

Volume 23 Number 4 \$5.50 A magazine about issues of art and culture

FUSE

MAGAZINE

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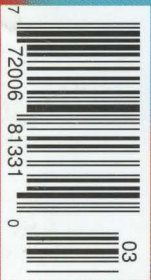
DRESSING UP & (MESSING UP)

White in Contemporary
First Nations Art

by RICHARD WILLIAM HILL

TALKING VISIONS TALKING ART TALKING POLITICS
ELLA SHOCHAT on her latest book

KATE STEVENS ON RECENT DISASTERS IN TORONTO'S PUBLIC ART
PATTI YOUNG KIM ASKS IS ACTIVISM SEXY?
CARNEGIE INTERNATIONAL A REVIEW BY SYLVIE FORTIN





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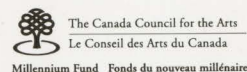
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April Hickox, *Within Dialogue*, 2000

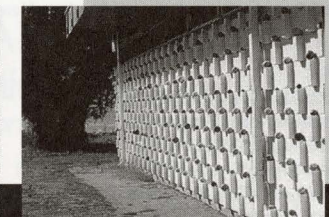
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For further information call 416-203-0946. Or mail proposal to: Rogue Wave, 2 Ojibway Ave., Toronto, Ontario M5J 2E1 islcomas@aol.com

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Glenn McArthur, *Urban Forest*, 2000



Michael Davey, *Play/tonic forms*, 1999

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Video still, I will kill you, Paolo Ravalico (2000)

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MAGAZINE

Volume 23 Number 4 April 2001

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CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

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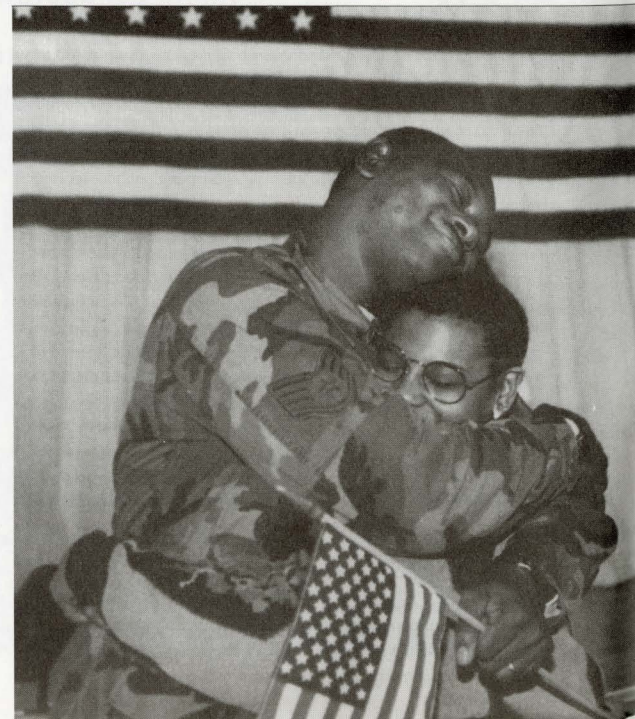
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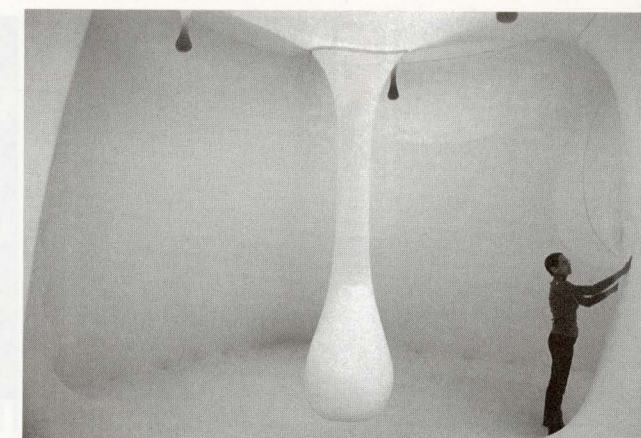
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The Diner's Club: No Reservation Required, Jim Logan, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 91.4 cm x 137.2 cm. Courtesy: Thunder Bay Art Gallery.



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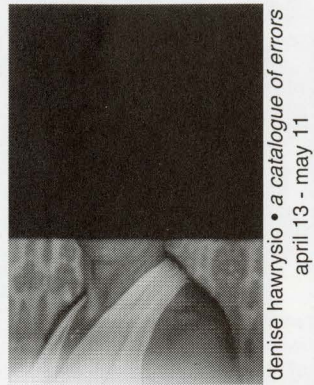
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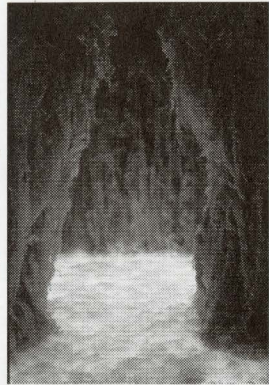
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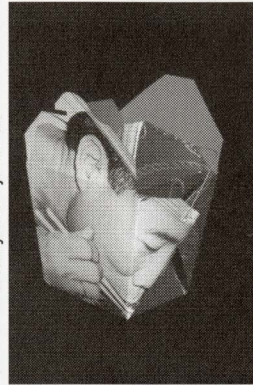
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by Alex St. Marc



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april 13 - may 11



colwyn griffith • eye candy
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josie chu • filial to go
june 22 - july 20

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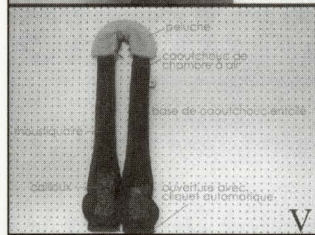
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Editorial

This issue of FUSE critically engages a dialogue of the political. It asks us to think about artistic freedom and expression, the relationality of multicultural feminism and alteric moves in identity and representational strategies.

