culture [was] not relevant." Not only is the argument coarse and unrefined, but it is also logically untenable. Surely, if I held this opinion I would not be participating in a cultural event such as *Race to the Screen*; I also earn my living writing and when last I checked writing was still considered a part of culture. I have also written and published that I believe for my people, Africans in the New World, the articulation of their culture is their only way back to their psychic wholeness. What I did express at *Race to the Screen*, and what I hoped the audience understood, was my profound discomfort with a certain aestheticization of racism so that it becomes yet another flavour in the artistic pie. Racism has and continues to exact an inordinate burden—economic, physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychic—on African Canadians. Too often for us the bottom line has been the killing of our people, and although I work in the area of culture, I cannot and will not forget that. It behooves every black person—artist, domestic, or doctor—to understand the lengths to which those that control the system will go to articulate their belief in their supremacy. There are many who do not want to face this, many who themselves belong to those very groups that are oppressed. And what better place to forget it but in "artistic" and cultural settings. It was this aspect of reality I was attempting to introduce into the discussion at the panel discussion at *Race to the Screen*.

Ms. Lai is clearly excited by her discovery of diversity—another buzzword of the

post-modernists—and suggests this as an alternative to my "reactionary" stance. She may be surprised to know that diversity is as old as the first African who decided to jump overboard and kill herself rather than go into slavery, as opposed to those who not only worked for "massa" but also helped oppress his own people. Clarence Thomas is but a more recent example of this diversity. To state the obvious, however, no group is monolithic—but racist/white supremacist systems and individuals do view African, Asian, and First Nations communities in this way. Understanding this is not a bar to accepting the existence of diversity.

Does all this mean that you spend your artistic life responding to "the system"? Of course not. I strongly urge Ms. Lai to read my "Notes Against Reaction" in the Women's Press anthology *Works In Progress*. She could also have a look at "Managing the Unmanageable" in which I argue that while I may be marginalized, my understanding of margin is as a frontier, which immediately makes the dominant culture the hinterland.

Mischief, obtuseness, or simple ignorance? I still don't know which of those motivated Ms. Lai's comments but I agree with her in one respect—she is having great difficulty and her piece reflects that she is in over her head. Before she attempts another such piece Ms. Lai has a great deal of homework to do.

Yours truly, M. Nourbese Philip





Larissa Lai's response:

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN THIS letter by extending my apologies to Marlene Nourbese Philip for describing her position on the panel "Constructing Race" at *Race to the Screen* last spring as "reactionary." I would also like to apologize to Richard Fung for a careless misquote which unfairly decontextualized a comment he made.

Due to a number of circumstances, the article never really got beyond the stage of a rough draft. I should not have permitted it to be printed.

With regards to my misrepresentation of what Richard had said during the Saturday morning panel, I could probably have done a better job of unpacking the argument. I thank him for his clarification.

With regards to Marlene Nourbese Philip, although the word "reactionary" was mischosen, I should clarify what my discomfort with her position was. While I agree that her description of white supremacy as hierarchizing marginalized groups has a basis in reality, I also wonder if a focus on precisely what the ranking consists of is a useful strategy. Over the course of history, different groups have used a conception of race as a reason for oppressing people. But the hierarchy of who is more oppressed than whom is in a constant state of flux, and the histories of people of colour is the history of that flux. When people of colour get together in

groups, it seems to me that all too frequently we find ourselves playing into a system of tokenism which guarantees that only a few of us can "make it" by playing a time-consuming, never-ending game to determine who is the most genuinely oppressed.

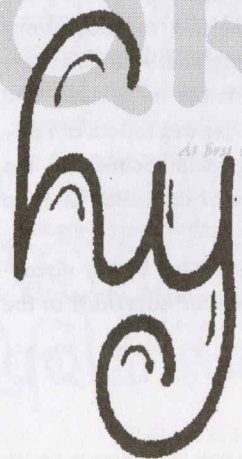
Marlene Nourbese Philip's concerns regarding racism in this country against people of African descent are legitimate. It is certainly not my intention to posit any Asian group in "competition" for that space. Nor am I at all suggesting that the notion of hierarchy should be dispensed with, but only that it is less than a perfect tool.

Recognizing that within the white racist system ranking of various "of colour" groups in terms of such a hierarchy occurs, I also want to recognize, in its critique, that ranking the ways in which racially marginalized people are oppressed homogenizes a whole gamut of oppressions, that occur at numerous fronts and in numerous forms, by assuming the same criteria to determine them. I hope that I would be one of the last in line to support a model of "multicultural diversity" as one big happy more-or-less-homogenous-except-for-nifty-costumes-and-a-few-quaint-cooking-techniques family.

In the second instance, her warning against the dangers of aestheticizing racism are well taken.

I would like to end this letter with the hope that a useful and constructive relationship may develop out of this.

Yours sincerely, Larissa Lai



C.C. to FUSE:

Micheline Savoie
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Societe Radio-Canada
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Dear Ms. Savoie,
REGARDING MR. ZOOL SULEMAN'S letter (August 16, 1991) and your subsequent reply, it seems that a number of issues were missed. While it heartens me that an Equitable Portrayal in Programming department is in operation at the CBC, your reply raises serious concerns at the level of both the nature of the response to Mr. Suleman and the overall reaction to the issues raised.

To begin, in relating Mr. Suleman's commentary on *The Journal's* review of *No New Land* to your former scholastic activities, whether those memories are good or not, effectively reduces Mr. Suleman's concerns to the level of a "good" academic discussion and thus dismisses the impact these issues have on the actual lives of South-Asian peoples. In this way, your response parallels *The Journal's* review in its strategy of reduction and dismissal of the key issues, and subsequent elevation of academic issues (i.e., character portrayal, plot structure, etc.).

Moreover, although your standard procedure for the treatment of Mr. Suleman's concerns was nothing less (or more) than appropriate, it seems that many of these concerns were still not "heard" (as Ms. Offman puts it). I will go through these in order:

Firstly, in a country such as Canada where cultural representation in every public forum, including the media, has been a controversial issue for at least a decade, it is difficult to accept the committee's explanation that a South-Asian reviewer "should have been invited" to participate on the panel. Surely you did not need to form a committee to attain this verdict.

The additional information supplied by Ms. Offman that "well established critics or academics with some TV experience" from the South-Asian community were unavailable only serves to multiply the questions of how or why this issue became peripheral. Who, for example, decides whether a South-Asian critic or academic is "well established" and whose community should this person be well established in? If it is true that many South-Asian critics or academics do not have TV experience, how are they to obtain this experience when producers such Ms. Offman reject them as possible candidates for television panels? Would it not have been better had Ms. Offman pursued some of these questions before the program was aired rather than letting this key issue slide, offending South-Asian viewers, and then asking a member of the community she has just offended to help her locate appropriate reviewers?

Secondly, should a member of the committee wander into any public area in Toronto where conversation is taking place, they may make the facile observation that when one person speaks, the other is silent. The structure of conversation is built on social conventions which dictate who speaks, when they may speak, and what they might say. The CRTC regulations governing radio interviews is but one example of these social strictures rendered in guideline form. Indeed, one may even be imprisoned in Canada for verbally articulating "false news" about the King or Queen of England. In other words, there is very little which is "free" about speech and, in fact, the social use of speech is a greater indicator of power relationships than it is of freedom.

It is already evident to you and others on the committee that the absence of a reviewer from the South-Asian community yields a vacuous silence regarding the concerns of that community. Thus you know that speech and silence, or in other words, conversation, has already been "tampered" with in the case of *The Journal* review. In this context, Mr. Suleman

points out that Ms. Drainie makes several remarks which, to him, constitute the "most offensive part of the review." Given that speech is a greater indicator of the power relationships than it is of freedom in that it exists in human situations and not solely at a theoretical level, the issue is as follows; Ms. Drainie, who is simultaneously empowered by her speech position and culturally ignorant of her topic, has been situated by the producers of *The Journal* so as to have the freedom to make derisive remarks about Mr. Suleman's culture with nothing but a void of silence to challenge her. This is the condition condoned in your recourse to a theoretical notion of "freedom of speech." It is inadequate.

Thirdly, the offensive components of the review identified by Mr. Suleman are not addressed in either the committee's or Ms. Offman's letters. Again in parallel to the presentation of the topic in *The Journal*, the committee has chosen to obscure the issue of racism, which is clearly defined by Mr. Suleman in his lengthy discussion of the dramatizations, by referring only to the use of accents in the voice-over. As professionals in media arts, you know that television representation is a formal system which operates through the dynamic synthesis of visuals, digetic sound, and extra-diabetic commentary. Therefore you know that in addressing your response solely to the voice-over you treat but one portion of the overall representation which, as Mr. Suleman has pointed out, is stereotypical. That is, within the viewing instance the tripartite tabulation of the visuals (drama-

tizations depicting powerlessness), digetic sound (the "East Indian" accent), and the extra-diabetic commentary (Ms. Drainie's remarks) result in an offensive product. However, unlike Mr. Suleman, the most offensive point for me is that, as media professionals, you already knew everything I have stated here yet you chose to ignore it and hide it behind a decorous reference to "freedom of speech." Is this what the Equitable Portrayal in Programming department does at the CBC?

I would suggest that the "whole series of programming policies" you claim to follow are either not sensitive enough or have not been enforced in the case of the *No New Land* review. As I stated at the beginning of this letter, I am heartened that there is an Equitable Portrayal in Programming department in operation at the CBC, but not if this department's actual mandate is to fabricate a formal process which operates to renounce key community-based issues under the guise of equity, thereby justifying the existence of racist programming at the CBC.

Sincerely, Linda Wayne

by Gillian
Morton

During the Toronto FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS, I had the opportunity to speak to a number of filmmakers. What follows are excerpts from conversations with filmmakers Felix de Rooy, Rico Martinez, and Isaac Julien about their work. Another voice included here is Barry Barclay's, a Maori filmmaker who was unable to attend the festival due to illness. I have included excerpts from his book *OUR OWN IMAGE* (Longman Paul, 1990), which he wrote as an open letter to the Chief Dan George Memorial Foundation in Vancouver while working on *TE RUA*, his latest film. Barclay's comments are general reflections about filmmaking and not specific references to *TE RUA*.

Independent filmmaking on the Big Screen

FELIX DE ROOY PHOTO COURTESY COSMIC ILLUSION PRODUCTIONS

These filmmakers are all independents who are breaking into the mainstream, either by making bigger budget films (relative to those funded only by grants from arts councils), or simply by making feature films they hope will reach large audiences. As filmmakers of colour, they face not only institutionalized racism in terms of barriers to production, but also in their film's distribution (or lack thereof) and critical reception. *YOUNG SOUL REBELS* is the only film seemingly to have faced few problems, having premiered with an award-winning performance at Cannes.

The other films experienced problems getting theatrical distribution. *TE RUA* could not get a screening in Berlin, even though the film is produced in association with the Berlin Senate and is partially set there. (I wondered if this failure had something to do with *TE RUA*'s linkage of the Maori activists with Germany's "others," Turkish and black immigrants.) Felix de Rooy alludes to the antagonistic reception of his work in Amsterdam in what follows below. Rico Martinez's film, which has the potential of a camp cult classic, has been limited to festival exhibition.

The FESTIVAL was over many months ago and most of the films were never to reappear on Canadian screens. In these excerpts the filmmakers comment on some of the concerns which inform the debates amongst independent filmmakers, their audiences and critics: who the films speak to, how they are funded and received, and what aspirations they have as filmmakers.

Audience/Reception

Many filmmakers reject the idea of speaking for the communities that they come from, partly because of the authority this implies and partly to emphasize their communities' heterogeneity. This issue of speaking to their communities has become increasingly important as filmmakers acknowledge the constraints of producing and exhibiting work within existing institutions. Reaching beyond the art house/festival circuit audiences already established for their work presents a particular challenge.

Barry Barclay

The majority culture seems to have ears like a sponge: you can talk your tongue off, year after year; the ears flap, but in the end you feel you have spent your life speaking to a great sponge which does not seem to learn, but which is ever eager to absorb more.

I have come to believe we need to be talking to our own people first—to be "talking in." (p.76)

I do not think this is turning inward in an unhealthy way. Rather, I see it as asserting a cultural confidence so that, if we shape things in our own way, we shall come to make images that will be attractive to those humans on the planet who wish to enjoy them. I am not talking about minority programmes directed at a minority. I am talking about a minority being confident enough to talk with its own voice about whatever it chooses and as it does so, having a feeling that the talk will be of interest to others who wish to drop in. (p.78)

Felix de Rooy

The people I wanted to speak to in the first place are the Antillian people, because they never see any references to themselves on the screen.

Usually the only images that are seen are American black images. I feel black history is much vaster, much richer, and much wider than only those American images, for example, those that are being made by Spike Lee.

I was also hoping to transcend the limits of Antillian culture and say something to the rest of the world. The Caribbean is very important because it is a laboratory of multi-ethnic societies. Now Europe is being confronted with the same problem or situation that the Caribbean has been living with for a long time.

In Amsterdam *AVA AND GABRIEL* played for only seven weeks. It won a Golden Calf at the Dutch film festival but the critics panned it. They said it was a racist film; that I didn't know what I was doing; that I made of mishmash of too many issues; that I myself didn't know how to deal with them; and that the film drowned in its diversity.

I have a history in Holland, of course. The Dutch have the PR of being a very liberal country. Everything's possible; they're so tolerant; there's no racism in Holland (which I'll tackle in my next film). To be confronted with an image totally contrary to their PR hit them really hard. They felt, who's this Caribbean guy who's using our money to make a film which criticizes us?

Also, I had a very successful but controversial exhibition in Holland called *WHITE ON BLACK*, images of blacks in popular Western culture. Some of the items are Dutch and they show the racism that clearly exists in terms of stereotyping black people. *WHITE ON BLACK* got a lot of international press and the Dutch were quite upset. But they couldn't attack me personally. The film premiered a few months after the exhibition and since they couldn't criticize me over the exhibit they took the opportunity to attack the film.



PHOTO: NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION

Barry Barclay

Barry Barclay is quarter Maori, quarter French and half Scots. He has made numerous documentaries for

television and in 1986 directed the critically acclaimed *Ngati*. He is also the author of *Our Own Image* (Longman Paul, 1990).

SYNOPSIS: *Te Rua* is about the struggle of the Uritoto tribe to bring home sacred carvings stolen from them 100 years ago. The carvings are now "owned" by a museum in Berlin.

Nanny Matia, a Maori elder, sends Rewi Marangai, a successful lawyer, performance poet Peter Huaka, and other young Maori activists to Germany. To make public their struggle, they high-jack historic German sculptures, an act which leads to a showdown with the German state.

Felix de Rooy



Born in Curacao, Felix de Rooy is a painter, graphic artist, and director of film, TV, and theatre. His major feature films are *Desiree*,

Almacita Soul of Desolata, and *Ava and Gabriel: A Love Story*.

SYNOPSIS: *Ava and Gabriel* takes place in Curacao in the late '40s. The Surinam painter Gabriel Goebloed arrives from Holland, having been commissioned to paint a mural of the Virgin Mary by the Dutch church. Clergy and locals are confused; they were not expecting a black painter. Gabriel creates more confusion by refusing to conform to the customs of the close knit,

continued next page

colonized Antillian society. His choice for the church's mural of the Virgin Mary is Ava, a young teacher, who is from "mixed origin." This begins a controversy about a black Madonna.

Ava's fiancé, the local Dutch police major, is unhappy with her decision to pose for Gabriel, particularly since the two are obviously attracted to one another. Further complicating the sexual and social intrigues, the Dutch Governor's wife becomes interested in Gabriel. The melodrama inevitably concludes with the state/society's punishment of Gabriel for his transgressions: death at the hands of the police force.



Rico Martinez

Rico Martinez is a Chinese-Filipino/Mexican American filmmaker who lives in Hollywood. He wants to make films that are somewhere in between *Valley of the Dolls*,

Saturday Night Fever and *Scorpio Rising*.

SYNOPSIS. *Desperate*, Martinez's first feature film, chronicles the history of two desperate characters, Tan-Yah and Troy. The narrative follows Tan-Yah's attempts to launch a singing career in punk rock, country and western, and finally, in back-up lipsyncing. Troy, meanwhile gets caught up in a "pyramid" scam and then in a gay/bisexual porn film. Obsessed with fame, they both pursue a series of fashion and cultural trends. Their final career choice, "body builders to the stars," ends when they murder a sadistic satanist who tries to keep them as caged creatures in his dungeon. The murder allows them to finally triumph as

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Rico Martinez

To me, the way to infiltrate and be subversive is to be accessible, to disarm, to do something that could be silly, that people would not be jaded about—as opposed to doing something that people who like avant garde stuff are going to go see anyway, people who already agree on certain theories and certain politically correct issues. What's the point?

I like to think that most people are pretty smart. Not in a book way, not that they went to school or whatever. But people are smarter than the films that are made for them.

Isaac Julien

In Britain *LOOKING FOR LANGSTON* was seen by a white gay audience more than any other. I was dissatisfied; Langston was able to be spoken about solely in a gay context. As if the black communities of interest could just say, "Well, that's over there."

What I wanted to do with *YOUNG SOUL REBELS* was purposively involve black audiences in my work again in a kind of confrontational, direct way. By making *REBELS* a narrative film, I hope to reach different audiences that wouldn't come to see more formally experimental representations, and gay representations specifically.

In a screening in Nottingham, about ten straight black men walked out during the sex scene. Afterwards at the Q-and-A it was uncomfortable, very confrontational. But I felt that it was bringing it back home, bringing these questions back to the communities which I am from.

Funding

Not surprisingly, independent filmmakers are often preoccupied with raising money: how to access funds and how to maintain that access. (Festival press packages suggest some aspects of the business of marketing "marginality": brief histories of colonialism; filmmakers pictured in geisha girl drag; and background material detailing style as a social force which begin, appropriately enough, with quotes from *VOGUE MAGAZINE*.)