In Richard William Hill's "Drag Racing: Dressing Up (and messing up) White in Contemporary First Nations Art," conceptual frameworks of binary opposites and inversion are taken to task as Hill investigates the transgressive potentiality of inversion in the making of Native art. Hill devises a navigational tool for travels through a critical, political and philosophical argument, one that unhinges identity from projects of normative construction. By way of commentary on the trickster and on travesty, Hill explodes dualistic thinking in favour of a more thoughtful in-between place, the workings of mimicry and parody.

Meera Sethi's interview with Ella Habiba Shohat moves us through engaging topics in cultural production and multicultural feminism. Shohat speaks in detail about similarities and differences in the projects of anti-racism and multiculturalism, showing why we need to keep both strategies as options for political organizing and for a continued dialogue among feminists. For Shohat, multicultural feminism is about relationality, the possibility of inter-sections, matrices of oppression and coalition building for feminists. Sethi and Shohat examine questions within art history, cinema studies, community, identity and much more. A review by Rinaldo Walcott of *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, a collection of new essays edited by Shohat, further elucidates multiculturalist feminism. Walcott suggests that *Talking Visions'* theorization of feminism is neither sentimental nor rhapsodic, but offers another prospective feminist language, spoken through fluid visual images and theoretical sophistication.

Kate Stevens' "Of Moose and Mel: Recent Disasters in Toronto's Public Art" unveils the immediate hypocrisy of Mel's city of moose. Stevens shows us how an attempt at producing public art turned out to be just another case of selling out to the highest bidder,

Lastman-style. The moose initiative was a controversial example of big business advertising its wares under the guise of a public art project. According to Stevens, rather than a showcase for local artists, Lastman's moose project was a lesson in how to stifle artistic freedom and expression.

The four visual art reviews in this issue take us from the local Toronto art scene to Nunavut to two American cities, Pittsburgh and New York. Sylvie Fortin draws our attention to a show held at Carnegie International that featured the work of forty-one artists who delved into questions of "the real." Sheila Butler's review of a Baker Lake sculpture exhibit makes geographical difference a central discussion point as she looks at the conditions for artistic production in the Arctic and in southern parts of Canada.

Germaine Koh looked at the work of four South Asian artists featured in an AGO exhibition curated by Sutapa Biswas; Koh reviews the resulting work of each artist's response to the historical galleries of the *Group of Seven* as they situate "personal identity within established public narratives." Peter Hudson reviews two New York-based exhibits: one archives hip hop culture in a very limited way and the other is of a telling relationship between commodity culture and graffiti tags.

Richard Fung's video *Sea in the Blood* is reviewed by Margo Francis. Fung's video is based on personal history and is illustrative of how in the making of a video which features the personal, the political is never elided but always present. John McCullough's book review is one of two in this issue; McCullough's review of John Chase's book is a critical and close read of "architecture as applied art."

This issue of FUSE Magazine is the last issue for which the tireless Petra Chevrier will serve as Managing Editor. The board and staff at FUSE would like to wish Petra the very best as she moves on to other ventures. Thanks Petra and good luck!

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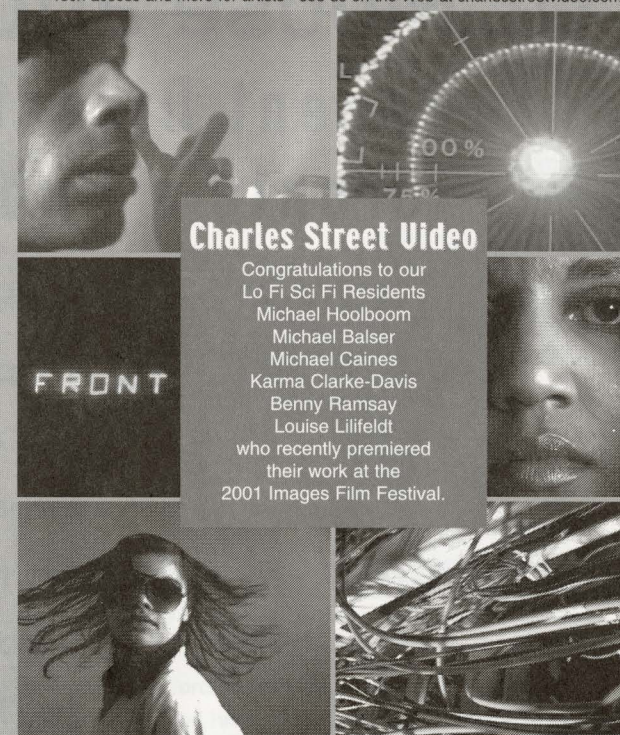
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Of Moose and Mel: Recent Disasters in Toronto's Public Art

by Kate Stevens The fate of two recent public art projects suggests that public art in Toronto has become synonymous with advertising rather than public discourse. A garbage-truck mural project led by Min Sook Lee and head artist Grace Channer, and the work of Sketch, a community art group that participated in the "Moose in the City" both ran up against municipal censors this past summer. Their fate does not bode well for the future of public art in the megacity.



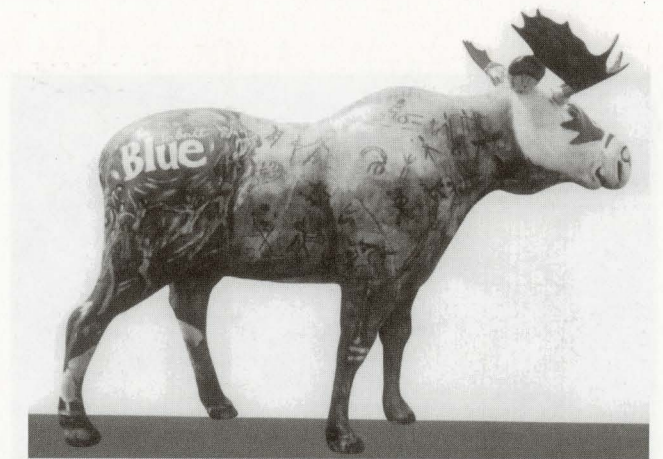
"The project will use the theme of invisibility to counteract the issues of unsustainable consumption, ecologically damaging waste treatment systems, negative stereotypes of garbage workers and the marginalization of their labour." (A direct quotation from the "Project Description" submitted to the Laidlaw Foundation.) The censored garbage trucks in the *Garbage Collection* public art project, Grace Channer and Min Sook Lee in co-operation with The Toronto Environmental Alliance and sanitation workers from CUPE 416, 2000. Photo: Min Sook Lee.

The now notorious "Garbage Collection" was a public art project consisting of three garbage trucks painted to raise awareness about environmental issues.¹ The Toronto Environmental Alliance, sanitation workers from CUPE 416, and artists collaborated to create art that dealt with work, art and garbage.² The project was led by organizer Min Sook Lee, and funded by the Laidlaw foundation.³ When the trucks were unveiled they caused an explosion of controversy. At the time the debate about whether or not to ship Toronto's garbage north to Kirkland Lake was raging furiously. Shortly after the press conference on August 21, Councillor Bill Saundercok, chairman of the works committee and supporter of exporting Toronto's garbage problem north, demanded that all three trucks be recalled by the work's department.⁴

The only really controversial mural was on a truck painted under the direction of artist Grace Channer. It depicted a train leaving heavily polluted Toronto, a cow defecating in water, and a group of well dressed men exchanging fists full of money behind City Hall.⁵ Saundercok saw the men holding money as politicians.⁶ Min Sook Lee claimed, however, that "It doesn't necessarily mean Kirkland Lake. This is a story that's going to happen time and time again."⁷ As for the men in suits, they "are not politicians but represent corporations that make money in the lucrative waste industry,"⁸ according to Shelly Petrie, from Toronto's Environmental Alliance. For Min Sook Lee the mural was intended to "represent what can happen to any city when it doesn't take care of its environmental problems."⁹ In the end one side of the offending truck was painted over.

Laidlaw offered to repaint the censored mural (as well as murals for other garbage trucks) outside of the Bamboo Club on Queen Street West. The advisory committee, consisting of artists and activists involved with or supportive of the project, wanted to raise issues about the politics of public space. These projects were about to begin when the chair and the executive director of Laidlaw claimed that there was no communication strategy in place and that the mural program should be postponed. The effect was to ensure that the project would be held off until the municipal election was over. Laidlaw also declined to renew the contract of Robin Pacific, a supporter of the re-painting within the institution.

The "Moose in the City" project is the brainchild of mayor Mel Lastman, who had a vision of the city covered in a herd of tackily decorated fiberglass moose. The project was designed to showcase the talent of local artists — or at least that is what Lastman would have us to believe. Dig a little deeper, however, and it becomes clear that the project has done much more to raise the profile of corporate sponsors and to seduce tourists into spending



Sydney Moose, Manny Neubacher, 2000. Installed at Canadian Diplomats. Patron: Labatt Breweries Ontario. Courtesy: City of Toronto Special Events.

their money in Toronto than it has for artists. It also becomes clear that Lastman and his cohorts see no distinction between public art and advertising.

Individuals or corporations interested in acquiring a moose, thus becoming a "moose patron," were expected to pay \$6,500 for a single moose, and \$35,000 for a "herd" of four. Patrons were invited to view the proposals sent in by the artists and from them decide which moose they wanted to acquire.¹¹ A herd consisted of three moose that were chosen from successful submissions and a fourth that was left unpainted, so that the "moose patron" could assign "their own creative agent"¹² (read: plaster their logo or products all over the moose). However, all participants were supposed to follow the same rules as the artists.¹³

The rules were: "No direct advertising or logos, no religious messages, no politics," and finally, "no content that affronts the personal integrity of another person."¹⁴ As it turned out, rule number one was frequently flaunted as many sponsors plastered the moose with images of their products. Even more shamelessly, the moose that were patronized by Labatt Breweries of Ontario, Ed and David Mirvish and Bell Canada, all have the companies' respective logos reproduced all over them. But it seems that this was the only rule to which moose officials turned a blind eye.

Sketch, an art centre for street-involved youth, created a moose in partnership with the Gardiner Museum of Ceramics. According to Sue Cohen of Sketch, the moose they produced was two-sided, designed to show the "ideal" and the "real" city of Toronto.¹⁵ On the "ideal" side the artists wanted to depict things that were inspiring to them in the city, like a safe, family-like community. In this Toronto there was more room made for parks and housing and "places where people can come together and enjoy each other."¹⁶

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Pre-installation studio photo of right side of *Anonomoose*, S. C., W. J. D., S. R., J. S., I. S., A. M., P. B., S. T. (Sketch), 2000.