Barry Barclay

We have had mixed experiences with Maori funds. They tend to be under-funded in comparison with their Pakeha [non-Maori] counterparts; they are the first to be cut back in bad times; they tend to introduce a ghetto factor as far as Maori artists are concerned; and they have the effect of closing off the major fund to Maori, who no matter what the scale or nature of their project are steered to the Maori fund. (p.24)

The new noble savage who may be shown off in the drawing rooms of the white world is encouraged to rattle, not the spear, but the camera, and the majority culture is pleased to fund one or two of them from time to time. But when you turn into a difficult native, the drawing room is likely to clear fast. (p.27)

And it is convenient for the system to be able to view the committed Maori filmmaker as some dedicated sod prepared to have the telephone and electricity cut off for non-payment in order to film other committed Maori being led off to prison in a good cause. (p.26)

Felix de Rooy

The film cost one million dollars: half came from Holland, one quarter from Antillian sources, in services, and

one quarter in loans. The reception in Curacao helped save us from bankruptcy. When *AVA AND GABRIEL* came out there was some controversy. On a radio programme called "The People are Speaking," there was a very angry man who said that I was corrupting the morality of the youth. He felt that I had misused the people of Curacao because I said was going to make a love story, but what I was showing was "homosexual decadence." He said that kids should be forbidden to see the film—which in way helped because then all the teenagers wanted to see it.

Rico Martinez

It's totally hard to make independent films in L.A. You have to go outside—most of my money came from New York-based organizations. I got a really weird grant from the Princess Grace Foundation. All the people on the board are these old rich conservative right wing kind of people: Nancy Reagan, Frank Sinatra, Placido Domingo, that type of people. I thought they'd made a mistake. It was really weird. I met the royal family, Princess Stephanie, Prince Albert. We had a royal procession, totally formal.

I promote myself as a bimbot, a mixture of a robot and a bimbo. When you think of a director he's usually white, usually male, usually sort of smart. Why not promote myself as possibly stupid, as an image? Not take promotion seriously, question it. It's probably the Asian part of me; my mom has all these Chinese sayings which more or less translate to the person that's not speaking that appears stupid is sometimes the smartest.

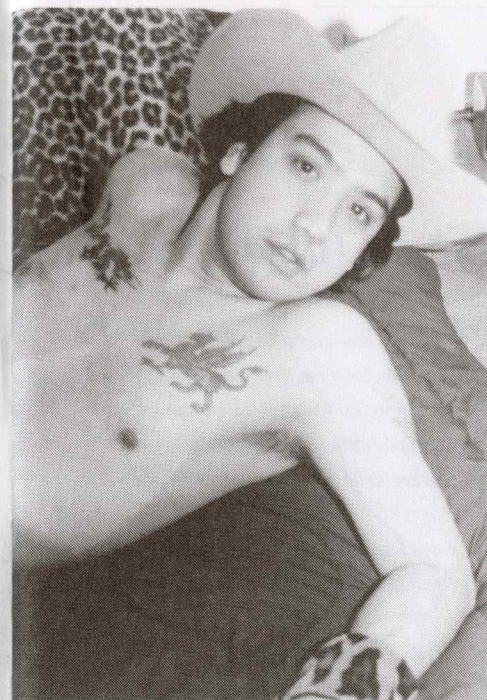


PHOTO COURTESY FILMMAKER

I promote myself as a bimbot,

a mixture of a robot and a bimbo. When you think of a director he's usually white, usually male, usually sort of smart. Why not promote myself as possibly stupid, as an image? Not take promotion seriously, question it. Rico Martinez

Movements/Dreams

In discussion with filmmakers, two issues which cropped up frequently were the relation of the filmmaker's practice to a specific political/historical moment, and the filmmaker's aspirations. The two are, of course, connected, as the comments below illustrate.

Barry Barclay

As filmmakers, most of us now have little compunction about standing up and saying, "Don't keep lecturing us about how to make films. Give us the resources and we will do it in our own way." The boldness and determination to do that has come from a much wider struggle.

Maori control of Maori matters (or "mana motuhake," as it is called) is being pushed in the trade unions, in health care, in education, in local government, and in a host of other areas. Perhaps that general determination to be in control of one's whole destiny—

and most of the active Maori filmmakers in the country have been part of that wider movement in some way—has created a climate within which the filmmakers feel confident enough to assert the same principles in their own industry.

Felix de Rooy

What I really hope is that at a certain moment I get an other status than the one of being an exotic cherry in the festival pies. I hope the film gets distribution. If the films don't get a distributor and they actually don't make money, then my career as a filmmaker is endangered. As long as the structures in the Western world in terms of race relationships and respect don't change, my films will just be filed. Hopefully one day, maybe in 20, 30, 40 years, they'll be rediscovered and re-evaluated. But at least they're there.

Rico Martinez

My next film, *MICRO MINI*, is a science fiction film about this planet that exists in a microchip. The planet is

made up of all the physical and mental "states" of Asian and Hispanic culture: an Edo period/Erotica/Porno state; a Bruce Lee State; a '70s low rider state, with Cholos, Mexican American gang riders; an Aztec state; and a Spanish Inquisition state. There's a runaway from the planet who's a shemale, who I call "the figure." The figure runs away from *Micro Mini* to become a supermodel in outerspace where there are limitless fashion and lighting opportunities. At a certain point it becomes bored with fashion and decides to do a makeover, to get rid of surface. It becomes a spy on *Micro Mini* to find the secret of the beauty of the soul.

Isaac Julien

[In *REBELS*,] I wanted to throw light on black youth movements. They connected to the soul music in America, often through the media of pirate radio. I still feel that the left has a kind of expedient relationship to black culture. This relationship is represented through Billibud. He gets Caz in the bedroom and it's "Let's put on the reggae music." Caz doesn't want to be placed in this particular way.

Obviously, these experiences are my own experiences—and they're not. In 1977 I was doing my A levels. I was in no way as transgressive as Caz is, or Chris. It's important to make solidarity across these lines—across sexual and racial lines. But they have to be on the basis of real reconciliation, real acknowledgement of differences. People try to make easy, expedient relations. *REBELS* is trying to problematize those relations between black and white, gay and straight.

Gillian Morton is an activist and writer living in Toronto.

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Celebrity Criminals. Martinez's kitsch sensibility comments slyly on the pathos of Tan-Yah, Troy, and all wannabe trendsetters.

Isaac Julien

Isaac Julien was born in East London. He is a co-founder of Sankofa Film and Video, a group of young black filmmakers who have produced radical work for cinema and TV. His earlier work includes *The Passion of Remembrance*, *This Is Not An AIDS Advert*, and *Looking for Langston*.

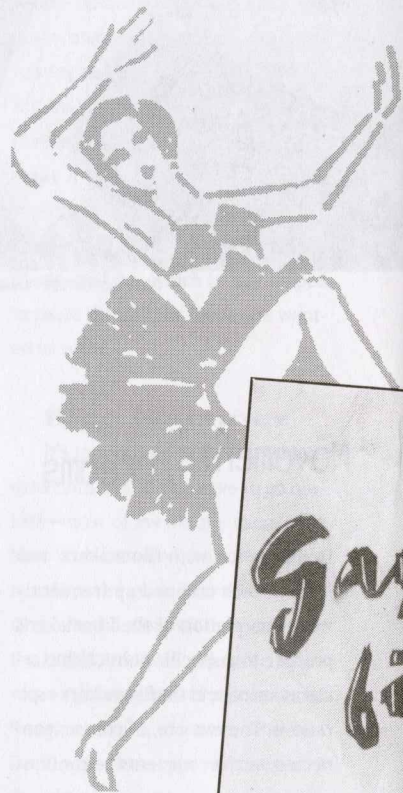


PHOTO: ELLEN FLANDERS

SYNOPSIS. *Young Soul Rebels* is set in 1977, the year of the Queen's Jubilee, amidst the groundswell of British nationalism and the growth of the National Front. There was vibrant political and cultural opposition to the rise of racism; *Young Soul Rebels* uses the conventions of the mystery movie genre to explore the cultural dimension of resistance.

Two teenage black boys, Caz and Chris, one gay, one straight, share a passion for soul music. The murder of T.J., a gay man cruising in a park, makes Chris a target for both the killer and the cops. Romantic interests developing outside their relationship and differing ambitions for their Soul Patrol Pirate radio station leads to bitter arguments. The film's finale is set at a Stuff The Jubilee concert in the park. Skins and National Front supporters clash with punks as Caz and Chris reunite to confront the murderer.

It's a Queer World after all



An Inside Look at the International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival Circuit

AND NOW, MANILA! . . . OTTAWA! . . . St John's, Newfoundland! (Not to mention Moscow, Tokyo, and Winter Park, Florida). Like scraggly flowers in a hostile landscape, queer festivals are springing up everywhere. At a time of steadily decreasing financial and moral support for lesbian and gay culture, the body of lesbian and gay film/video work is expanding as never before, and over 50 lesbian and gay festivals worldwide are struggling to keep up with both demand and supply.

In November 1991, the AMSTERDAM INTERNATIONAL LESBIAN AND GAY FILM FESTIVAL programmed over 300 films and videos to huge crowds in eight theatres and two cities. The rich aunt of the festival circuit, the Amsterdam festival (occurring every five years) provides a kind of standard of main-

stream success for the other festivals. Corporate and state sponsorship, a long roster of international guests, and a vivid public profile, contributed to a confusing matrix of inspiration and disillusionment. Attending as a filmmaker and guest, I was picked up at the airport in an sleek Audi (provided by one of the corporate sponsors) with the festival logo emblazoned on the front of the car. Two days later, I, with the other filmmakers, couldn't get a table at the mayor's dinner in our honour. The corporate suits with their helmet-haired wives had taken all the seats.

So, instead, we went out for Indonesian food and talked for hours about the festival circuit with their mainstream organizing/programming strategies, and our own political posi-

tions as lesbians, artists, and activists. Our emotions were as varied and contradictory as our own cultural and political identities. We felt validated; we felt co-opted; we felt empowered; we felt invisible. When margin becomes centre, new margins are constructed, and odd things start to happen.

The phenomenon of plenty, vis à vis lesbian and gay cultural work, is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Although the SAN FRANCISCO LESBIAN AND GAY FESTIVAL has occurred annually for 15 years, most of the other festivals didn't exist before the mid-'80s. These festivals were built on the model of women's film and video festivals in which mainstream invisibility is the motivation for a separate realm. The film industry's historic (and ongoing) exclusion of women as auteurs, directors, and cinematographers meant that women-directed films had little access

to commercial distribution or wide festival exposure. The handful of women's film festivals did little to redress the need for wider audiences. But they were, and are, affirmative spaces: they gave us attention, they allowed us to connect with audiences, and they created context—a space where the feminist content of our work resonated in concentric circles of discussion, activist audiences, and feminist film/videomaker colleagues.

These days, there are fewer women's film festivals than ever before, and many, like Montreal's FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DE FILMS ET VIDÉOS DES FEMMES have become mainstream clones. Few of them highlight lesbian work. Most never achieve consistent state funding and shun corporate sponsorship strategies. Volunteer burnout is probably the most common cause of death.

While lessons in political activism rarely get passed on in tidy and continuous ways, it does seem like the contemporary lesbian/gay movement, and therefore, its film festivals, exist both as a partial result of, and in reaction to, the feminist movement. Feminist activists learnt the hard way that identity politics without political analysis leads only to female corporate executives, Margaret Thatcher, and glossy Ms. magazines. Feminist gains, like expanded abortion rights (in Canada anyways), increased access to education, daycare, and employment, have happened only through longterm, tedious, and repetitive organizing work by trade unions, coalitions, and collectives.

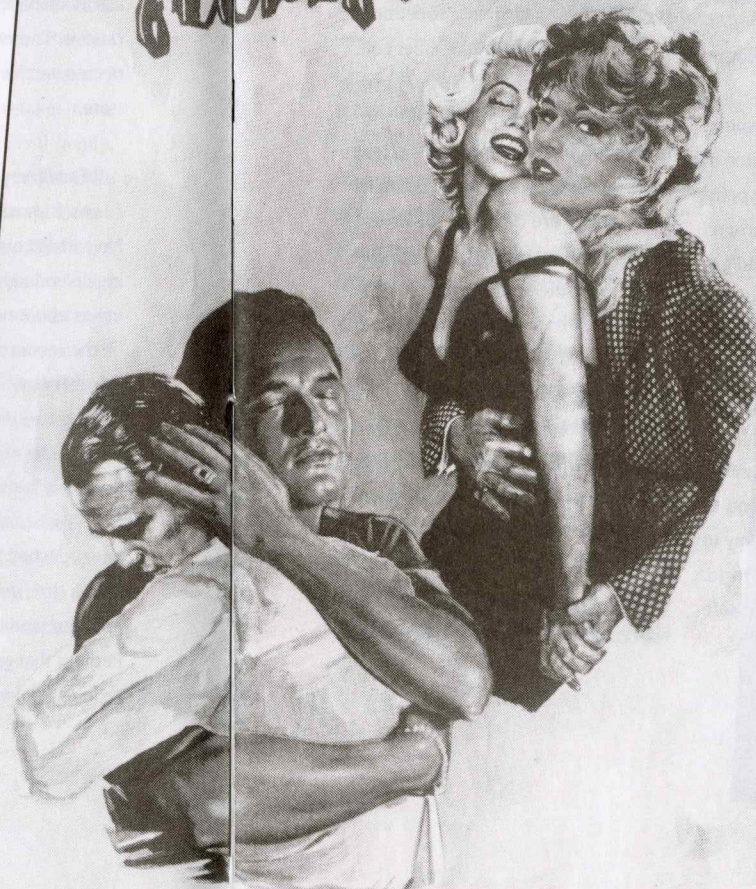
In the context of right-wing backlash, these gains seems minuscule now, and a younger generation of women and lesbians, activists and artists, enter a political world fraught with division and exhaustion. Notions like pleasure, entertainment, and fashion, have been revived. Political correctness is as volatile a term with queers, these days, as it is with straights.

The word "lesbian" is more freely spoken, gay stories appear in places like PEOPLE MAGAZINE, so young dykes know that there are gay people in the world. But now that there is more of a public image, young gay people get their identity from the mass media depiction of gay life, instead of gay underground culture, which is a new and insidious problem. . . .

—Sarah Schulman

Today's lesbian and gay film festivals occur in a time of shifting cultural meanings. For lesbian culture in particular, a politics of scarcity finds itself colliding with a new phenomenon of plenty. Right-wing and conservative prohibitions (Helms, Clause 28, Secretary of State), both blatant and subtle, have, ironically, inspired a proliferation of sexual imagery from a younger generation of lesbian artists. And yet, within the new, spicy smorgasbord of butch/femme narratives, leather-dyke images, and sexual sit-coms featuring dildoes, Barbies, and tit-clamps, there are certain dietary deficiencies. I still feel hungry.

Gay and Lesbian
filmfestival '91



BY MARUSIA BOCIURKIW

Who writes the recipe? Programmers or artists? Or both? A quick look at programming themes of various festivals reveals a homogeneity of curatorial trends. Segregation by gender and race is common to most of the festivals; programs of lesbian shorts and gay shorts, and a boys' and girls' opening feature, characterize most of the festival structures. Work by lesbians and gays of colour is usually grouped together under such obscure headings as, "Under Repair" (NEW FESTIVAL, NYC) or "Deconstruction" (IMAGE ET NATION FESTIVAL, Montréal). Programs of works about AIDS have become staple fare. Other headings seem to depend on clever word play and generic groupings ("Music with Balls," gay music videos, Amsterdam; "Love and Marriage," videos about lesbian marriage, San Francisco). Messages of political resistance are relegated to the other-within-the-other—lesbians and gays of colour and people with illnesses and disabilities. One is reminded of supermarkets and department stores.

An emphasis on new work (admittedly, often a condition of public funding) deprives communities of their histories. Segregation by sex or by race separates audiences out and places the onus of anti-racist discourse onto the shoulders of people of colour. It means we don't get to learn from one another or to have debates that move beyond essentialist definitions. As fun and innocuous as it all appears, an implicitly apolitical and complacent trend begins to emerge, to which, it would seem, emerging filmmakers respond.

It is important that we are not constrained and contained by fixed identity tags ... that we do not get caught

up in an "ideological bantustan" that decrees that you do not cross boundaries of your experiences... One of my concerns as a filmmaker is to challenge the "normalizing" and "universalizing" tendencies within the predominantly white lesbian and gay communities—to assert the diversity of cultural and racial identities within the umbrella category of gay and lesbian. There is a need also to redefine community and just as there isn't a homogenous black community, there isn't a monolithic lesbian and gay community.

—Pratibha Parmar⁴

Lately, festivals have begun to have panel discussions on race and representation. While it would perhaps be even more pragmatic to also have programmers who are people of colour (with very few exceptions, most of the festivals are programmed by individual white curators), these panels have been rare sites of open and radical political discussion at the festivals.

At the Amsterdam festival, a panel entitled "Black on Black" created a useful forum for exchange amongst Dutch Blacks⁴ and Black filmmakers present at the festival, like Marlon Riggs and Pratibha Parmar. Marlon critiqued the construct of Black performer/(mostly) white audience. "I'm asked to serve your needs, not my own," he said, and demanded action on the part of white audiences, saying, "You have to inter-

Overall, we seem to be in a position not of imagining what could be, but rather of merely holding onto what has been. Communities in crisis tend to turn inward and to rely upon identity politics as a way to maintain a visible face in the world. There is a sense of yearning for safe spaces and uncomplicated vistas that daily struggle in an unsafe world evokes.

rogate yourselves." Pratibha noted that, as she sat on the panel, she felt like "an anthropological, ethnographic object of curiosity." She questioned the absence of local Black lesbians and gays, both as filmmakers and as audience, as well as the presence of some obviously racist films at the festival. She wondered why filmmakers, whose concern is images, weren't more concerned with what those images said. "The [recent] rise of racism and fascism in Europe has been unprecedented," she concluded, "We must have dialogue across communities."