It was the "real" side that was the problem. The goal of the "real" side was to show the city full of different people doing different kinds of things. "Some parts of the moose are grey, and what that symbolizes is concrete taking over this moose's body... it... suggests that animals can't live in this environment."¹⁷ Political? Perhaps, but subtly so. What was less subtle was their depiction of the Gardiner Expressway with its multitude of advertising billboards running across the body of the moose. The billboards were intended to be "advertising without making it advertising"¹⁸ In short, they were a comment on the meta-subject of ads. Some of the signs read:

"me me me, its all about me"
 "make a contribution, so we can get rich"
 "it won't hurt, come on buy it"
 "eat less pay more"
 "spend your money now."¹⁹

Is it shockingly political to claim that, surprise, surprise, those ads are trying to sell us something? Or that they promote the value of individual consumption? Apparently.

Sketch did worry a bit about the signs themselves. A representative from the moose program told them that there was some cause for concern and that she would look into it. Cohen, who is quick to insist that the matter was simply a miscommunication, says that the issue was "in terms of 'what if people didn't want to buy the moose?' —which was pretty valid."²⁰ However, for the time being the signs stayed and the moose was purchased by the Toronto Board of Trade, and displayed at First Canadian Place. But when the moose was unveiled all the signs, except one, had been blacked out. The people at Sketch felt the one that was left was just missed or forgotten about.²¹ Ironically, the full colour glossy catalogue documenting the project is inscribed with the following dedication: "Dedication to the spirit of freedom of expression, worldwide."²²

Representatives from Sketch insisted that it be made clear that the incident was simply a miscommunication and that they were able to call the city, and as a group work together to get some (but not all) of the signs put back on. They expressed gratitude



Detail of left side of *Anonomoose*. Studio photo.

that a community group could be included in the project. But the issue should not be about who gave what permission when. The question to ask is why shouldn't street-involved youth be allowed to participate in public discourse around issues directly affecting them? Isn't this how one participates as a citizen? Don't we want to know how they see this city? And on a broader level, why have the censorious "no politics" rule in the first place if freedom of expression is truly valued?

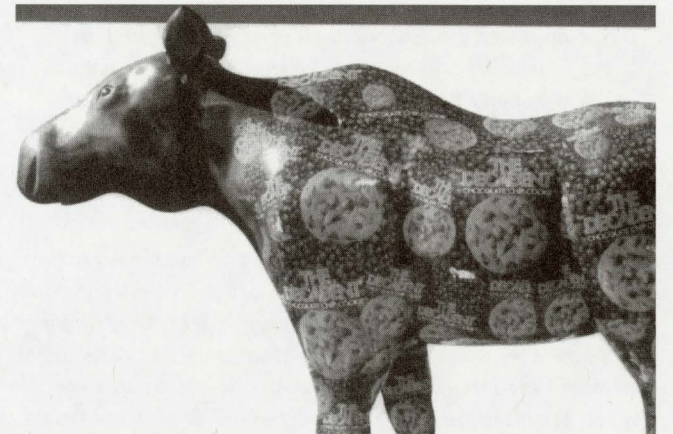
By now we all ought to know that all art has a political aspect. The problem is that "art" in the service of powerful interests, such as advertising, has come to dominate public space to the extent that it functions almost invisibly. The decision to devote public space almost exclusively to advertising is a political one, but we refuse to acknowledge that we have even made it. This is why Sketch's comments revealing advertising's true nature (which ought to be obvious to anyone who thinks about it) were so threatening. The garbage-truck situation begs the same question: why shouldn't artists tackle a contentious issue publicly? City councilors, reporters and others are paid to do this, so why not artists? And what better time to repaint the mural then during a municipal election in which garbage is a key issue?

Theoretically, in a liberal democracy, public discourse is fundamental to creating an informed public and ensuring that issues of public significance are worked through. It says a great deal about the real agenda of liberal democracies if debate is banned from public space in favour of corporate advertising. We seem to live in the world that is the outcome of a process described by Jurgen Habermas:

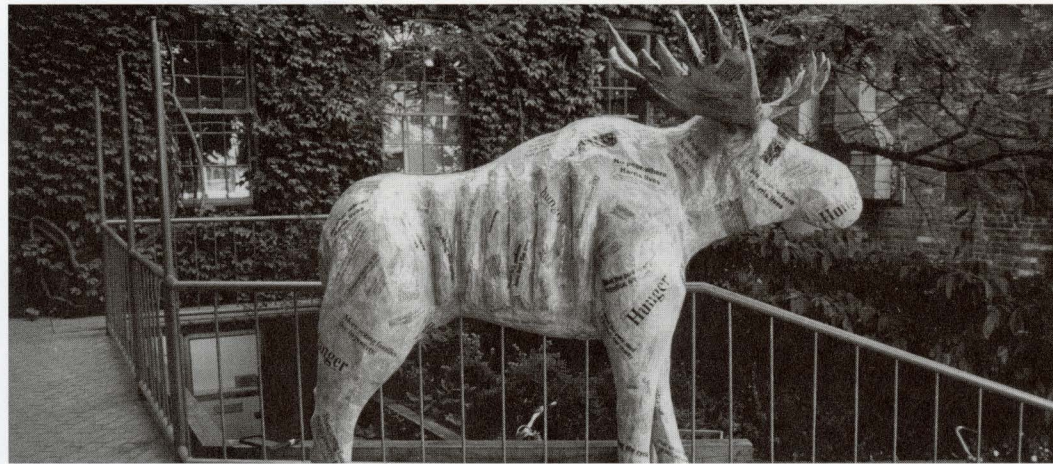
When the laws of the market governing the sphere of commodity exchange and of social labour also pervaded the sphere reserved for the private people as public, rational critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption and the web of public communication unraveled into acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode.²³

Of all media, it seems that visual art has fared worst of all as the public sphere is increasingly privatized.