We must refashion a world where differences are openly acknowledged, layer by layer, side by side...

—Marlon Riggs⁵

The current moral panic inspired by AIDS, the demise of the illusion of the nuclear family, and shifting political and economic conditions around the world, have cost lesbian and gay communities dearly, making us targets for a capitalist, heterosexual moral agenda. Overall, we seem to be in a position not of imagining what could be, but rather of merely holding onto what has been. Communities in crisis tend to turn inward and to rely upon identity politics as a way to maintain a visible face in the world. There is a sense of yearning for safe

spaces and uncomplicated vistas that daily struggle in an unsafe world evokes.

Counter-cultural or sub-cultural positive images propose a complex "forgetting" of present realities—a resistance to, say, the painful realities of war, powerlessness or poverty—and "remembering" of possible alternatives—peace, security, affluence... [there is a] growing wish for legitimation, the longing for recognition, the desire to stay time, to make things as perfect as one wished they could be... —Jan Zita Grover⁶

"A poetic look at sand sculptures" ... "The ideal of love at first sight" ... "A sweet story about two young girls" ... "Francie gives Barbie a makeover that changes her life" ... "Bathroom etiquette, girlboy style" ... "A coming-of-age story about two young girls" ... "A comedy about three lesbians who share a house" ... "A houseful of bad girls enjoy lounging in lingerie" ... These are excerpts from festival catalogues of the past two years. A plethora of tongue-in-cheek or simply sweet-and-girlish lesbian work has emerged, which now dominates festival programs. Politically explicit work, once foregrounded, now occupies a less prominent space. Domestic melodrama and comedy are having a comeback, somewhat reminiscent of postwar culture during the McCarthy era. While the trend towards defiant sexual explicitness is refreshing, many of these new lesbian sex narratives remain locked within a certain fixed iconography. As romantic in their own way as pulp novels in '50s, they speak a voice of resistance in muffled, disguised tones.

Informal discussions I've had with with audience members at various fes-

tivals indicate, however, that the desire for challenging and politicized work has not diminished. There are as many feminists within lesbian audiences as ever, and many feel disenfranchised as spectators. Curators respond to what's out there and what they perceive as audience demand. Artists respond to audiences, markets, and curators, as well as (hopefully) their own personal and political desires. This complex interweave makes it difficult to locate cause-and-effect. And all the while, the invisible proscriptions of the racist and homophobic culture swirl around these festivals like ominous rainclouds that nobody wants to admit are there.

Recently, a programmer asked me for some suggestions for structuring a three-day lesbian film/video festival. There wasn't much time; films had to be booked ASAP; it was a first-time festival and the community wouldn't stand for anything ambiguous or weird. We quickly came up with three categories, one for each night: goofy-girl (Barbies, bras, bathrooms); cultural difference (lesbians of colour); and smash-the state (documentaries). Later, I wondered why I hadn't asked some basic questions: what did the community want, or need? What were the gaps in lesbian discourse in that particular place? What were the obsessions? What issues had recently affected local lesbians? what was the media saying or not saying about them? What would be controversial, or pertinent? What would be fun? How did race and class figure in that community's interactions and self-definitions? In short, as two dykes with a long history of community activism and feminist/cross-cultural organizing, I wondered why we had abandoned some of our most

reliable organizing tools.

In her article "Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness," African-American writer bell hooks proposes the notion of "a politics of location" as a means of dealing with the multiple subjectivities that people with multiple oppressions experience. Her metaphorical use of the idea of home is one I find helpful in attempting to create new definitions of a multi-faceted community which can resist stereotyping and co-optation.

The very meaning of "home" changes with the experience of decolonization, of radicalization. At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing, frontiers of difference... —bell hooks⁷

It's time we started questioning what we mean by terms like "lesbian film," and whether the definition has become a little too self-contained. In the relation between lesbian spectator

and lesbian spectacle exists a strong desire to satisfy and to be satisfied. It's almost a co-dependant relationship, in which each enables the other's weaknesses. The desire to meet audience demand—another DESERT HEARTS feature is high on the lesbian wish-list—may occur at the expense of the artist's professional and creative development. Artists with multiple agendas (for whom home is no longer just one place) may wish to produce films that speak to many different audiences, that may have no overt lesbian content at all. Is a film lesbian just because it's made by one? It shouldn't be so hard to just go back and forth between locations but the contradictions can become overwhelming in a single-issue world.

A case in point: Jan Oxenberg's latest feature, THANKYOU AND GOODNIGHT. Oxenberg's name is synonymous with the lesbian-feminist wave of filmmaking in the '70s: her films A COMEDY IN SIX UNNATURAL ACTS and HOME MOVIE were coming-out primers for a generation of lesbians, including myself. Oxenberg's work was serious fun; she was one of the first lesbian filmmakers to synthesize contemporary lesbian

culture and humour onto film. While these works are now being re-released as a kind of historical package through Frameline, a San Francisco-based lesbian and gay distributor, Oxenberg has herself gone on to produce a feature docu-drama about her relationship with her Jewish grandmother during the last days of her *bubbe's* life that makes no mention of Oxenberg's lesbianism. When I saw the film at Toronto's FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS, I found it stunning for its rich mix of play and reality. Oxenberg appears in the film both as herself and as a cut-out doll (herself as a child). Her relationship with her grandmother and Jewish culture are presented with poignancy and respect, at the same time that she sketches a sharp portrait of the limitations and stifling proscriptions of urban family life. In the context of the FESTIVAL (which out of some 400 films, programmed a total of four films by out lesbians), this to me was a very lesbian film. I recognized Oxenberg as a dyke; I identified deeply with her need for cultural tradition and continuity, which lesbian communities do not always provide.

In this year's frantic search for a lesbian opening feature, THANKYOU AND GOODNIGHT has been generally overlooked by the lesbian and gay festival circuit: it doesn't say the "L"-word, it's too documentary, it's too challenging. At the same time, Oxenberg is playing hard to get with the queer festivals; her commercial distributor doesn't return calls and Oxenberg, when I talked with her, was vague about how to get a hold of press material. Having languished in moneyless lesbian backwaters since the '70s, Oxenberg is clearly going for big time. And who can blame her? Still, I find myself wanting more of a global view, like



Oxenberg's, at the queer festivals, and more out lesbian stuff (I'll even settle for Barbie) at the big festivals.

Meanwhile, gay narratives have become *très chic*. News reports about the recent SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL (an American jumping-off point for independents seeking commercial success) crowded about the plethora of exciting gay (read gay male) films. The popularity of Gus Van Sant's *MY OWN PRIVATE IDAHO* has created a kind of space for gritty homo films (which may be an accidental space created by an anti-woman culture). So, guess what? Straight people are producing films with lesbian or gay content. Made without connection or commitment to lesbian and gay culture or community, these films appropriate an already very limited space. As both these and Oxenberg's film indicate, lesbian or gay content need not be the sole criteria for programming films.

The contradictions create big cracks through which lesbian narratives can fall and disappear. They end up inhibiting the development of lesbian work. It's up to the lesbian and gay festivals to provide a home for these many different sides of the lesbian story, without abandoning a certain basic commitment to autonomous lesbian/gay cultural space.

Right-wing demands for elimination of public arts funding in the U.S. are

presently concentrated on government support for lesbian and gay cultural projects. . . . Non-commercial lesbian and gay media organizations and institutions are extremely fragile financially and especially vulnerable to political forces. . . . Since these groups provide the infrastructure that supports lesbian media production, very few lesbian artists have been able to work consistently in this vein, which accounts for the ever-changing roster of producers in the various festival programs. Many are young artists, often students, who make one or two short films or videos before taking stock of their options and moving on to a more viable career. . . .

—Martha Geever⁸

It's important also to name instances where festivals have managed to introduce innovative structures or programs. In 1989, a one-time only event, *How Do I Look?*, was organized by a New York group that called itself *Bad Object Choices*. A quirky and fascinating week-long festival of films and videos from the past decade (shown at the *Collective for a Living Cinema*) formed the backdrop for a three-day conference where lesbian and gay media theorists and activists delivered papers which were subsequently discussed (and in some cases completely taken apart) by a lively queer audience. (A book with the same name, documenting the conference, was recently published by Bay Press.⁹) Though at times a little academically *de trop*, the event was memorable for its brash mixing of academics and practitioners and the way it prioritized discussion. Everyone wanted to talk—passionately.

The next year, the SAN FRANCISCO LESBIAN AND GAY FILM FESTIVAL organized a conference in conjunction with its 10-day screening program entitled "Rules of Attraction." Though criticized



for its inadequate representation of people of colour, the conference was an ambitious attempt to provide a theoretical context for the festival. In 1989, Hallwalls, the Buffalo, NY media centre, organized a program of videos and presentations called *THE MEDIATED BODY*, which included lesbian, gay, feminist and other works in multi-dimensional look at the body in the context of sexuality, disease, and other issues. Vancouver's *INVISIBLE COLOURS*, the "International Women of Colour and Third World Women Film/Video Festival," (also in 1989) provided a breathtaking model of programming and conferencing that was unprecedented, bringing together film and videomakers of colour from around the world. It created an extremely rich exchange of ideas and experiences that no women's festival had yet managed to provide. (It may well be time for a lesbian and gays of colour festival of similar proportions.) Toronto's *RACE TO THE SCREEN* festival was another important model, which examined race and representation by inviting filmmakers, critics, and activists to curate a program of films and then deliver a paper elaborating upon or

counterpointing these programs. In general, the notion of guest curators does seem to breathe new life into the tired old notion of one person's tastes and cultural biases setting the agenda for an entire festival. And finally, the Amsterdam festival, whose lesbian programmer, Annette Forster, prioritized debate through the organizing of theoretical spaces—a festival café, where after-screening discussions could be held; and an exciting (though poorly translated) festival catalogue, which included essays by such international folk as Jewelle Gomez, Nick Deocampo, Karin Spaink, Jackie Goldsby, and many others.

Hopefully, changes will occur in the relation between programmers and producers as well. . . . Ah, recognition! . . . Ah, hotel rooms! . . . The pleasures of an out-of-town gig are rare for many lesbian filmmakers, seductive for all. Plane fares, accommodations, and the occasional *per diem* are generally seen by festival organizers as reward rather than as standardized payment. After the eight naughty filmmakers walked out on the mayor's dinner in Amsterdam, the material conditions of festivals and filmmakers were hotly debated by all. Comparing notes, filmmakers realized some were being paid fees and others not (this was later rectified by festival organizers). Unequal treatment and stardom are as common at queer festivals as they are in the mainstream. One programmer I talked to said that it's ridiculous for filmmakers to expect to be paid equally for their work. "If I have to pay a fortune for a Derek Jarman film, then of course I'm going to try and get independent videos for free." A *VILLAGE VOICE* critic declared that the outspoken filmmakers had only themselves to blame; they were

"creating a construct of self-victimization."

Notions of collective organizing and equality, so integral to feminist and lesbian movements, have not fared well in the festival milieu. In too many cases, the (understandable) desire for legitimation has led to an unfortunate wholesale acceptance of mainstream strategies. (Most mainstream film festivals do not pay fees, except to stars.) Lesbian and gay film festival organizers must begin to realize the obvious: that festivals would not exist without the films, produced via the filmmakers' generally unpaid labour. To expect that filmmakers continue to donate labour and films at the festival level is benevolent exploitation. A conference solely for lesbian and gay video/filmmakers has yet to occur, but, as our numbers expand, such an event could do much to identify and organize around, common issues. Connected to this is the fact that most lesbian/gay festivals are organized by volunteers, making fee-for-service a vexing concept.

In a time of increased media and state censorship and/or discrimination, lesbian/gay filmmakers are an increasingly important resource for their communities. What are the ways in which producers of images within an embattled community can be supported and even nurtured? The punishments for being outspoken, feminist, and blatantly lesbian can be immense, within the straight film-industry and even within the alternative art-world milieu. They are invisible, unspoken punishments—reviews not written, grants not received, money not gotten, positions never offered. They have profound consequences, and can result in more allegorical and oblique work than lesbian

audiences are prepared to accept, or understand.

The effect of taking a risk, being punished for taking a risk, but having the risk itself unacknowledged, is chilling. It makes it nearly impossible for us to evaluate the risks we are taking, decide for ourselves whether the consequences make the risk worthwhile for us. It may have the effect of making us unwilling to risk. . . . —Judith McDaniel¹⁰

Before I left Amsterdam, I heard a scary story. An 18-year-old British lesbian, Jennifer Saunders, had just been sentenced to six years in prison for having consenting sex with her two 17-year-old girlfriends. Since there are no laws against lesbian sex in Britain (Queen Victoria said they didn't exist), Saunders was charged with "indecent assault," based on a 17th century law. Saunders is a cross-dresser, and so, the prosecution claimed that Saunders had dressed as a boy in order to seduce and deceive her girlfriends, basing the charges on the archaic law which stated that "one may not dress as the opposite sex for the purposes of sexual deceit."¹¹ British and Dutch women were busy discussing and organizing around this case, which provides a portent of worse things to come via the new political order of the British- and German-dominated European Economic Community. Far right politicians and fascist and neo-Nazi groups are gaining prominence in Europe. Lesbian visibility can work both ways. Jennifer Saunders is the first woman in British judicial history to be jailed for consenting lesbian sex.

. . . And though we have found each other again as lesbians, the divisions of privilege are still painful between us. —Minnie Bruce Pratt¹²

Many progressive people are counting their losses these days—friends lost to cancer or to AIDS; Black youth lost to police violence; programs lost to cutbacks; feminist and lesbian institutions lost to the recession, the Mulroney government, and the GST (Librairie l'Essentielle, Montréal; DIVERSITY MAGAZINE, Vancouver; INSIGHT WOMEN'S FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL, Edmonton). The flourishing of a lesbian and gay media culture at this time is ironic, but timely (and uneven: lesbian films still languish for lack of funds or distribution). There's a fine line between culture and industry, and as lesbian and gay audiences become a market that can be tapped, festivals will be facing difficult questions around corporate sponsorship and mainstream and heterosexual co-optation. However, if lesbian and gay film culture can stay connected to its political roots, if it can function both as a pleasurable and as a radicalizing force, its effects will be felt in other areas. It is a profound feeling to experience invisibility; it is nothing less than revolutionary to take one's body and one's history back. And, as the Jennifer Saunders case indicates, visibility can also be dangerous. Lesbian and gay images are tricky business.

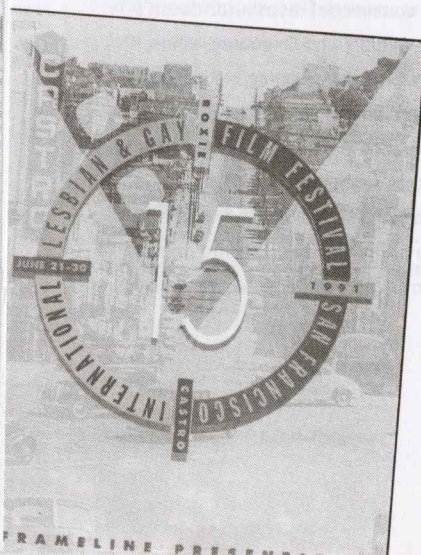
Marusia Bociurkiw is a writer, video/filmmaker, and self-diagnosed film festival junkie living in Montreal and Toronto.

Ideas and input from Cecilia Dougherty, Pratibha Parmar, Suzanne Downes, and Sandra Haar are gratefully acknowledged.



Endnotes

1. For the record, only one of the transgressive guests was male.
2. *On Our Backs Magazine*, San Francisco, Fall 1988.
3. Pratibha Parmar, "That Moment of Emergence." In *Amsterdam Lesbian and Gay Film Festival Catalogue*, 1991.
4. "Black" is a term used in European countries to refer to all people of colour.
5. From the panel "Black on Black" at the *Amsterdam Lesbian and Gay Film Festival*.
6. Jan Zita Grover. In Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser, eds., *Stolen Glances* (London, England: Pandora, 1991).
7. bell hooks, *Yearning*. (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1990).
8. Martha Geever, "The Big Picture: The Making of Lesbian Media." In *Amsterdam Lesbian and Gay Film Festival Catalogue*, 1991.
9. *Bad Object Choices*, ed. *How Do I Look?* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991).
10. Judith McDaniel, "Taking Risks: Becoming a Writer as a Lesbian." In Betsy Warland, ed., *Inversions*. (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1991).
11. Quoted from courtroom documents; cited in Mindy Ran, "No Steps Forward, One Millennium Back," *City Life Magazine*, Amsterdam, December 1991.
12. Minnie Bruce Pratt, "The Friends of My Secret Self" In *her Rebellion: Essays 1980-1991* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1991).



THE POLITICS OF DENOUNCEMENT

BY ROZENA MAART

We interpret reality based on the known—the availability and cognizance of the familiar—and proceed with interpretations which enable us to locate our respective realities within a larger continuum of the Real. Seeking meaningful interpretations of our realities is an imperative seldom exercised. Of crucial significance to our understanding of the Real, is the knowledge that perceptions are socially, politically, and racially constructed, and often exist as a consequence of the exclusion of the buried historical. Thus what we perceive or are able to perceive is channelled within existing construction paths, where Truth exists as a consequence of a constructed reality and perception, a by-product of the racially-configured society within which we live the Real. This exclusion of the historical sets an agenda, a very different one indeed, for a larger discussion of what takes place when Black people are judged, and by whom. In order for any of us to understand what exactly took place not only on our television screens but within the larger American society (of which, as Black people, we know the need for these linkages and the subsequent development of our collective identity, even though we may live in Canada), we need to proceed by forging an agenda for the discussion about the historical—the historical presence of Black peo-

Clarence Thomas as Supreme Court Judge of the U.S.A.

ple in the United States; the historical process of defiance of white domination; the historical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized; and the historical perseverance of pursuing a Black identity within a society which actively works towards the destruction of Black people.

The media-controlled, squared-eyed, televised version of the continuum of the Real as orchestrated by the representatives of white America has treated both Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill with utmost disrespect. Thomas and Hill have been relegated to positions held by pawns, where through systematic moves they would be eliminated. They have been identified in terms which do not address the complexities of racism as a consequence of colonization. They have been identified without

histories of acquiescence or acceptance; histories which reflect upon the true nature of their processed beings; histories which have existed as stumbling blocks in their respective paths to attaining the fulfilment of their beings. The continuum of (the reality of) Black people who live and exercise the fullness of their being within white-dominated United States is one of survival—either through assimilation or revolt. The history of the Black struggle in the U.S. has been one of revolt. It was pursued and continues to be pursued by adherents of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Angela Davis, Fannie Lou Hamer, and many other African-American men and women who revolted in known and unknown ways against U.S. white domination. Unfortunately, for many of the Black men and women with whom I spoke, the debates seem to have centred around these two issues:

1. Believing Anita Hill or Clarence Thomas.

2. Approving of Clarence Thomas as a Black man who was a candidate for the Supreme Court, where he will historically be a Second, after the retirement of Thurgood Marshall and yet again the only Black representation on the Supreme Court, and therefore to denounce Anita Hill for her untimely public accusation of Clarence Thomas as a sexual harasser.

Such simplified production of choices leave us with no tools by which to better understand our acquiescence or defiance. It leaves one with feelings of immense hostility at either, or both, Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill. And indeed what a wonderful task to accomplish than to constantly hold Black people hostage to their own realities. Let us not be torn by divide and conquer politics but let us re-assess on our own terms the processes by and through which the Clarence Thomases and the Anita Hills exist in this society.

If indeed we consider the historical processes which have juxtaposed a “good” Black against a “bad” Black, we know that this stems out of a relationship which Black people had to develop with their slave owners. It is thus one of submission and subordination; one of survivor and victim; one of House-Negro, working within the household, and one of Field-Negro, working outside in the cotton fields; it is one out of which a set of social relations was created through coercion to reflect upon the chastising qualities that the master and the whip accomplished; it is also about a set of social relations which was maintained through verbal celebrations of oral, African power, about individuals who refused to genuflect to whips, or to seek solace in houses which provided limited comfort, and indeed, a set of social relations which continues to determine the extent of defiance of Black people in the United States today. Such a context thus provides us with a larger basis from which to draw our conclusions and create different ways by which to assess information when it is about Black people who have acquiesced. It may explain why Clarence Thomas was nominated! If we consider what white domination identifies as “good” certainly no Black man would be a candidate! What the nomination of Clarence Thomas by George Bush suggests, is that only when the Black identity emerges at the backdrop of the white experience, only in this capacity may it even be considered! Hence the choice of a Black man who, although a recipient, would perpetuate and reproduce the ideologies through which white domination is maintained!

As Malcolm X stated, a good Black man is a dead Black man. George Bush’s nomination of Clarence Thomas is about a particular death: it is about an alive man who has killed his own history—his history of Blackness. But like all killings and death, none can be resurrected except as Christianity maintains, only that of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ. But Clarence Thomas proved otherwise. He resurrected his Blackness with images and symbols very much like Christianity when confronted with the true reality of Black men, whom he does not identify with since he has never stood trial under white male domination yet whom he publicly condemned as they, not he, who live under this reality of judgement by the law. Thomas then proceeded by casting himself as a recipient of lynching, of a systemic act of racism gone by. He resurrected the burning cross, resurrected images of suffering and pain, and like true Christians whose purpose it is to convince sinful individuals of a past, where Jesus Christ was persecuted and we have to live by the goodness of his sacrament, Thomas identified the past—a reality he did not himself live under, but a reality that lives itself out in similar ways everyday. These white men, upon listening to the broadcast of George Bush, the most important white male god who really counts, made a decision to reflect upon the true nature of their understanding of this very Christian crucifixion of a Black man, who George Bush has cast as an abiding, accountable-to-white-domination Black angel. Christianized to their fullest potential, these white men, significantly with not a Semite on the bench, favourably judged the colonized Hemite. Thomas then ascended into and upon the throne of the Supreme Court, sitting at the (politically) “right” hand of the father (George Bush) where among the white clouds he shall shine like a treasured, colonized, Black jewel.

Choosing Clarence Thomas as a Black man to grace the halls of the Supreme Court is about choosing a Black, christianized man who has denounced a tradition of Blackness. Here is a man who genuflects to the causes of the white man. Here is a man, unlike the purpose by which Black

Consciousness becomes a commitment for orators and ideologues like Steve Biko, who spoke about Black Consciousness as rallying around the cause of our skin colour, that Blackness be exercised as a political identification not in opposition to whiteness but as a political commitment to ourselves. But indeed here is a man who clearly demonstrates to the agents of white domination that they have succeeded in determining the extent of his being—his Blackness. Let me continue to say, indeed, this is not only about Judge Clarence Thomas, but about the processes by and through which white domination has proceeded to determine the false consciousness of the recipients of their racism. As recipients of white racism we constantly have to cast our existence at the backdrop of the white experience. We are chosen, our plights are highlighted, and our positions within white-dominated structures are alluded to if and only when we identify ourselves as individuals emerging out of this racism, which through its institutionalized, structural, and systemic nature lies about who and what we are. The lies of white domination are no less painful than the truth. For in truth we have learnt that our histories have been shackled and with whips and chains that have kept our identities in place, we emerged as defiant beings, opposing all the manifestations of racism. The lies linger like rotten fruits—picked to die. If indeed there is a death to mourn, it is about the death of a Black man’s identity constructed out of pain and suffering, where unable to make meaning of the racism so deeply inflicted, he emerged as a man about to heal his pain by becoming the best candidate for white colonization. Unto the gods whom he suffered under, and under whom his colonized being suffered daily, in order for him to survive, the only possible solution for Clarence Thomas was to identify with his colonizers—to identify and internalize the centuries of racism; to identify and emerge as a startling example of a House-Negro who became a White-House-Negro. A lesson has been learnt: one of success and one of failure. If we as Black people intend to succeed we then have to fail

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WHAT IS IT THAT UNITES THE COLOURS OF BENNETTON?

by Ian Roderick

WHILE WALKING UP A MAIN STREET by my home I happened to notice a billboard for Benetton clothing which had just been posted. Typically it was an "inter-racial" advertisement. It portrayed three young women, one black, one white, and one Asian. They faced me straight on and cheekily stuck out their tongues. The ad suggested that under the pigmentation of their skin they all had pink tongues; that they all spoke with the same tongue; that they all spoke the universal language

of equality, or at least, of anti-racism. This, however, is only half the suggestion, the half that makes an attractive promise.

The image struck me when I recognized its resonance with an image I had seen before. It echoes an etching by William Blake (1757-1827) which also professes to be egalitarian, which promises a pure democratic speech act, and which demands the cessation of slavery.

Blake's *Europe Supported by Africa and America* is one of a series of etchings consigned to Blake as illustrations to accompany Captain J.G. Stedman's *A Narrative, of a five Years' expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam on the Wild Coast of South America; from the years 1772 to 1777*. Stedman was a mercenary in Guyana and an unlikely opponent of the slave trade. In Guyana to aid French attempts to put down the frequent slave revolts, he could do little more than deplore his own circumstances.

Blake's plate suggests a collective endeavour between the three continents. They stand before the viewer naked and given to *his* gaze, as if they were a chorus joined in song. The song they sing is one of harmony between the continents in

which their peoples "may henceforth and to all eternity be the props of each other."¹ The potential success of their union is revealed by the growth of three roses at the feet of the continents/women who stand on otherwise barren ground.

Blake seemingly disavows the colour of one's skin as a determinate of one's humanity. A prolific poet as well as engraver, Blake's poetry equally expresses a concern for the lack of equality between "the races." The black youth whom Blake ventriloquizes in "The Little Black Boy" declares

And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face,
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.²

And thus I say to little English boy,
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,³

By employing the metaphor of clouds, Blake attributes superficiality and ephemerality to skin colour and implies that there is something deeper and common to us all which makes us human. What makes us human, for Blake, is our soul.

What Blake, Stedman, and Benetton cannot escape is their reliance upon a Euro-centric teleology. The "humanness" which Blake and Stedman seek to reveal in the "Negro" is defined in terms of qualities which the white man is already said to possess. The purity of the soul is defined by its whiteness:

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O! my soul is white.
White as an angel is the English child:
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.⁴

This dubious relationship between the white and black child is only to be resolved in heaven which the black boy anticipates as:

And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him, and he will then love me.⁵

The conclusion with which one is left is that the white child must see his own image in the black child before he may

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BUT O! MY SOUL IS WHITE



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There is no guilt or anxiety, no sign of complicity for the viewer of European ancestry. We can comfortably enter the encounter with the cultural Other because they are not really very different from ourselves. Like the English boy in heaven, we can see our own image in the similarly attired and "coloured" people.

Even if the Benetton ad were ironic in intention it would be inappropriate. To describe the mural as ironic suggests the possibility of still enjoying a common subject position from which one can "read" the ad. Not only does the ad still speak to a universal subject but it privileges a subject who can occupy the position of the benevolent observer. As a parody it can only make reference to a white, middle class, male vision of equality.

If Blake chooses a white soul to symbolize the commonality of all humanity then Benetton makes the same suggestion with its pink tongues. We should ask ourselves what the three contemporary fig-

OF DENOUNCEMENT

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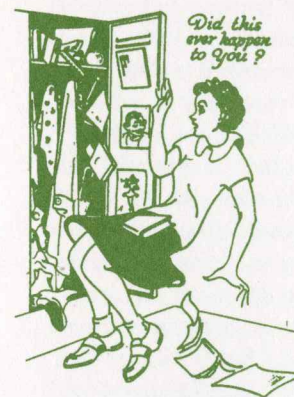
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What Blake, Stedman, and Benetton cannot escape is their reliance upon a Euro-centric teleology. The "humanness" which Blake and Stedman seek to reveal in the "Negro" is defined in terms of qualities which the white man is already said to possess. The purity of the soul is defined by its whiteness:

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O! my soul is white.

White as an angel is the English child:
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.⁴

This dubious relationship between the white and black child is only to be resolved in heaven which the black boy anticipates as:

And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him, and he will then love me.⁵

The conclusion with which one is left is that the white child must see his own image in the black child before he may

love him as a fellow human being. This can only be done by the passage of both white and black clouds so as to reveal *white souls!*

Likewise, Blake's work *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) follows a similar tack. Written at about the same time that Blake was illustrating Stedman's *A Narrative*, it is the story of the failed love of Oothoon, a female slave, and the free-man Theotormon. Oothoon, though a slave and clearly intended to represent all black slaves, is illustrated as a white woman. Her whiteness grants her humanity and thus allows the reader to recognize the crimes against it. Oothoon proclaims: "And I am white and pure to hover round Theotormon's breast."⁶

Despite the constant mutinies aboard slave ships and slave revolts of which Stedman's own narration attests, both he and Blake envision the slaves as victims. They express their sympathy for them largely through the construction of long-suffering female characters. Only by making reference to women can Blake and Stedman describe the slaves' "powerlessness," and so they participate in the feminization of other races. It may well be that this was an acceptable way to describe the relations between races for the abolitionists: equal, but somehow subordinate.

BUT O! MY SOUL IS WHITE



In toto, the three continents do not stand as a choir, but rather, Europe's voice predominates. Africa and America serve as the chorus offering vocal support to and singing through Europe.

The advertisements of Benetton are intended to appeal to a cosmopolitan audience. As with Blake's, Benetton's cosmopolitanism is largely Euro-centric.

Both Blake's etchings and the Benetton ads with which we have come to be so familiar are typically ethnographic. They promise a moment of contact with the cultural Other that is always harmonious. In order for the peoples to be united there must be a corresponding moment of universalization or homogenization. For Stedman and Blake our unification comes through "our" common Creator and the "pure" souls he has endowed unto us.

Within *Europe Supported* the viewer is reminded of the history which precedes this newly formed tripartite as Africa still bears the broken manacle of slavery while Europe continues to wear pearls. Unlike Blake's illustration, the Benetton advertisement provides the viewer with no prior context to the encounter being portrayed. The Benetton ad is only concerned with the here and now, the immediate moment of contact.

There is no guilt or anxiety, no sign of complicity for the viewer of European ancestry. We can comfortably enter the encounter with the cultural Other because they are not really very different from ourselves. Like the English boy in heaven, we can see our own image in the similarly attired and "coloured" people.

Even if the Benetton ad were ironic in intention it would be inappropriate. To describe the mural as ironic suggests the possibility of still enjoying a common subject position from which one can "read" the ad. Not only does the ad still speak to a universal subject but it privileges a subject who can occupy the position of the benevolent observer. As a parody it can only make reference to a white, middle class, male vision of equality.

If Blake chooses a white soul to symbolize the commonality of all humanity then Benetton makes the same suggestion with its pink tongues. We should ask ourselves what the three contemporary fig-

ures tell us when they speak in tongues. What is the yardstick of their humanity?

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ENDNOTES

1. Captain J.G. Stedman. *A Narrative, of a five Years' expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, on the Wild Coast of South America; from the years 1772 to 1777*. (1796). Vol. I, 206.
2. William Blake. "The Little Black Boy." *Songs of Innocence*. (1789). lines 15-16.
3. lines 22-24.
4. lines 1-4.
5. lines 27-28.
6. *Visions*. line 20, page 3.

THE POLITICS OF DENOUNCEMENT

FROM PAGE 19

to be Black. If failing means having to maintain our dignities and pursue our beings outside of these constructions, let failure be our motto and succession be our death. For the politics of denouncement, of failure, of denial, of a system that requires us to exist as appendages of the system of white domination, can be of no use if it means a constant death of all of who we are. Denouncement of an ancestral pride that rings with rebellion and shines with a resistance of survival—only through true recognition of these histories can we move forward towards fighting the colonizer, and before we denounce ourselves, denounce the system which has taught us to denounce who exactly we are. —Oct. 20, '91

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the State of the Forest

The Canadian Landscape as PROPAGANDA

by Oliver Kellhammer

THREE P.M. ON A LEADEN AFTERNOON on Vancouver Island. Fat raindrops are pelting down from a sullen sky. A chilling mist is rolling in from the Pacific. I am standing in the midst of a "clear-cut"—a vast expanse of scorched earth, charred tree stumps and rubble strewn gullies in which pristine mountain streams once flowed. My hiking guidebook, which is out of date, tells me that I'm in an area of "old-growth" forest which is "currently" embroiled in a controversy between environmentalists and the logging industry. It is clear who won. A large plywood sign advises that the sea of destruction stretching out in front of me is a Western Forest Products Ltd. "tree farm" and that the scorched ground has been "treated"—with chemical herbicides—to "encourage the growth of young conifers." Judging by the surrounding stumps, most of the trees (hemlock, cedar and some Sitka spruce) were hundreds of years old when cut or "harvested" (as it is called in the industry). If this was indeed a "tree farm," who planted it in the first place hundreds of years ago? Clearly the reality of the devastation in front of me did not corroborate the language used on the corporation's sign. Soon I learn that such absurd dichotomies between physical reality and the corporate worldview have become a hallmark in the debate over Canada's forests.

THE FOREST . . . Canada's "mantle of green." To many of us, this concept still invokes memories from schoolbooks of stalwart lumberjacks, dwarfed by the vastness of primeval wilderness. Perhaps we imagine a trapper's cabin, amidst towering pines, or perhaps the sight of a moose by a lake at sunset or the "drip-drip-drip" of sap into the buckets of a maple grove in late winter. No matter what particular image comes to mind, our concept of "forest" is clearly archetypal and one that is deeply ingrained in the Canadian psyche.

The forest has often been a defining factor in Canadian social and cultural history. To aboriginal peoples, it provided (and in many cases, continues to provide) food and shelter as well as a context for complex cosmologies and aesthetics. It shaped the patterns of the European colonization/subjugation process, aspects of which continue to this day. It was the forest which fuelled the fur trade and the shipbuilding industry—factors essential to maintaining the power base of the invading Europeans.

At present the forest is serving the needs of corporate capital. The result of these needs is wholesale forest destruction. The corporate sector, in collusion with various levels of government, has sensed the potential for public outrage over this escalating ecological catastrophe. As a result, it has launched a sophisticated propaganda campaign aimed at denying the catastrophe and attempting to reprogram our basic forest concepts. Thus, by the time the catastrophe is complete, most Canadians will no longer possess the frames of reference necessary to describe forest destruction in a meaningful way.

HEWERS OF WOOD AND SPLITTERS OF WORDS

Canada's rapacious forest products industry has found it difficult to hide its visible effects from an increasingly sceptical public. Canada's deforestation has been compared to that of the Amazon.¹ The clearcuts on Vancouver Island and in Northern Ontario have become so vast as to constitute a dominant landform feature, which is clearly visible in satellite photographs.² The forest industry is aware of its image problem and has resorted to various propaganda techniques in order to continue its agenda. It has tried to shift basic terms of reference regarding the natural environment toward the corporate viewpoint through the skilful use of language.

One method is to invent a new language. Preferably, this language should have a limited vocabulary and employ superficially familiar terms to mean new things. Consequently, industry advertisers and public relations consultants expend a great deal of time and effort making sure that the language of the debate is completely under control. As soon as a given dispute can be stated effectively in the coded language of the corporation, it is ready for a public hearing—the corporation being secure in the knowledge that even the more radical expressions of public opposition will be constrained by the linguistic framework which it has imposed.