The garbage-truck mural, like the moose, ran into trouble when artists took a hard look at real situations in Toronto. Robin Pacific suggested that the garbage-truck situation "was very similar to the Sketch incident because [the project] showed the negative and positive sides and [the city] didn't want to see the negative." She adds:



Works from top to bottom: *Police Moose*, Kris Morrison of Urban Illustrations, 2000, installed at Police Headquarters, Toronto. Patron: Toronto Police Services; *The Decadent Chocolate Chip Moose*, L.B.E. Team, 2000, installed at 396 St. Clair Avenue West, Toronto. Patron: Loblaw's Companies Limited; *Blue Moose*, Jocelyn McTavish, 2000, installed at various Toronto locations. Patron: Labatt Breweries Ontario.



Starving Moose, Eden Bender, 2000, installed at 401 Richmond Street, Toronto. Courtesy, 401 Richmond Management.

The argument that Saundercok used was "this isn't art, this is defacing city property." My belief is that we own the city's property because we are the taxpayers and our money paid for it, as it paid for the buses. Did anyone ask me if they could put a corporate ad all over a bus? Or you or anyone? Who got to make that decision?"

As a de facto ad campaign, the "Moose in the City" project acts as a stand-in for real public art. "Moose in the City will show the world what wonderful artists this city has,"²⁵ Mel Lastman wrote in his "Mayor's Message" in March. These wonderful artists might have been recognized for their abilities if the city had allowed for any sort of artistic freedom. George Cohen, chair of "Moose in the City" (and also head of McDonalds Canada), writes that the project "has been an incredible testament to the creativity of Canadian artists."²⁶ Or at least to their ability to recreate corporate logos on the back of a fiberglass moose. Why was it okay to break this rule but not others? Perhaps it's easy to censor artists and street kids who have very little social power. It is just as easy to turn a blind eye to your corporate buddies as they hijack public art and turn it into advertising. Even George Cohen essentially admitted that the project was run on the advertising model: "There might be one or two artists who might wish they had more freedom to design their own moose, but they got to realize a lot of people paid a lot of money to get these things on the street."²⁷

Robert Sprockman, a local artist, submitted a design for a moose that was selected by the CN tower. When he went to them with his ideas, they already knew what they wanted. "One Moose for the restaurant... one blank moose and I believe they have a moose that is painted to look like a tour bus."²⁸ Sprockman adds, "They

knew very clearly what they wanted, there was no room for my artistic input and I felt that they would be better off finding someone who was a sign painter that would give them what they wanted."²⁹ Most of the moose that were not used to sell a product were mere decorations. As Pacific says "You have a moose, it's made out of fiberglass, you can do two things with it; you can decorate it or you can make a statement, that's it. And if you can't make a statement who the hell wants to decorate it? And look what happened when they tried to make a statement."³⁰

In response to this poor excuse for a public art exhibition other groups created their own moose with explicitly political messages. The emaciated "Starving Moose" was a clever subversion. The artist, Eden Bender, is a volunteer at the Daily Bread Food Bank. The Moose was displayed at 401 Richmond during ArtsWeek, where it was on temporary loan from the Food Bank. It drew attention to the many people in Toronto who are going without the essentials of life.

Perhaps the most disturbing fact of all is the Toronto art community's lukewarm response to these acts of censorship. Are we all demoralized from living too long in Harris' Ontario? Are we keeping our heads down because we fear cuts to municipal arts funding or community programs that sponsor public art? The dangerous result of apathy could well be a censorship chill, particularly among community arts groups that rely on municipal funding. As globalization puts increasing pressure to commercialize all aspects of life, surrendering public space to commercial interests is the last thing we should be doing.

Kate Stevens lives in Toronto.



One of three garbage trucks in the Garbage Collection public art project, Grace Channer and Min Sook Lee in co-operation with The Toronto Environmental Alliance and sanitation workers from CUPE 416, 2000. Photo: Min Sook Lee.

Notes

1. "Toronto Garbage Truck Mural of Train Transporting Trash Pulled off Road", The Canadian Press (Aug., 25, 2000).
2. R. Pacific, "No Such Thing as Away" *Lola* (vol. 8, winter 2000-01), p. 11.
3. K. Palmer, "Garbage Truck Mural Trashed," http://www.star.com/back_issues/ED2000826/news/2000826New05_CI-GARBAGE26.html (26 Aug. 2000).
4. Pacific, "No Such Thing as Away" p. 13.
5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*
7. Toronto Star, "Garbage Truck Mural Trashed."
8. Canadian Press, "Toronto Garbage Truck Mural of Train Transporting Trash Pulled off Road."
9. Pacific, "No Such Thing as Away," p. 13.
10. R. Pacific, interview with the author (10 Nov. 2000).
11. <http://www.ravenevents.com/moose.html> (published by the Church Wellesley Community Business Association).
12. *ibid.*
13. *ibid.*
14. "Art project mooses the mark," editorial. *eye* (9 March 2000).
15. S. Cohen and P. Bateman, interview with the author (6 Nov. 2000).
16. *ibid.*
17. *ibid.*
18. *ibid.*
19. *ibid.*
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.*
22. Toronto Special Events, *Toronto Moose Prints: A Retrospective of Toronto Outdoor Art Museum* (Toronto Special Events, 2000).
23. J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p. 160.
24. Pacific, interview.
25. M. Lastman, "Mayor's Message" *Official Moose in the City web page* http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/moose/moose_mayor.htm (19 Nov. 2000).
26. G. Cohen "Letter from the Chairman" *Official Moose in the City web page* http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/moose/moose_mayor.htm (19 Nov. 2000).
27. "Moose artists disillusioned," *Ontario Today* (CBC radio, 1 Sept. 2000).
28. *ibid.*
29. *ibid.*
30. Pacific, interview.

Drag Racing: Dressing Up (and messing up) White in Contemporary First Nations Art

by Richard William Hill

Anceforth all things shall topsy turvy turn;
Physick shall kill, and Law enslave the World;
Cits shall turn Beaus, and taste Italian Songs,
While Courtiers are stock-jobbing in the City.

(The dying words of the character Common-Sense, from Henry Fielding's "Pasquin")

The teacher said that black was the opposite of white, sweet was the opposite of sour, and up was the opposite of down. I began to make my own list of opposites: the number one must be the opposite of the number ten, ice was the opposite of water, and birds were the opposite of snakes.

Jimmie Durham, "The Search for Virginity"

Visualize this painting: in the foreground two men and a woman sit picnicking in a pastoral setting. The woman gazes out at you with a particularly direct stare. In the background another woman wades in a small lake. Sound familiar? Have you already guessed Manet's *Le Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe*? Perhaps you are picturing those two well-dressed middle-class gentlemen of the late nineteenth century, lounging with their nude female companion. But



The Diner's Club: No Reservation Required, Jim Logan, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 91.4 cm x 137.2 cm. Courtesy: Thunder Bay Art Gallery.

let's not get ahead of ourselves, I'm not done describing the picture yet. In the painting I'm talking about, the women are clothed and the men are nude. The landscape is distinctly North American and the picnickers seem to have been indulging in diet coke and blueberries. And, lest I forget, the people are all Native.

The work is Jim Logan's parody of Manet's famous painting, which he calls *The Diner's Club: No Reservation Required* (1992). It is part of a large group of similar paintings, the Classical Aboriginal Series, in which he introduces Native content into his own versions of works from the Western canon. Many of the pieces are laugh-out-loud funny and it was seeing them together as a group that made me realize that this sort of inversion is a strategy I'd seen used by a number of Native artists. I use the term inversion because the work is turning upside down a familiar colonial notion of identity that imagines "Native" and "Western" as discrete categories set in a binary, hierarchical relationship. Do I need to add that in this hierarchy Native is on the bottom and Western on the top? In *The Diner's Club*, Logan works this out on many levels. On a meta-level the entire project plays Native art off against the exclusions of the Western canon, but this particular work contains many specific inversions of familiar binaries as well: Native vs. Western subjects, female vs. male nudity, the French vs. Canadian landscape (read also margin vs. centre, or local vs. international), Logan's folksy approach vs. the high style of Manet, contemporary vs. historical, etc. It is not just a case of "dressing up white" (although mimicry is involved, as we will see) but also an inversion of established visual codes of ethnicity (and in this case gender).

The problem with binary notions of identity is not only that they tend to be hierarchical, but also that they make discussion of ambiguous or in-between identities impossible. But if we want to escape the limitations of binary notions of identity is the strategy of inversion the way to go? In speaking about her own art, Crow artist Susan Stewart seems to suggest not. In her mixed media work *Self-Portrait of the Artist Posing as an Object of Curiosity* (1994), Stewart portrays herself wearing a blond wig both as a critique of the standard of blonde, white beauty and "as a reversal of the way Hollywood producers dressed up white women to portray Indian women in their films." These are interesting ideas, but here's the kicker:

By donning such a ridiculous costume, I tried to make the point that I can never escape my true self and that, "even though I may speak like you, and move through white society, I will always think clearly Indian, even in my sense of humor."³

Now I appreciate the extent to which this statement is an act of resistance, but I'm also aware of the trap it poses as well. I'd like to imagine it isn't one we "can never escape." Stewart suggests that the purpose of her inversion has been to make explicit a binary conception of ethnic identity so as to confirm and entrench that binary distinction, to argue that the impact of the mass media is superficial and never disturbs an authentic core Native identity. This is a common enough idea, but I'd like to argue that the insistence on a Native identity that is authentic and fundamentally discrete is neither politically expedient nor descriptively accurate. As Jimmie Durham has repeatedly said, authenticity is an internalized colonial standard that "we have inflicted on us"⁴ to limit our agency and keep us "out of the world."⁵ The postcolonial critic and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha also discusses the perils of accepting a binary notion of identity that leaves one confined to the margins, because the mainstream desires that:

the division between margin and center should be preserved, and as clearly demarcated as possible, if the two positions are to remain intact in their power relations. Without a certain work of displacement, again, the margins can easily recomfort the center in its goodwill and liberalism; strategies of reversal thereby meet with their own limits.⁶

I'm going to argue that these inversions can go beyond merely turning a binary relationship on its head, that Stewart's position does not do justice to the subversive potential of her own very interesting painting. Similarly, I believe that a critical reading of strategies of inversion in contemporary Native art has the potential to open up the simplistic binaries that have dictated our identity for too long. There are better, richer conversations to be had in the space between, which is the space in which we live.