In our office, there is a team of experts rewriting our vocabulary.

—Frank Oberle (Federal Minister of Forests), Vancouver, November 1991.

THE VOCABULARY OF DESTRUCTION: "ForestSpeak"

A typical example of this language distortion and invention is the forest industry's use of the term "tree-farm licenses" (TFL's) for areas of virgin timber on crown (i.e., public) land over which they have been granted control. When an environmental or aboriginal group contests the right of the corporation to denude a piece of landscape and the watersheds that it may contain ("landscape" and "watershed" are terms which connote public interest), the industry simply responds that its "tree-farm" licenses are being threatened ("farms" connote areas of "private" interest, "farm" being an archetypal concept of "property" and a cornerstone of North American capitalist myth). Inevitably, this strategy arouses the sympathy and support of the legal system which is already strongly predisposed to emphasizing property rights over human rights.

Recently, a right-wing British Columbia politician (in a complete capitulation to the corporate line) decontextualized the term "tree-farm" further, inventing the term "fibre-farm"³ which, thankfully, did not gain public usage. In point of fact, "tree-farm" licenses represent more than just a linguistic privatization of public space. Key information concerning corporate activities on these public lands is kept rou-

tinely secret by provincial governments on the grounds of "commercial confidentiality."⁴

It continues to be more expedient financially for corporations to respond to public concern over abuse of the environment with linguistic obfuscation than to entertain any real reform. The corporate "P.R." machinery has developed a new language with which to inoculate a compliant mass media. What emerges is a strange new Orwellian language which we might call "ForestSpeak." The federal government explicitly promotes this approach. At a recent Vancouver silvicultural conference, federal forestry minister Frank Oberle advocated "rewriting (forest) industry vocabulary" through a "public education campaign" to eliminate any terms that might "have an emotional impact on the layman," thus enabling government and industry to "assure everyone of the high standards of Canadian forest management practices."⁵ The following is a brief glossary of some "ForestSpeak" terms cross-indexed with their (as yet) more common definitions:

CONVENTIONAL ENGLISH	"FORESTSPEAK"
propaganda	"public education"
environmentalist	"ecoterrorist"
forest	"tree-farm" or "fibre-farm"
old-growth/virgin forests	"over-mature timber" "decadent forest"
conservationist	"preservationist"
clear-cut logging	"the working forest"
clear-cut logging with camping allowed afterwards	"multiple use"; also, "sharing the forest"
log shortage	"mill overcapacity"
park	"heritage forest"
wilderness	(no equivalent)
anticipated regional economic/ecological collapse due to industrially instigated deforestation	"fall-down effect"
Areas not wanted by forest cor- porations due to poor quality or relatively inaccessible timber	"recreation-potential" "heritage forest"
Nitrogen fixing trees (alder, etc.) vital in the process of forest succession but of lower commercial value	"weed trees"
Anyone not in full agreement with forest industry policies	"interest groups"
pro-corporate view	"balanced"

ELIMINATING POINTS OF COMPARISON

Winston: "But it did exist! It does exist!
It exists in memory. I remember it! You remember it!"

"I do not remember it," said O'Brian.

—George Orwell, 1984.

While these examples of "ForestSpeak" exhibit some simple language coding techniques employed by corporate propagandists aimed at "industrializing" our forest concepts, they are just an adjunct to a much larger and more insidious arsenal of psychological warfare.

To achieve the maximum conversion of public forest resources into private capital (with a minimum of public interference), the forest industry has prioritized destruction of potential public rallying points, i.e., areas of forest wilderness which have developed special cultural significance. These forest icons or archetypes hold certain qualities which contribute towards a "forest concept" in the popular consciousness. Their very existence serves as a link to a pre-industrial, non-mediated past and can often arouse deep-seated emotions incompatible with contemporary mass-industrial paradigms. Corporations are very eager to tamper with such concepts.

Perhaps the nearest physical manifestation of the "pure" forest concept is that of the "old-growth" forest. This is a forest that has reached a state of dynamic equilibrium, spanning long periods (in Canada as far back as the last ice age and in the case of some tropical rain forests, possibly much longer). Because of a relative lack of disturbance, the plant and animal communities contained within such old-growth forest can, over time, become very complex and for the same reason, individual trees within these forests can, under certain conditions, attain great age and size. If such an ecology remains intact over a fairly large area and is relatively free from industrial effects, it approximates many people's concept of forest "wilderness." As old-growth forest ecosystems become increasingly rare, changing from environmental ground to environmental figure in only a few generations, their symbolic and cultural value becomes more significant to Canadians.

It is precisely because of their symbolic value that the last contiguous examples of old-growth forest are being systematically destroyed. The arguments put forth by industry to justify their deforestation practices ("x" number of jobs, "so and so" many millions of dollars into the local economy, etc.) have become largely unsustainable. The real short-term monetary value of the "resource," i.e., logs and jobs, is now often exceeded by the long-term expense of extracting the timber and dealing with the litigation that environmentalists and native groups initiate when these last stands of old-growth are threatened. However, massive government subsidies have been injected into the industry as face-saving measures. The Temagami wilderness of Ontario is a case in point. Here, the contro-

versial "Red Squirrel" logging road has become the most heavily subsidized logging road⁶ in Canadian history—all in order to assure the destruction of a small, yet highly symbolic, remnant of Ontario's original old-growth pine forest.

For the forest industry and David Peterson's⁷ Liberal government, the Temagami wilderness represented far too important an environmental rallying point to be left intact. It was one of the most significant stands of old-growth forest left within easy access to Canada's industrial heartland. Furthermore, it is home to the Temagami Anishnabi, an aboriginal people who have long claimed title to the land. In keeping with tradition, the province's ruling capitalist elite was eager to marginalize these people further; it feared setting "altruistic" precedents that might limit profits. In addition to spending over 3.5-million⁸ in tax dollars to construct the logging road, the province footed the bill for over 370 arrests⁹ and detentions of protesters—a staggering policing cost and totally out of proportion to the potential benefits in revenue expected from the logging process itself.

It has become evident that this push to open up 80 per cent of the Temagami wilderness to logging was more than just a simple entrepreneurial venture or a job creation exercise for an economically marginalized area. The "Red Squirrel" road was a concerted effort to re-write Ontario's ecological history by destroying one of the last symbols of an ecological past. As these last forest wildernesses are impinged by corporate activity, any existing reality not controlled in some way by corporate culture will be unimaginable. Public opposition to the corporate world view will become a moot point because the only paradigm of pre-corporate reality available—wilderness—will have either been eliminated as a non-mediated form, or at best, enshrined and "museumized" in public parks. The major challenge for the corporate propagandist, then, is to assuage the public's fears about corporate control over (formerly) public wilderness and downplay the land's destruction by concealing the effects or presenting them as desirable and ultimately inevitable.

Industry's fragmentation of the wilderness has already been achieved with phenomenal success throughout much of this country. Most of the areas now in dispute are at the periphery of corporate exploitation, such as the few remaining unlogged watersheds on Vancouver Island or the aspen parklands of northern Alberta. All other areas have been turned into a corporate "Kulturlandschaft" at least to some degree. For example, British Columbia's tourism ministry, eager to capitalize on its "Super-Natural" image, recently had ferry cruise ads photographically retouched to remove evidence of ubiquitous "clearcutting" on coastal mountainsides.¹⁰ Presumably, realistic depictions of the landscape could be detrimental to the potential tourist dollar.



Will tourists pay to see these forests that have never been logged?
Will film companies use these forests to shoot films about life long ago?

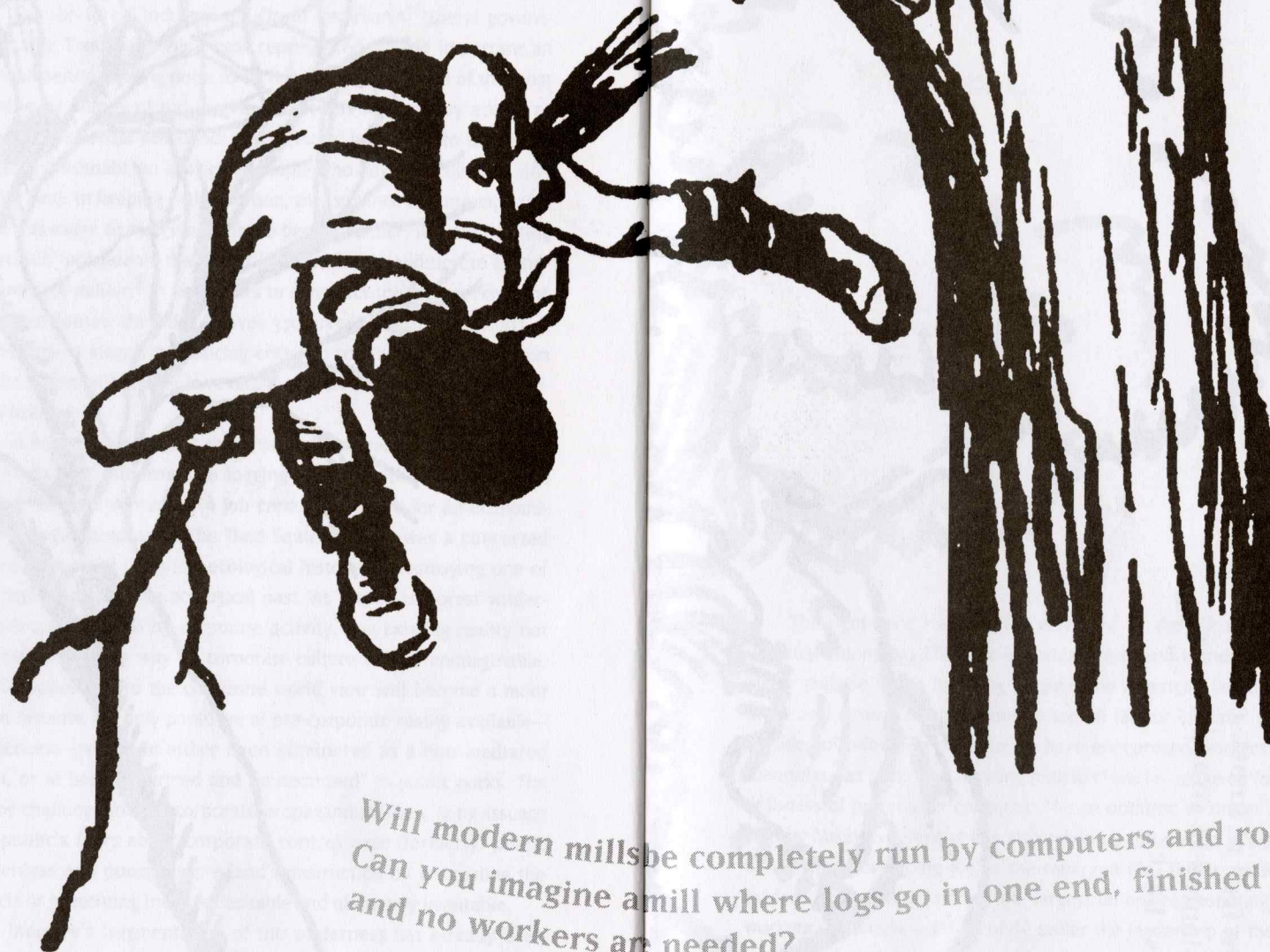
MACFOREST —THE THEME PARK

When photographic retouching fails, the forest industry presents its large-scale destruction of wilderness as an improvement. In the ever-evolving wonderland of corporate advertising, the industry appears as the "steward" and "custodian" of Canadian forests—a new and improved surrogate for a beleaguered Mother Nature whose trees are (according to one corporation's literature) rife with "insects" and "disease," requiring the interjection of "intensive forest management" and the "Designed Forest System."¹¹

In order to make the radical transformation of forest wildernesses into charred stump fields and chemically sprayed "tree-farms" more palatable, the corporate identity is being transformed into the identity of nature itself. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to replace the public's concepts of "forest" with those of the corporate agenda. Reminiscent of Disneyland, the industry is eager for Canadians to view our forests as a sort of generic theme park—a sanitized framework in which the corporate image and worldview can be promoted relentlessly.

The proposed tree-cutting in Vancouver's Stanley Park epitomizes this "theme park" mentality. Stanley Park, logged by primitive methods in the 1860s and 1880s, miraculously retains a few stands of exceptionally large old-growth conifers. In addition, a lush secondary-growth forest of massive alders and big-leaf maples has emerged on the sites originally logged, resulting in a rich, mixed forest of ecological diversity exceptional for an urban park. All was well until, in a proposed 3-million dollar "forest regeneration plan," forestry giant MacMillan Bloedel ("Mac-Blo" in B.C.'s vernacular) offered to "clear-cut" 5,000 mature deciduous trees in order to replace them with evergreen seedlings to create "a forest typical of our native coastal forests with as natural an appearance as possible."¹² "Mac-Blo" also kindly offered to "chip in" 1.5-million dollars—half the cost of the program, in order to ensure its completion. However, due to the region's natural forest ecology (an irritating detail to the "high-tech" oriented industry), the presence of the deciduous alders is vital in providing the soil nitrogen required for the proper growth of the very evergreen seedlings scheduled to be planted. Consequently, the plan also calls for the dumping of 200 kilograms per hectare of artificial chemical fertilizers so the seedlings can grow into the "natural" forest envisioned. Although there was considerable public outcry, the plan was passed in a slightly modified form in June of 1990, by a municipal parks board.

But what could "Mac-Blo" possibly hope to gain by chopping 5,000 trees out of the heart of Canada's most environmentally conscious metropolis? The timber value of the park's alders and maples is clearly negligible and the cost for the project is exorbitant by logging industry standards. As a public relations gesture of corporate charity, the plan was incomprehensible because it predicated obvious and sustained public outrage. The only plausible rationale remaining is that of corporate brand identification. "Mac-Blo" wants to place its corporate identity or trademark on the only bit of nature



Will modern mills be completely run by computers and robots?
Can you imagine a mill where logs go in one end, finished paper comes out the other
and no workers are needed?

left for most Vancouverites—so much so, that it is willing to fork over 1.5-million dollars to do it. By performing these large scale and highly visible alterations to the park's vegetation (presumably signposted with "forest management brought to you by MacMillan Bloedel"), the park is transformed from a relic of intact ecological process into an artifact in which nature becomes a "theme" with which to promote the corporation. In addition, by putting itself in the position of redefining what is "natural" about Stanley Park, the corporation neutralizes the park's value as a rallying point for environmentalism, a movement which derives the bulk of its support from urban dwellers. Tragically, Stanley Park's conversion to a forest industry theme park suggests, to some, an inevitability of corporate control and privatization of public green spaces.

As long as some places remained free and wild, the idea of free and wild could still live.

—Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*.¹³

THE HIDDEN FRONT: FOREST INDUSTRY PROPAGANDA IN THE SCHOOLS

More frightening than clearcutting parks and "share the forest" ad campaigns is the forest industry's influence on school curricula. For example, in B. C., the logging interests and their sympathetic levels of government have used elementary school textbooks in order to

present a blatantly pro-corporate view on contemporary forest issues. A Grade 5 social studies text, *Explorations*,¹⁴ with a "unit" on "Exploring the Forest Resource" discusses possible future scenarios for the province's forests, such as, "trees planted in straight rows" with "radio-controlled robots spraying the pests," "genetically engineered supertrees" and "mills completely run by computers in which NO WORKERS ARE NEEDED" (author's emphasis).

Any information on alternative forestry practices is conspicuously absent. Such concepts as ecologically sustainable forestry, producer co-operatives, and community land trusts are completely ignored—apparently deemed too antithetical to the existing corporate oligarchy for young minds.

In this same book, elementary school children are presented with the inevitability of wholesale destruction of the environment. In a double page spread extolling the "wages, taxes and exports" that the forest industry provides, the hapless child is confronted with an imposing chart entitled "Good Times and Bad Times in the Forest Industry,"¹⁵ a simplified version of the right-wing "trickle-down" theory of economics. In "Option 1," "Bad Times," "Very few houses are built in the United States," our forest industry makes "less money," "less taxes are paid" and your school won't get any "computers or soccer." If, on the other hand, "Option 2" prevails; and "Canadian forest companies sell a large amount of lumber to the United States," "more tax money is paid" and there will be "good times for your school," if you like computers or soccer. Why the forest companies or the United States are allowed to dictate community economic conditions in Canada is an issue which is never addressed, nor is our chronic need to develop viable secondary industries in order to avoid being held up for this kind of ransom.

For older children, the forest industry provides "scientific" brochures to help children with their school projects. "Mac-Blo" 's *HOW THE FOREST GROWS* booklet is typical. It describes botanical facts such as the "five principal conifer species of the west coast" but it also warns students that "it is in the interest of all Canadians to assume that the forest industry is regulated on a scale not greater than that of other countries . . . (or else) . . . we ("Mac-Blo") will be in no position to supply the new jobs that the growing Canadian labour force will need." In other words, unless the forest companies are allowed to proceed with a minimum of environmental accountability, all economic hell will break loose and students won't get a job after high school. In addition, students are taken on subsidized field trips to monocultural "demonstration forests" where sanitized versions of contemporary forestry practices are relentlessly flogged by government and industry spokespeople. Unless steered elsewhere by enlightened teachers, British Columbia's youngsters are presented with marginal choices in their economic and ecological future by a corporate propaganda system dedicated to maintaining the status quo.