I Before rushing into the political and philosophical implications of inversion, perhaps we need to step back and



Nativity, Goyce Kakegamic, 1984, diptych, oil on canvas, 76.2 cm x 109.2 cm. Courtesy: Thunder Bay Art Gallery.



contextualize this practice. Is it a distinctively Native strategy? Should these works, for example, be read as part of a "Trickster discourse," as anthropologist Allan Ryan suggests?⁷ The Trickster is a character who shows up in the stories of many Native cultures, serving a double function: s/he disrupts convention, does the wrong thing, acts badly, etc. and at the same time clarifies social norms by blatantly transgressing them. Recently, the disruptive side of the Trickster has been much celebrated and s/he has been championed as a kind of postmodern figure, a wily deconstructivist let loose on Western culture by Native artists and writers. Not surprisingly, her/his normative function tends to be downplayed. I believe the work I'm discussing here can be read as Trickster interventions, but I don't think that's the whole story.⁸

Fortunately, there have been other efforts to discuss these sorts of inversions in art. Curator Diana Nemiroff had a go at it when writing about the work of British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare. In his series of large photographs, *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998), the artist stages scenes of Victorian aristocratic decadence, which each contain a black character participating front and centre. Nemiroff described this as a:

strategy of transgression that I will call travesty, because it recalls the gender-bending cross-dressing of the homosexual queen, and shares in the latter's double-edged self-mockery.⁹

This certainly describes the dynamic of many of the pieces under discussion, but I don't want to beg the question of whether inversions need always be subversively transgressive. For this reason I prefer anthropologist Barbara Babcock's definition of inversion:

an act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms.¹⁰

This makes it clear that a hierarchy is being inverted without assuming that this involves a "double edged self-mockery" that destabilizes binary notions of identity. This leaves open the possibility suggested by Stewart's reading of her own work; that inversion can serve to define a norm and consolidate one identity in opposition to another.¹¹

Reading Babcock it becomes clear that the strategy of inversion occurs across many diverse cultures, likely because the binary oppositions that inversion depends on are a significant aspect of human meaning-making (although perhaps raised to the level of fetish in Western reason). As such they constitute a potential limit to human cognition, a trap that might trick us into mistaking the limited structural processes of our mind and language for how the world actually is. This is a trap that we cannot elude through simple negation (although that would be a great way to create another binary). Binaries can only be undone by an awareness of them as a limitation and by strategic efforts at unraveling from within. The result of this process may be paradoxical; it may turn out that some images contain contradictory meanings and pull in several directions at once as they strain under the descriptive inadequacy of the original binaries they undermine.

In setting the context for the inversions that I am looking at it is useful to remember that the term travesty, for example, has a history that extends back prior to its appropriation by drag queens. In the seventeenth cen-

tury travesty was a popular English literary form of burlesque in which a lofty subject was treated in a low form. Inversion, however, goes back much further. Anthropologist David Kunzle argues that the humorous forms of topsy-turvy and mundus inversus (world upside down) became increasingly popular and increasingly political in the early modern period. Prior to that time, however, the thrust of these works was often normative, showing the catastrophe of a world in which the natural order provided by God is set on its head (Christianity has a special genius for generating binaries).

For example, in the “hell” panel of Bosch’s triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1504), which is replete with inversions of all sorts, we see a rabbit carrying a dead human, an image cribbed from the marginal illustrations of medieval illuminated manuscripts.¹² While the primary meaning of such images may have been viciously normative — using inversion to clarify the rules so that those who transgressed them could be cruelly mocked — this reading may not exhaust their possibilities (I warned you about these paradoxes). As Kunzle notes, the mundus inversus is “capable of fulfilling diverse and even contrary social and psychological needs.”¹³ The very excessiveness of Bosch, the loving attention he lavishes on the transgressive behaviour depicted in his paintings, seems to suggest the work is functioning as a safe way to discuss, perhaps even to vicariously partake of, the repressed and forbidden. All the same I don’t think we ought to trick ourselves here by thinking that because this work harbours powerful repressed content that it does not remain fundamentally normative.¹⁴ As Europe modernized, such inversions moved from the realm of Christian art and into forms like the popularly distributed broadsheet. Kunzle argues that such inversions increasingly became meaningful for the lower classes “who sought or fantasized about the subversion of the existing order.”¹⁵ In this sense we can see the use of inversion becoming increasingly self-conscious.

What distinguishes the inversions in contemporary Native art from both traditional Trickster stories and the older European tradition of mundus inversus is that they are self-consciously set against mainstream values as a form of explicit critique. In a sense they have harnessed the disruptive energy latent in the traditional forms of inversion and deployed them deliberately as parody against the

conventions that authorize Western hegemony. As art historian Linda Hutcheon suggests, parody has been central to the visual art of the twentieth century, much of which is rooted in a politic of opposition to the mainstream or at the very least a loss of faith in its epistemological foundations.¹⁶ Needless to say, critical strategies of parody and inversion have been especially important to artists working from a postcolonial perspective. Think, for example, of David Hammons’ portrait of a white-skinned, blond-haired Jesse Jackson, titled *How You Like Me Now?* Or Roger Shimomura’s sly, surprisingly seamless blending of American pop illustration and Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints? Or Nigerian-born British artist Yinka Shonibare’s sculptural interventions in the Western canon and his staged scenes of Victorian life. Or Yasumasa Morimura’s many photographs that cast the artist as the central (or all of) the figures in works from the Western canon and pop culture. I think that the works of contemporary Native art that I am discussing are at least as engaged with the critical practice of contemporary artists as described above as they are with traditional Trickster stories. In the spirit of category crossing we can imagine aspects of all of these traditions in play simultaneously.

II Why do inversions tend so often to be funny? Freud argued that jokes are a means by which repressed, unacceptable or taboo emotions can be expressed in a form that will “evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible.”¹⁷ In other words, behind every joke is a social norm being stretched and tested, and I would suggest that our laughter might also serve as a release of anxiety over these symbolic transgressions. In this sense jokes remain both outside and within the rules; they are, within varying limits, a socially sanctioned form of social transgression. As Freud famously noted:

tendentious jokes are especially favoured in order to make aggressiveness or criticism possible against persons in exalted positions... the joke then represents a rebellion against that authority, a liberation from its pressure.¹⁸

As such, jokes do allow us to critique, to probe the limits of our values and, to suggest new possibilities without committing to them.