THE WORKERS AND THE "WORKING FOREST"

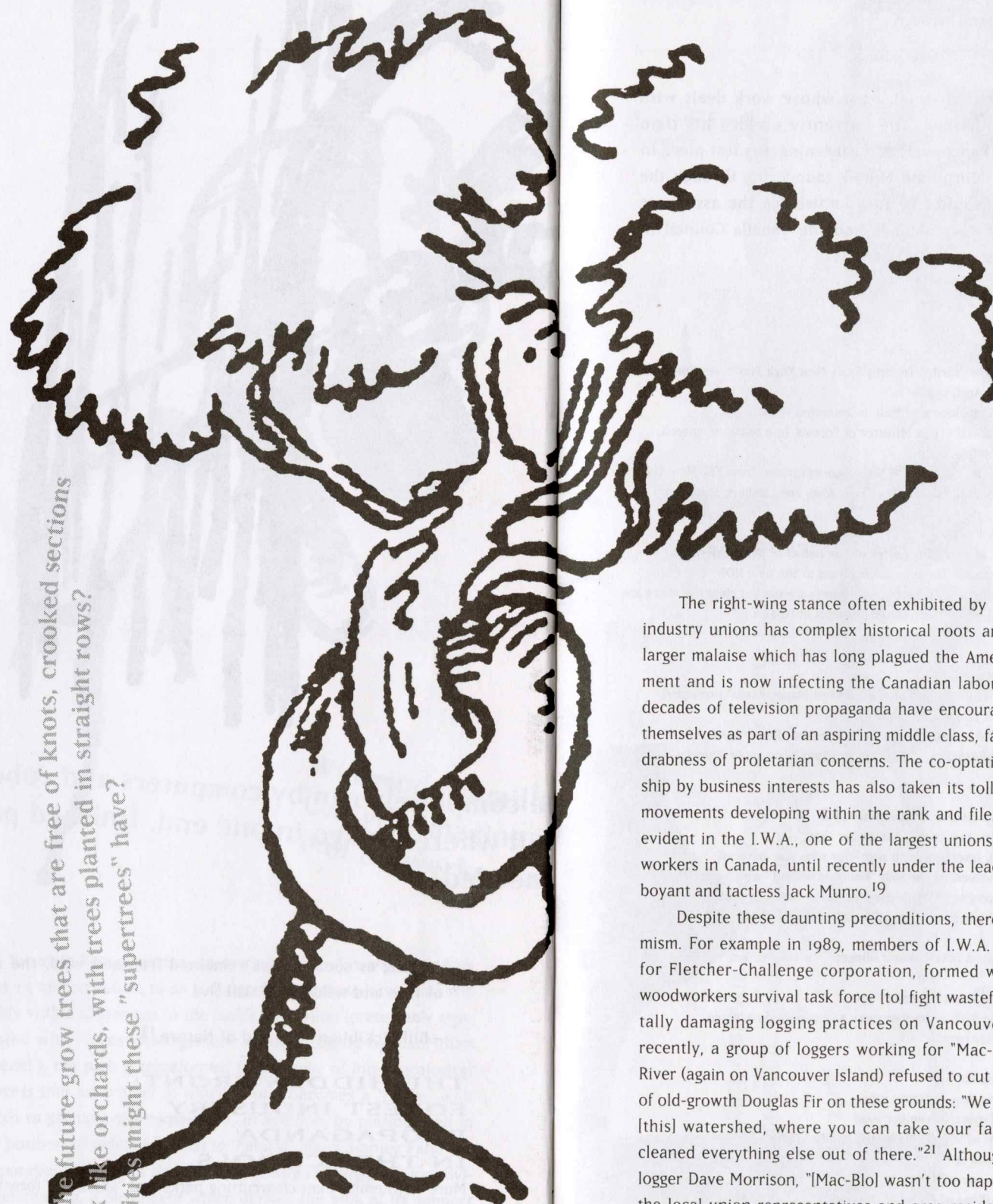
Any discussion of Canada's forests would be incomplete without examining the role of forestry workers. Nationwide, the forest industry employs a considerable number of people (one in ten Canadians),¹⁶ both directly and through secondary industries.

Unfortunately, in many regions of Canada, forest jobs are the only income available to workers. Thus, minor downturns in international demand for forest products can result in dramatic increases in regional unemployment. The "one industry town" is a familiar byproduct of such a resource-based economy, as is seasonal employment. It is not surprising then that environmentalists (or "preservationists" in industry parlance) are perceived with some hostility as a "threat to jobs" by many forest industry workers, as are aboriginal people. How did we get to such a sorry state of affairs where unionized workers are co-opted by the corporate agenda, away from what might seem to be more natural political alliances with environmentalists and aboriginal people?

Aboriginal people are commonly treated with scorn by forest industry workers, especially when asserting land claims for areas slated for logging. Natives must endure the deep-seated racism endemic in Canadian society as well as suffering significant semantic injustices against them inherent in our European-based legal system. Anti-aboriginal viewpoints are actively encouraged by the corporate bosses who (in British Columbia) give loggers days off with pay to protest at courthouses and legislatures against aboriginal efforts to secure land titles or against environmentalists advocating wilderness preservation.

Many Canadian communities have become deeply divided over these forest land use issues. The confrontation at Oka was precipitated through differing visions of forest land use—Mohawk homeland versus a private golf course. In the West, loggers have threatened British Columbia's Lil'wat people with guns and "blood going to be spilled"¹⁷ over a logging road blockade. In addition there have been media reports of environmental activists being run off the road by loggers on Vancouver Island as well as having their pets poisoned. Loggers have been used by police to "beat up" protesters arrested at logging road blockades, most recently at the controversial Tsitika/Robson Bight site on Vancouver Island.¹⁸

It is difficult to completely understand the sheer animosity directed by forestry workers toward environmentalists. Part of the blame can be placed at the feet of the environmental movement itself, which has shown a lack of class analysis/consciousness in dealing with forest industry workers. Environmentalists are perceived (with some accuracy) as urban, middle-class, well-educated persons who are quite unfamiliar with the day-to-day concerns of the average logger. The Canadian environmental movement has not been successful in convincing forestry workers that it is wasteful logging practices and ruthless implementation of job-destroying technological changes that most threaten their future and not conservation efforts, which only mark small areas of forest unavailable for commercial exploitation. The corporations, of course, have capitalized greatly on the workers' paranoia generated by the current economic recession.



*Will people of the future grow trees that are free of knots, crooked sections
Will forests look like orchards, with trees planted in straight rows?
What other qualities might these "supertrees" have?*

The right-wing stance often exhibited by the Canadian forest industry unions has complex historical roots and is indicative of a larger malaise which has long plagued the American labour movement and is now infecting the Canadian labour climate. Perhaps decades of television propaganda have encouraged workers to see themselves as part of an aspiring middle class, far removed from the drabness of proletarian concerns. The co-optation of union leadership by business interests has also taken its toll on any progressive movements developing within the rank and file. This is particularly evident in the I.W.A., one of the largest unions representing forest workers in Canada, until recently under the leadership of the flamboyant and tactless Jack Munro.¹⁹

Despite these daunting preconditions, there are signs for optimism. For example in 1989, members of I.W.A. local 1-80, working for Fletcher-Challenge corporation, formed what they called "a woodworkers survival task force [to] fight wasteful and environmentally damaging logging practices on Vancouver Island."²⁰ More recently, a group of loggers working for "Mac-Blo" near Campbell River (again on Vancouver Island) refused to cut a magnificent stand of old-growth Douglas Fir on these grounds: "We have nothing left in [this] watershed, where you can take your family to . . . We've cleaned everything else out of there."²¹ Although, in the words of logger Dave Morrison, "[Mac-Blo] wasn't too happy," the majority of the local union representatives and area residents expressed solidarity with the loggers' action.

Unfortunately, these are isolated incidents. The Campbell River situation, for instance, wasn't controversial because the stand of

trees was only 27 hectares, inconsequential in terms of job loss to the loggers or corporate profits. When larger areas are in dispute, such as in the recent controversy over the Tsitika/Robson Bight region of northern Vancouver Island, the workers have consistently followed the company line, declaring themselves "Economic Hostages of Native Land Claims"²² as well as verbally and physically attacking protesting environmentalists.

One would like to think that the isolated acts of foresight shown by members of forest industry unions indicate a groundswell of consciousness emerging which is still drowned out by the vociferous presence of a right-wing, pro-corporate minority. Many people working in the tree-planting industry, for example, are strongly supportive of the environmental movement, perhaps because they have first-hand experience with the mess that the forest corporations leave behind. It remains a fact however that in many communities dependent on forest jobs, considerable social pressures ranging from ostracization to the threat of physical violence are put on anyone known to profess sympathy for environmental reform. This factor must be taken into account when examining the appalling lack of environmental leadership shown to date by organized workers within the industry.

THE FUTURE FOREST

Both nationally and internationally, people realize that the Canadian forest industry is exacting a terrible price in return for the benefits that it provides. European foresters balk at our ecologically disastrous practices, claiming that they would "go to jail"²³ if they participated in the "forestry devastation" that has become routine in the Canadian woods.

According to one reporter, Canada's timber industry is "more highly subsidized than any of its main international competitors, yet is among the most irresponsible when it comes to environmental accountability."²⁴ Another points out that our governments "grant control over vast tracts of public and aboriginal lands to multinational consortiums in perpetuity—for free,"²⁵ even though these tree farm licenses become valuable and saleable corporate assets.

In addition to being obscenely wasteful, the forest industry is poisoning us. It is responsible for "half the water pollution in Canada"²⁶ (according to a leaked Environment Canada report). This has resulted in the closure of many productive fisheries and the elimination of countless jobs associated with them. It is also becoming obvious that the increasing number of landslides and floods associated with bad forestry practices is draining the public purse.

Although an important job source, the industry willingly uses these jobs as bargaining chips and threatens to eliminate them if forced to adopt, for example, pollution controls. In terms of actual forest jobs created, Canada ranks significantly behind its competitors (the U.S., New Zealand, and Sweden), creating a paltry 1.67 jobs for every 1000 cubic metres of wood cut.²⁷ This is due, primarily, to an unconscionable lack of corporate investment in secondary industries which could provide stability for workers dependent on the forest.

The state of the forest is at a crossroads in Canada and we must now collectively decide on its future. The present situation is (in the words of one spokesperson for professional tree planters) "a gigantic feudal structure."²⁸ We must now choose between the style of resource exploitation used in the Third World by the multi-nationals or smaller scale, community-based development models that are sustainable. Forest industry "information management" is a hindrance to this much needed and fundamental reform.

As a response to this crisis, there have been some encouraging signs of coalition building between environmental groups and aboriginal communities as well as some landmark community initiatives. The town of Hazelton in northern British Columbia, for instance, has issued what it calls a "Forest Industry Charter of Rights" which advocates "a more holistic view of how the environment, economy and politics should interact,"²⁹ through ecologically sustainable forestry practices under community control. Typical of the "new forestry," the Hazelton charter promotes the settlement of native land claims as a necessary part of its envisioned implementation—in marked contrast to present corporate policies. The Hazelton initiative appeals to many other groups pressing for industry-wide reform.

On a global level, there are indications that changing conditions in the world marketplace will make it more difficult for the forest industry to go ahead with "business-as-usual." Canada's negative "Amazon-like"³⁰ environmental image is already having repercussions in Europe, which currently imports 3.6-billion dollars³¹ worth of Canadian forestry products per year. Canadian forest products could be boycotted like tropical hardwoods, but on a larger scale. Germany has already begun purchasing pulp products from sources that it considers more environmentally-friendly than Canada.³² Proponents of the Canadian industry have taken this threat seriously and commissioned both a 58,000-dollar "media content analysis"³³ of its European image problem along with an anti-boycott propaganda campaign designed by a prestigious Ottawa ad agency. Apparently, European buyers can obtain their requirements from Russian and Scandinavian sources which are becoming more attractive due to the exigencies created by European economic union and the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. Politicians are also particularly eager to garner support from the powerful "Green" lobby present within the European Parliament. On this continent, the rising demand for recycled paper products is causing the larger corporations to move south of the border, away from the Canadian forests and close to big American cities which provide the market, raw materials, and cheap, non-union labour. These developments will create economic and cultural havoc in our forestry-dependent communities, unless progressive forestry reforms can be implemented in time.

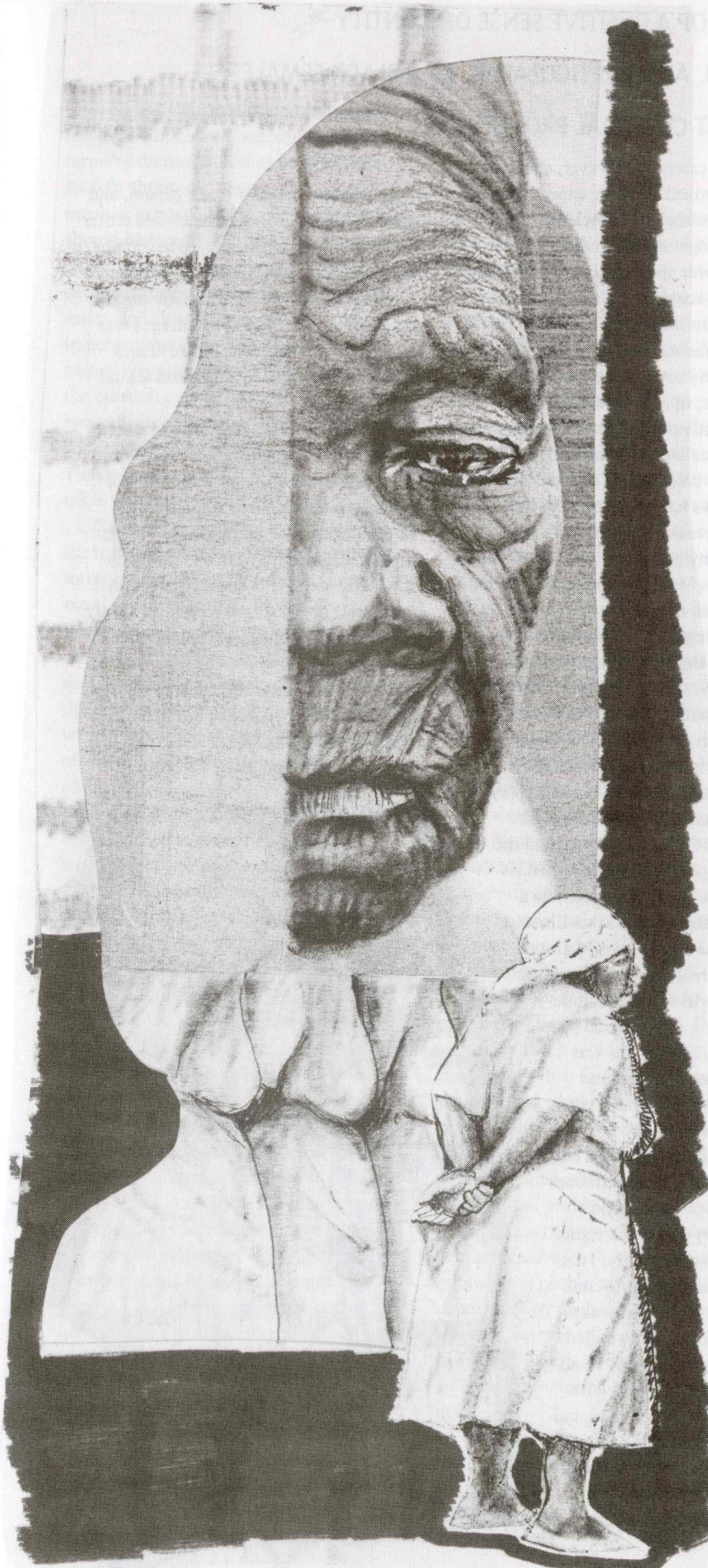
Canada has always been a land dominated by its forests. The forest has served as a context for both our history and culture. The land's abuse by corporate culture parallels our abuse by the right-wing agenda. We must understand the propaganda that is used to justify the devastation in order to defend against it. By exposing the corporate remanufacturing of our ecological history, we can at least

open the door towards building a sustainable future. If we do not act then future generations will be cheated out of an essential part of their natural and cultural heritage.

Oliver Kellhammer is a visual artist whose work deals with ecological/political issues. He currently divides his time between Toronto, Vancouver, and gardening. His last piece in *Fuse* was entitled "Corporate Money Laundering through the Arts." The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Anita Cudmore, Zoe Lambert, and the Canada Council in preparing the research for this article.

ENDNOTES

1. In fact, "The Brazil of the North." Timothy Egan, *New York Times*; reprinted in the *Vancouver Sun*, 22 April 1990.
2. Martin Mittelstaedt, *The Globe and Mail*, 11 December 1990.
3. Dave Parker, former Social Credit Minister of Forests, in a televised speech, Victoria, B.C., 25 May 1989.
4. Catherine Caufield, *Vancouver Sun*, 18 June 1990; excerpted from *The New Yorker*.
5. Ben Parfitt, *Vancouver Sun*, 19 November 1991. Also, Zoe Lambert, *Squamish Times*, 26 November 1991.
6. *Canadian Press*, 4 April 1990.
7. Premier Bob Rae was arrested for protesting on behalf of this wilderness (blocking the logging road). The full ramifications of the new NDP environmental policy on the Temagami wilderness are not yet clear but there are indications of at least some half-hearted attempts at reform.
8. See endnote 6.
9. *ibid.*
10. Personal communication.
11. Excerpted from various MacMillan Bloedel "Forest Management" literature.
12. Glen Bohn, *Vancouver Sun*, 9 December 1989.
13. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989).
14. "Exploring the Forest Resource," unit 1, *Explorations* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983).
15. *ibid.*
16. Ken McQueen, *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 November 1990.
17. Steve Berry, *Vancouver Province*, 4 November 1990.
18. BCTV News Broadcast. Interview with protester who was arrested.
19. Famous for his involvement in the 1983 "Kelowna Sellout" which effectively disemboweled an emerging BC-wide general strike, called to protest the repressive social and labour policies of the (then) Social Credit provincial government.
20. Wendy McLellan, "Island Forest Waste Alleged," *Vancouver Sun*, 30 August 1990.
21. Larry Pym, *Vancouver Sun*, 5 November 1990.
22. Larry Pym, *Vancouver Sun*, 31 October 1990; and televised coverage.
23. *Canadian Press*, 28 May 1990.
24. *ibid.*
25. Catherine Caufield, *op cit.*
26. Glen Bohn, *Vancouver Sun*, 15 March 1989.
27. WCWC Educational Report, November 1990.
28. Interview with editor of SCREEF Magazine, on "The Rational," *Vancouver Co-op Radio*, 14 March 1989.
29. A Forest Industry Charter of Rights, Corporation of the Village of Hazelton, 1990.
30. Ken McQueen, *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 November 1990.
31. Dennis Buekert, *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 May 1990.
32. Ben Parfitt, *Vancouver Sun*, 19 November 1991.
33. Dennis Buekert, *op cit.*



ILLUSTRATIONS BY GRACE CHANNER

SELF DETERMINATION & CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

IT HAS ALWAYS BOTHERED ME THAT SOME people can package images of other people, their characteristics and experiences, interpret them according to trendy, whimsical fashion, and market them for a fast buck. I'm talking about that sensitive subject of cultural appropriation.

YOU CAN'T SERVE THEM BOTH ON THE SAME PLATTER

BY JANISSE BROWNING

Different forms of cultural production—film, TV, literature, visual art, theatre, dance—help to shape our understanding of ourselves, others, and the environments we inhabit. However, from my perspective, the scales have been tipped to favour some ways of seeing and understanding over others. The way the scales are tipped has a lot to do with power, money, and history . . . those who have control over the means of production and dissemination of their wares, and those who have had limited or no access to the means of cultural production and distribution. Cultural appropriation, as Métis film- and video-maker Loretta Todd has described it (*Parallelogramme* 16:1) is the inverse of cultural autonomy. Cultural autonomy, writes Todd, signifies a right to cultural specificity, a right to one's origins and histories as told from within the culture and not as mediated from without. Read on, and you might see why I believe cultural autonomy is a necessary step towards the liberation of people like myself. I will also give a recent and obvious example of an incident

—ARE EITHER ABSENT FROM MOST CULTURAL PRODUCTION ...

which describes the insidious nature of appropriation. I conclude that people from the dominant culture who engage in practices of appropriation and misrepresentation obstruct the process of achieving cultural autonomy for people like myself.

I'm writing from personal experience here, especially when I think about the various levels of cultural awareness I've moved through in my life so far. I haven't always had a strong identification with my African heritage, and my awareness of the Native blood which courses through my veins was rarely spoken about. My understanding of the importance of his/herstory, as I embody it, didn't happen overnight.

As long as I can remember, I've always wanted to be an artist of sorts—a dancer, writer, or painter. My family somehow managed to scrape up enough money to put me through several years of ballet schooling until I was old enough to barter with my instructor for free lessons by "doing time" as an assistant instructor. After years of volunteering as a dance instructor for a couple of community centres in my hometown, I found myself with very little time to develop my own skills as a dancer or painter. I realized that I did not have the privilege, support, or perseverance needed to become a full-time artist. On top of that, it seemed that everyone was telling me I had to be "ten times as good" as the average white person in all my endeavours because of racism, and nobody was saying I was an extraordinary dancer or painter. So, I dropped the idea of being an "artist." There I was, a young Canadian of African and First Nations descent (usually referred to as "Black") who had relatively few options for obtaining financial security ("working class" or "blue collar," they call it). I figured the best possible route for getting ahead was to get a student loan, go to university, and choose some kind of a career. After almost seven years of university, I still haven't found that

enigmatic "career." However, a formal education mixed with life experience has helped me refine my knowledge and skills to recognize and challenge imbalances of power and privilege. I've learned to identify racism in its many insidious forms and am better equipped to articulate what mechanisms help perpetuate its existence. My experiences surviving Euro-centric, upper-middle class institutions like universities also taught me about colonialism. I have almost always known that colonialism affected me, but didn't always have the verbal or literary skills to express what I knew.

Like many people of colour and First Nations people in this society, I've been engaged in an ongoing bout against the inner workings of racism—those voices in the head that almost convincingly whisper, "White is the norm." My earliest, most vivid realization of this inner battle was in grade four. There was one other Black student in my class. The teacher set up a bulletin board display of drawings that all of us students had coloured in. Only one picture had the faces of people coloured in brown. That picture wasn't mine. It was a shock to discover that I was illustrating what I saw as the world around me (or my imaginary ideal world) and this world did not include dark-skinned, curly-haired people like myself. I think this was the beginning of a long and ongoing journey towards conscientization.

Although my extended family has been involved with community education around Black history and Black issues for more than a century, I distinctly remember being confused about my identity as a young member of a so-called "racial minority group" in an environment saturated with white people, their values, cultures, and images. It's a constant struggle to develop a positive sense of identity in a

world where you—as a Black person, and particularly, as a Black female—are either absent from most cultural production or are misrepresented as a racial or gendered anomaly. Looking back helps me understand how the social environment I was raised in forced me to be aware of and sensitized to racial, cultural, and sexual differences.

The herstories and histories of indigenous Black Canadians (many of whom, like much my family, are a *mélange* of heritages including African, First Nations, and some European) have been conveniently excluded from textbooks. Our existence in this country's recorded social memory has been represented only in relation to Euro-centric cultural perspectives. For those of us blessed with an abundance of skin pigmentation, all that seems to remain visible of our herstories and histories to the rest of society is our difference from "mainstream white



Canadians." The masks of colonialism, imperialism, racism, sexism—various forms of domination that most of this society chooses to accept as "normal"—must be exposed and removed. Each of us should be learning how we can best contribute to the process of attaining self-determination, community empowerment, and cultural autonomy for disenfranchised people . . . especially if that means stepping aside to make room for the cultural expression of those who have been affected by racial, class, and sexual domination most directly and painfully. That's how *real* learning and growing takes place.

There are many of us who recognize the importance of our herstories and histories because they are central to understanding our identities in relation to the rest of society. I refuse to just accept or lament the erasures of our past and present struggles and accomplishments from the larger society's memory. That's why I write. I feel it's important to have a sense of where I'm coming from to convey why I have beliefs and reactions to things that may differ from other people's. So often, the experiences of people like myself have been recorded, interpreted, and reinterpreted (and thus, negated) by others who don't really have a clue about what it's like being persecuted by racism in this society. We (people of African descent or mixed ancestries) can't shed our skins. We have hidden knowledge—a wisdom of experience we embody—that can't be accessed by white people because they have not been forced to continually combat white oppression like we have. Most of us hold some things secret, some things sacred, and are wary of sharing too much of our knowledge because of past betrayals. Any representation of ourselves and our cultural experiences done by an outsider would be from a comparatively superficial perspective, simply because he/she hasn't had the experience of surviving racial oppression—complete with all its complications, consequences, and contradictions. Outsiders could also be contributing to the process of colonization by "speaking on behalf of us," since

they fail to acknowledge, challenge, and thus, change their positions of privilege and dominance.

Cultural producers need to understand the degrees of complexity that come with racial and cultural differences. While many white cultural producers—writers, filmmakers, visual artists, etc.—have been busy creating what they thought was the reality of people like myself, I've been busy trying to piece together the fragments of my experiences and herstories/histories. I've been trying to find my own truth, let alone communicate it to other people in a mediated art form. But while I've been doing this—living my life, trying to get by, and searching for my own cultural truth/pride/understanding—I've been perturbed by the abundance of cultural appropriation that's crossed my path.

One of the most difficult cases of cultural appropriation I've recently confronted involves an upper-middle class, white North Vancouver artist who paints highly sexualized images of Black women as her primary motif. In the predominantly white, mostly male alternative art scene in Vancouver, this artist displays and has sold her interpretations of Black women, fetishizing our bodies, maternity, and eroticism. The artist, Katerina Thorsen, exoticizes Black women in paintings with erect, larger-than-life breasts, sometimes with splayed open vaginas that invite the gaze of onlookers. Her representations—like many images acquired mostly from watching films and TV as a child—magnify the sexual prowess of Black women. Such images construct and reinforce dangerous stereotypes that already exist in many white people's imaginations. After expressing my disdain to the artist and her supporters at an opening last April, I realized how concretely power relations are reproduced in the image-making business.

One of my concerns (similar to those of several other Black women and our sup-

porters who attended the opening at a downtown Vancouver gallery) was the over-zealous and insensitive manner in which a white woman was selling her artistic interpretations of sexualized "womanhood" as it is embodied in Black women. The white woman, once again, assuming the role of "interpreter" of Black women's experiences. I have not seen a Black Canadian woman artist granted as much attention as Thorsen. But then again, I have rarely had the privilege of seeing images of Canadian women of African descent who directly share those experiences of oppression created by women (especially in Vancouver, where we constitute a relatively small segment of the population).

It was almost two years ago that I was first confronted by Thorsen's paintings, while writing an article for a Vancouver arts magazine about new galleries and interviewing owners of the independently-owned gallery where her paintings were exhibited. Feeling uncomfortable with being surrounded by sexualized images of women that resembled women like myself, I finished my interview with the four white male gallery owners and got out fast as I could. The paintings disturbed me, but I wasn't sure why. I asked one of the gallery owners about the artist and he assured me that, although the artist was white, she had a daughter who was "part Black." That still didn't sit right with me, so I attended two more of Thorsen's exhibits over a six month period. Her images only seemed to get increasingly wild and voluptuous. She also added an explanatory catalogue in which she cited various African-American women writers as her inspirational/spiritual sources. However, her explanations didn't justify the stereotypes that were produced on canvas.

Discouraged by the lack of meaningful dialogue I was getting from people in the predominantly white alternative arts scene regarding Thorsen's questionable images and with the encouragement of a friend, I spread word about the April

OR ARE MISREPRESENTED AS A RACIAL OR GENDERED ANOMALY.

opening among Black women friends and allies of various heritages and racial backgrounds. The outrage and disgust spread. About 15 of us, including some women more outspoken than myself, attended the opening. Other than those who planned to attend for critical purposes, I could have counted the number of people of colour on one hand. The show was a voyeuristic adventure into, and exploitation of, our so-called "mysteries of strength and exoticism." Even, and especially, one painting which represented Sojourner Truth was upsetting. Larger-than-life and with exposed disproportionate breasts, Thorsen painted her image of Truth with excerpts from the well-known "Ain't I A Woman" speech paint-

ed below the bust. None of Thorsen's images represented women who were visibly aged beyond their so-called "prime" . . . they were all sexualized and inviting/inticing the onlookers' gazes. The reality is that growing up in racist Canada, a Black woman is made to feel more alienated than "exotic," and this aspect of our experiences was virtually ignored. Whether or not Thorsen realized this, her images conformed to racist representations which perpetrate the "white as norm" myth, implying that whites are intellectually and socially superior, while Black women once again are relegated to the realm of emotion and sexuality. Black women were reduced to foreign *images*, hung for sale in a white-owned and operated art gallery (richly priced and sold to mostly white patrons) while the complexities of our daily experiences and herstorical struggles for autonomy were

neatly discarded, quietly swept out the back door.

What happened at the opening was a reminder of the ignorance around cultural and racial issues that pervades this society. Thorsen's young daughter, whose (absent) father is Black, was confused by the controversy that three-dimensional Black women seemed to be creating around the exhibit. I was sorry for the girl's confusion, but recognized the importance of asserting our positions as Black women with *voices*—not images who silently approve of their positions as slave to a white public's indiscriminate consumer appetite. When Thorsen and I had a chance to talk that evening, she said her work was an attempt to explore "goddess" culture and to create positive images for her daughter. Some of us pointed out the contradictions between her desire to create positive images for her daughter and her perpetuation of uni-dimensional stereotypes of Black women. She had not seriously considered her position of power as an image-maker and as a white woman with access to privilege—painting, framing, and selling her indiscreet interpretations of Black women and Black women's "cultures." After some explanation about the roots of my disapproval, Thorsen apologized to me, acknowledging that women were feeling hurt and exploited. However, she also tried to avoid confrontation with us, thus failing to accept responsibility for her actions. When others gathered around to engage in our dialogue, Thorsen appeared uncomfortable, then quietly retreated to a room removed from public access. The gallery owners and Thorsen's (mostly white) supporters failed to understand our outrage. Many of them simply didn't want to deal with our anger because it disrupted the comfortable social scene they had constructed. They refused to acknowledge that they had walked into a battle over Black women's rights to culturally defined self-representation. They attempted to diffuse our



NOT EVERYONE HAS THE LUXURY OF TIME, MONEY, AND RESOURCES, OR SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT, TO SIMPLY MAKE AND DISSEMINATE "OUR OWN IMAGES." PRESTO-CHANGO IS NOT MY REALITY

arguments by claiming the right to play in the "never-never-land" of fiction and artistry without respecting our herstories of artistic disenfranchisement in mainstream Canadian society. They were, in effect, securing their power over the images of Black women's bodies. The paintings hung in that public space for almost a month—for all to either enjoy, disregard, or be disgusted.

Thorsen's brother approached me at the opening and asked, "Are you an artist?" I imagined where he intended to take me with his question. Would he argue: "Well, if you don't like the kind of images we make of people like you, then why not make your own?" I replied that I might have been an artist, but have not been willing or able to make the sacrifices (or take the risks) required to become a full-time artist in a white-dominated society where support is rarely handed to people like me on a silver platter. His question was loaded—loaded with confidence and ignorance that comes with being white, male, and privileged. Not everyone has the luxury of time, money, and resources, or support and encouragement, to simply make and

disseminate "our own images" in mainstream or alternative galleries. Presto-chango is not my reality. These things take time . . . and space . . . the space that is taken up by artists like Thorsen who fill people's galleries and homes with trendy images of "exotic Others."

The owners of the gallery which housed Thorsen's exhibit organized a panel discussion the week after the opening to address the controversy that had erupted. Although a close friend asked me to attend with her, I refused to go. Apparently, my instincts to avoid the event were right. Just as I anticipated, the event was comprised of a predominantly white audience surrounded by Thorsen's offensive images of nude Black women (some with colours squirting from between their legs). The artist and her supporters were seated at the front of the gallery in a traditional hierarchical speaking arrangement. I was later informed by several sources that the "discussion" was dominated by the panel, which was mostly supportive of Thorsen's "right" to image-making. Questions of representation were pushed to the margins. The real issues were ignored. If I had attended the meeting, my blood pressure would have sky-rocketed. Why didn't these people start this important dialogue with us at the opening? . . . Because they wanted to control *who* would speak and *when*. They wanted to set it up in their familiar bourgeois fashion and attempt to diffuse (negate) the imperativeness of our arguments. They wanted to assume a facade of "objectivity" and sterility despite the inherently subjective and emotional nature of the problems associated with cultural appropriation and representation. They wouldn't honestly face up to the consequences of their implication in white domination of Canadian cultural production and colonialism. Typical.

Black women's pain must heal before its absence can be fully celebrated. We are, and have been, visible targets for sexist and racist aggression. Our not-too-distant past of forced maternity in slavery and the everyday threat of rape and abuse must be acknowledged. Others, like

Thorsen and her supporters, must assume responsibility for their transgressions. Those who are unfamiliar with our pain and the nature of our racially- and culturally-influenced ways of seeing and experiencing life should tend their own gardens before they jump into hoeing ours. They might be cultivating weeds instead of flowers—without even knowing it. As women of colour, Aboriginal women, and women of mixed heritage, we must continue to create art because this is necessary to our survival. Not all of us will be considered "professionals," but we can assert our images and stories to represent our multiple identities and experiences. If our images and stories are not produced or told, our voices will go unheard—or (as with cultural appropriation) someone else will take the liberty to "speak on our behalf" before we can get our utterances out. Let's get to it and not let others get away with their attempts to control us—or images of us.

A group of artists of African heritage from diverse backgrounds and cultures have been organizing in Vancouver. This is not directly in response to the misuse of our images by white artists, but is part of an ongoing process of community-based self-determination in cultural production. Black artists are, and have been, creating images of ourselves which are self-empowering—images which seek to create meaning out of our rich experiences, imaginations, critical perspectives, and desires. A collective showing of artists called ;Black? Untitled #1 is scheduled to exhibit at the Pitt Gallery in Vancouver, May 1992. Those involved with organizing this exhibit see it not as a singular event, but as part of the process of reclaiming our right to self-representation.

Janisse Browning currently lives and writes in Vancouver. She grew up in the Windsor, Ontario area where some of her ancestors settled after escaping from slave plantations in the States. Her First Nations ancestry (Chippewa and Cherokee) has not been institutionally recognized because those ancestors were women.

FABLED TERRITORIES

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY, VANCOUVER

NOVEMBER 11, 1991 - JANUARY 26, 1992

BY SHANI MOOTOO AND ARUNA SRIVASTAVA

GIVEN THE CONTROVERSY surrounding the Vancouver Art Gallery's importing of *Fabled Territories* from Britain and its lack of outreach to local artists of colour, it becomes increasingly difficult to write a review of the exhibition which is itself divorced from these considerations, from the immediately local, political, and cultural context of this exhibition's (sadly unheralded) arrival in Vancouver.

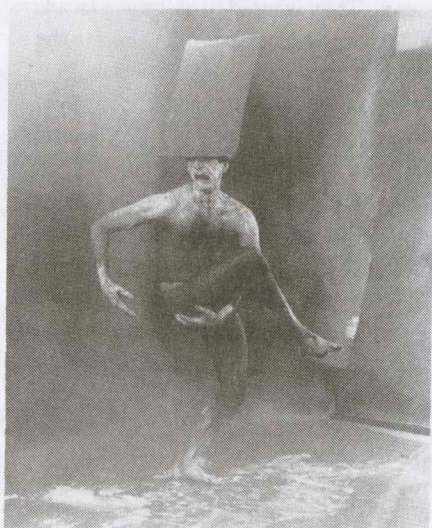
A "simple" review/overview of the works shown in the exhibition is impossible, not simply because of these local events, but because 1992 is a landmark year for such controversies, a time—many of us hope—for a reclamation of power by colonized people, indigenous people, the marginalized around the world. Closing as it did, quite appropriately, at the beginning of the so-called Year of Columbus, Vancouver's *Fabled Territories* was the occasion for many of us to recognize the importance, the necessity of context in our politics and histories, and of challenging those holding power in cultural and artistic institutions to begin to recognize those histories and politics.

Is the work of the artists in such an exhibition as *Fabled Territories*, or that of the curator, diffused or deformed, and is the work's importance eroded by being co-opted by institutions primarily concerned with colonizing and exoticizing what is unfamiliar? How can reviewers, artists, gallery visitors, and staff resist this erosion through their writing, public programming, attention to cultural and artistic detail, through communities affected by these exhibits, through specific cultural practice? Indeed, how can a short review like this "do justice to" so many of the

contexts only hinted at here, and to the exhibition, and the works, within it? It can't. But it can shift precipitously from context to text, back to the frame itself.

Therefore, a review such as this is only partly about individual works within frames. Instead we found ourselves looking at how the specific use of the English language, for instance, or particular photographic idioms, give the exhibition a place to locate a new system of aesthetics; or do they tame, colonize, leaving the viewer an arms-length voyeur with an anthropological gaze? In all curating situations, of course, there are exclusions and inclusions with specific implications; the range of experience represented by age, religion, sexual orientation, gender, class, and political stances in this exhibit, however, are laudable.

As an array of photographic art working within and challenging (often simultaneously) held traditions and values, both artistic and political, the exhibition is at best uneven—this unevenness perhaps speaking to the difficulty of creating fabled



"YELLOW EARTH," JUANITO WADHWANI

territories or imagined communities from highly contested worldly ones.

The works in *Fabled Territories* can be loosely divided into two genres—"art" photography and documentary or journalistic photography. For the most part, it is the former genre that seems here to be most challenging, innovative, to be mapping out the hybrid imagined territories of the exhibition's simultaneously nostalgic and promising title.

Alan De Souza's work, "Promised Land," demonstrates the artist's knowledge that the medium itself brings fully loaded meanings to the work; the medium of photography in particular, by inscribing its subject/object in the viewer's and photographer's gaze, makes changing these meanings near impossible. De Souza's work offers us an art object that uses the medium of the West—colour xerox on wood—in the form of a lotus flower, and renders his practice one in which he invents a culture that is partly Kenyan, partly Asian, and partly British.

Sutapa Biswas's work, similarly, thematizes its materiality as much as its subject matter, using text and a series of transparencies to explore the multiple cultural meanings of the image of a foot in sand or clay to point out not only the complexities of artistic practices, but the literal layering of interpretations that result from each viewing subject's (including the artist's herself) apprehension and creation of her work.

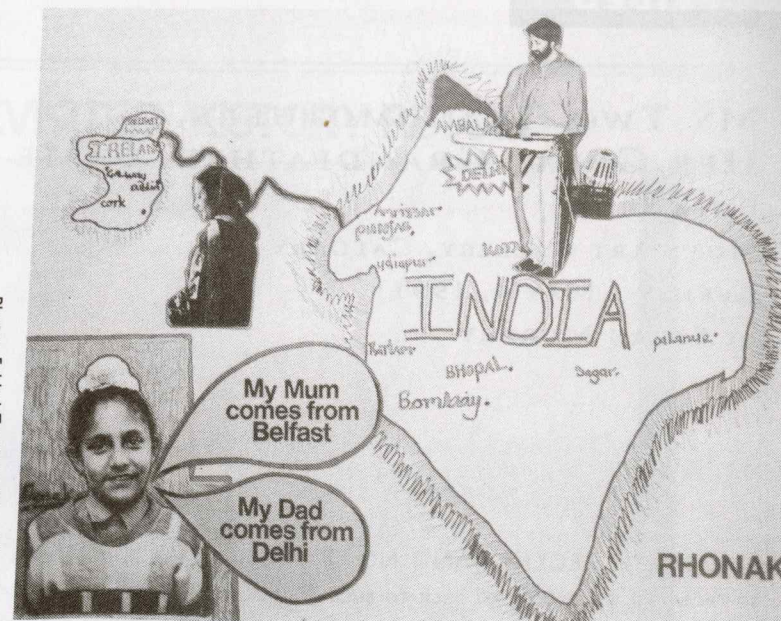
Interestingly, the selections from the Mount Pleasant Photography Workshop in Southampton provide some of the exhibit's strongest work. The artists here, all between the ages of 10 and 12, demonstrate a confidence of subject and of point of view and what seems to be a matter-of-factness about multiple cultural identities (most tellingly and humorously shown in three drawings about parental roots) that work by more experienced artists does not reveal. Clearly, these children and young adults are also politically astute; one of the workshop participants writes that their photographs "help to

fight racism and sexism...We are the community telling the people, rather than someone else looking at us telling people."

Juanito Wadhvani's series of silver bromide photographs is a created and staged performance inspired by, and a kind of parody of, the *kathak* dance form. For the artist, the shamanistic dancer figure is from a "no-man's land," a place between cultures and sexual orientations. This work in particular strives for a new aesthetic, a cross-pollination of pasts and presents, not simply of memories and present environments, but also of histories, cultures, and myths: the hybridization of early South Asian religions, *kathak*, with performance art, with photography.

Suresh Karadia's work belongs to the genre of photojournalism with a system of codes that would take phenomenal creativity to dislodge. Outside of the show's context, nothing in these photographs, whether they are of Benazir Bhutto, Rajiv Gandhi, or the haunting image of the Guru Nanak school in Delhi, demonstrates an attempt to (re)create cultural meanings or imaginations, and shows little of the fluidity, creativity and self-reflexivity of some contemporary photojournalism. Here, though, we arrive at the very paradox set into play by establishing a show's contours and contexts by racial or national origin. Why should we criticize Karadia (reportedly well on his way to becoming a commercially-successful fashion photographer) for either his photographs of the newsworthy subcontinent for their touristic gaze. Isn't that falling back into the old, orientalist, and patriarchal art-versus-popular-culture divide?

The colour photography of Nudrat Afza differs from many others in the exhibit in that it concentrates on scenes of outdoor life in England; indeed curator Sunil Gupta notes, of the exhibit, that "the streets of England are noticeably absent. Clearly they are not safe terrain. On the streets South Asians remain vulnerable, strangers in a strange land." Gupta's own works are colour photos of mixed-race gay couples juxtaposed with poetic text



Photos Fabled Territories catalogue, courtesy Vancouver Art Gallery.

"WHERE DO MY MUM AND DAD COME FROM?"
RHONAK SINGH DIGWA

and black-and-white photos of demonstrations against Clause 28, a clause that prohibits gay and lesbian co-habitation and cultural expression by outlawing so-called "pretended family relationships."

Guyanese Roshini Kempadoo uses a similar process of juxtaposing text and black-and-white, and colour photographs to explore the contradictions of life "here" in Britain and "there" in Guyana, of two homes. Her work, like Gupta's, does not comfortably create a hybrid form, but rather expresses dislocation or the holding in place of several identities and homes and aesthetics.

In a similarly haunting way, Pratibha Parmar's short video *Sari Red* is a video poem with some singularly beautiful and memorable images and sequences documenting how racism in Britain resulted in the violent death of a young South Asian woman, Kalbinder Kaur Hayre. As with much of the other photography in the exhibition, Parmar's medium and her idiom are sharply at odds with the immediacy of the subject matter: the day-to-day life of diasporic South Asians.

It is this disjunction, which imbalances the viewer's, critic's, parent's, or curator's gaze, which opens up this space for artists to "seek new territories which as yet have no fables." However, the heavily sedimented codes and traditions of pho-

tography, particularly as they are found in "realistic" portraits and snapshots of entire cultures and histories, work against this destabilizing (and enabling) disjunction and hybridity: the exposure of the seams and ruptures between artistic expression within and across cultural, racial, sexual, class difference.

The predominance of the comfortable seamlessness of some of the work in *Fabled Territories* is both instructive and alarming. We come to a photograph of Rajiv Gandhi lighting his mother's funeral pyre. A fellow gallery visitor and reviewer of sorts—a parent escorting a rather reluctant young child around the pictures placed a little too high for his craning comfort—comments to her captive audience that these Indians, see, are heathens, burning their dead folk. Imagine, she says, contradictorily, if you burned your own mother alive like that! Not surprisingly, she didn't stop for a few minutes at the end of their trip through *Fabled Territories* to watch *Sari Red*.

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Shani Mootoo is a painter, writer, and video artist living in Vancouver.

MY TWO GRANDMOTHERS, HER GREAT GRANDFATHER, & ME

LEILA SUJIR

MUTT ART GALLERY, CALGARY

APRIL 9 - MAY 4, 1991

BY SARAH MURPHY

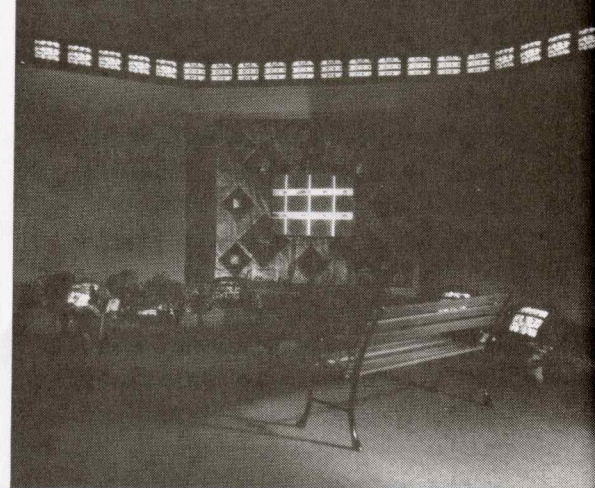


Photo D. James and A. Jarenko

LIKE MUCH RECENT (AND NOT-so-recent, if we are to go back to such oval figures as Frida Kahlo and Remedios Varo) women's art, Sujir's installation, *My Two Grandmothers, Her Great Grandfather, and Me*, with its framed narrative, its autobiographical references, its sense of life writing on videotape, hunts for a way to inscribe a woman's life (this particular woman's life) into cultural metanarratives, metafiction, metapatterns. (I doubt that this is a word but there are metapatterns in our management of space.) Sujir finds her methods not through reference to and criticism of European high art, or even high art's critique of mass media, but through reference to the roots of her own consciousness, in Indian textiles, women's quilting bees, tropical and northern parks, through the making and organizing of space in another mode, the mode of home and garden—a mode that has nurtured the artist on two continents.

What we see as we walk into the room where the installation has been mounted is first the garden, and next, the home. Inviting us to sit is a park bench surrounded by rocks and flowers, family photos and photos from the video, as well four monitors covered with translucent sari cloth whose stationary patterns interact with the moving videotape. Then, in front of and above us, we encounter 21 more monitors showing, in varied sequence, one or another of the four source tapes, while in the middle of a flowered quilt, yet another version of one of the tapes passes.

The tapes, in their own way, are yet another park, another garden—full of contrasting colours, contrasting narratives, contrasting memories, contrasting places and cultures. All are brought together using special effects patterns which resemble both the mosaic of the garden and the quilts of the home. In certainly the most intelligent and intuitively well-wrought use of those effects I have yet seen, each repeated diamond, each repeated rectangle, each central oval or circle, decorative in and of itself, tells why people have decorated their space, their surroundings, their bodies: to converse with each other and to make meaning. The blue of the North Sea near Calgary, Scotland (the blue Colonel MacLeod translated into our Alberta sky to rename this place) is first background, then foreground, then middleground to the rocks of Scotland or the green of India. The tape is an interweaving of narrative, of images, of meaning that move into language, declaring again and again: home, history, story, displacement, love. While on another series of monitors it says: "... a doubled sense of ... as we come to feel just that, the doubled sense of dislocation, immigration, the crossing of boundaries and the mixing of cultures."

Sujir's story, the unspoken story of the faces of her two grandmothers looking out from the video monitors, looking out from the quilt that contains them, is exactly that story: the metanarrative of displacement, of immigration. Only this

time, told from the point of view of a woman never allowed authority over history, yet expected to contain it and nurture it and reproduce it through those manifestations of culture and story contained in the organization of time and of space that is the home. That is both the easiest and the hardest part of any culture to lose, certainly the easiest to "mis-place," to lose one's place in and to thus lose contact even with those who have gone before, with the making of their hands, or with their voices.

What Sujir does here, in creating her time-based quilt, with its way of interweaving different levels of story and image, colour and texture, and space itself, is to show how memory can loop back on itself, how narrative can come to inhabit the moment, coetaneous rather than sequential, is to suggest the construction of a space so complex, a moment so powerful, that even after displacement, our spirits may come there to rest. And, the garden now becomes an altar (doubly exorcised: its video monitors degaussed, its space blessed). With its calla lilies and its marigolds, we may encounter and, if need be, bury our ancestors. Welcome now, like the ancestral spirits on the day of the dead, into this place to call home.

Sarah Murphy is a Calgary-based writer, translator, and visual artist. She is the author of three works of fiction, *The Measure of Miranda*, *Comic Book Heroine*, and *The Deconstruction of Wesley Smithson*.

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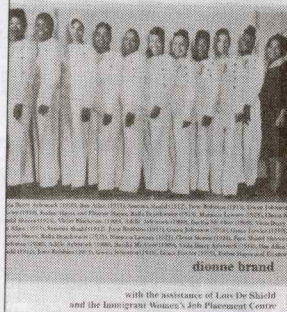
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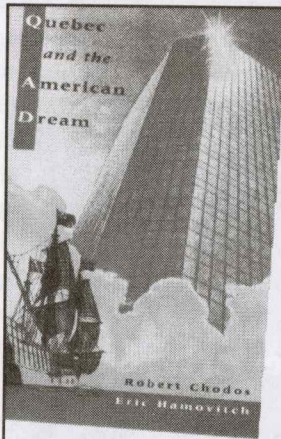
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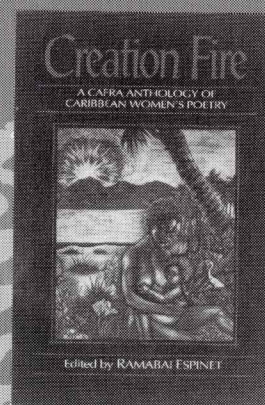
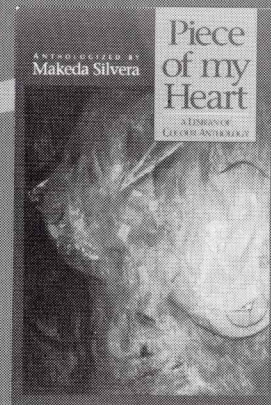
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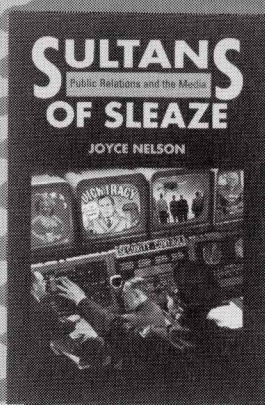
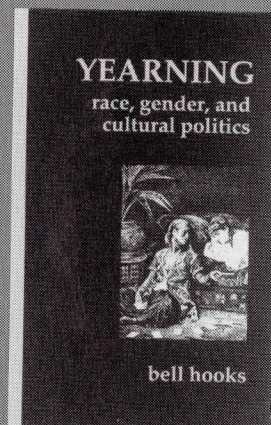
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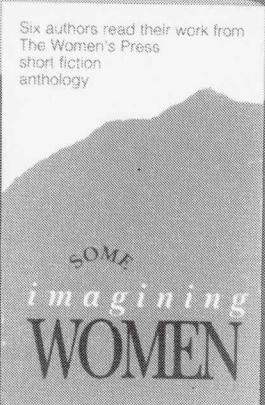
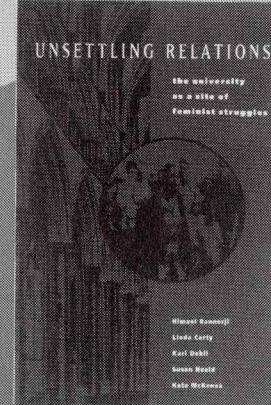
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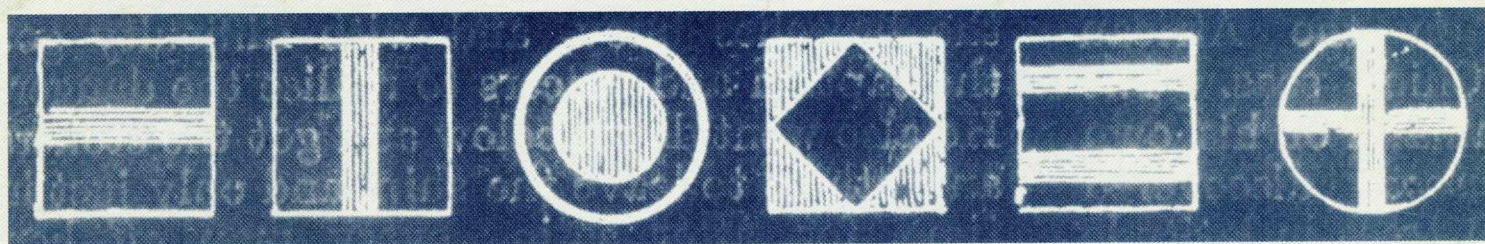
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