From this perspective it’s not so difficult to see why symbolic inversions are so often funny; they test our norms and taboos by turning them upside down. We should recall that, as literary theorist John Parkin notes, humorous forms such as satire “can be used to promote [or attack] any sort of value.”¹⁹ Some might laugh at Logan’s parody of the Western canon, others at a minstrel show. (It’s worth mentioning that often when we say an act is ‘transgressive’ we really also imply that it is normative, but according to a different set of norms. Even if we transgress a rule simply because we believe that it is an arbitrary restriction of our liberty, this still suggests to me that we have a commitment to the value of liberty from arbitrary authority. Failing to mention this is a kind of postmodern repression around making explicit the ethical assumptions that underlie our own critiques.)

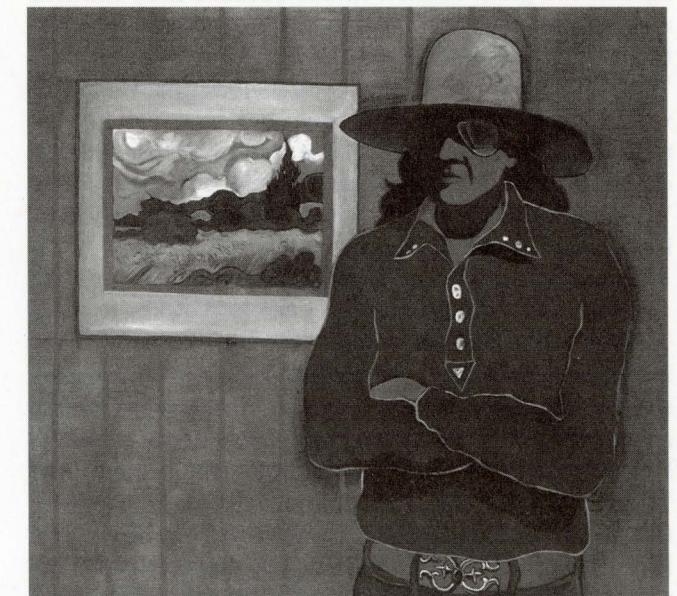
T. C. Cannon’s painting *Collector #5* (1975) provides one model for looking at how humour, inversion and values come together. Here the artist is slyly commenting on the strangeness of his own practice as an American Indian artist whose work sold almost exclusively to non-Indian collectors. By positing a Native collector of Western art (a van Gogh wheat field) enjoying a life of leisure and apparent pride of ownership (although interestingly enough the work appears to be a framed and matted poster rather than an original oil on canvas, perhaps a touch of realism that reverses the painting’s direction once again) the artist is turning several hierarchies on their heads. The first is the economic arrangement that excludes most Indians from the possibility of collecting “high” art. The second is the notion that Native artists are ignorant of Western art traditions (or worse yet, ought not to have their authenticity contaminated by learning about them). In fact Cannon was a great admirer of van Gogh and considered him an important influence.²⁰

These norms are being inverted to highlight their repressed existence, and demonstrate that they are shameful and deserving of derision. The humour we experience looking at Cannon’s painting seems a kind of explosive realization of a suppressed truth. It may even contain two moments for some viewers (white or Native, we can all internalize racist norms). The first is when we begin to view the picture and react according to the norms: “Ha, ha, what’s that Indian doing there; how funny

for an Indian to collect a van Gogh!” The second moment, occurring almost simultaneous with the first, is recognition of complicity with the racist norms. We begin to laugh with the artist against these norms as a kind of insider who squeaked in on a near miss. “Ha, ha, look how clever he was to put that Indian there; why shouldn’t an Indian collect a van Gogh!” As Freud argues, it is the covertness of the humour that makes it so effective:

A joke will allow us to exploit something ridiculous in our enemy which we could not, on account of obstacles in the way, bring forward openly or consciously; once again then the joke will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible. It will further bribe the hearer into taking sides with us.²¹

The representation of Christianity by so-called Woodland School artists offers examples of the variety of ideologies that these sorts of inversions can support or undermine. Like European artists of the past, many Native artists who are Christians have been quick to translate biblical iconography into their local idiom. To mention just a few: Norval Morrisseau, whom nobody can accuse of thinking small, has painted many portraits of himself as Jesus



Collector #2, T. C. Cannon, 1970, acrylic, 116.84 cm x 127 cm. Courtesy: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Christ and many other Christian-themed works. The Sandy Lake Ojibway artist and one-time lay preacher Goyce Kakegamic painted a *Nativity* (1984) in the style of the Woodland School. In it, the three Native wise men approach Joseph, Mary and Jesus (who are also Native) in a canoe, bearing gifts of blueberries. A host of animal spirits oversees the occasion.

Now I suppose that you could read these images straight, but I think they tend to be funny, and perhaps in at least two ways. I don't doubt that the intent of these inversions of Western religious subjects is primarily normative, making accessible biblical iconography that many Native people might otherwise have good reason to feel alienated from. Certainly Kakegamic has used line and colour to suggest a harmonization of Christian and Native beliefs. But they also operate critically (and therefore are conceivably funny) in two ways. They mount a fairly straightforward critique against white dominance in Christian representation, and one might laugh at them as zingers against this racist conceit. At the same time they import into Christianity a number of potentially disruptive notions, such as animism, representing oneself as Christ, or other ideas that might not be appreciated by a jealous God or His representatives on earth. I think I tend to laugh at them against the grain of their intent because they confirm my feelings about making graven images of the Lord. In this I have always followed Hélène Cixous' edict that "One must not try to portray God, because then one would see to what extent he does not exist."²² The further delight of these Christian inversions is that they do extra duty by challenging popular expectations about Woodland art as a simplistic carrying over of Ojibway image making of the past.

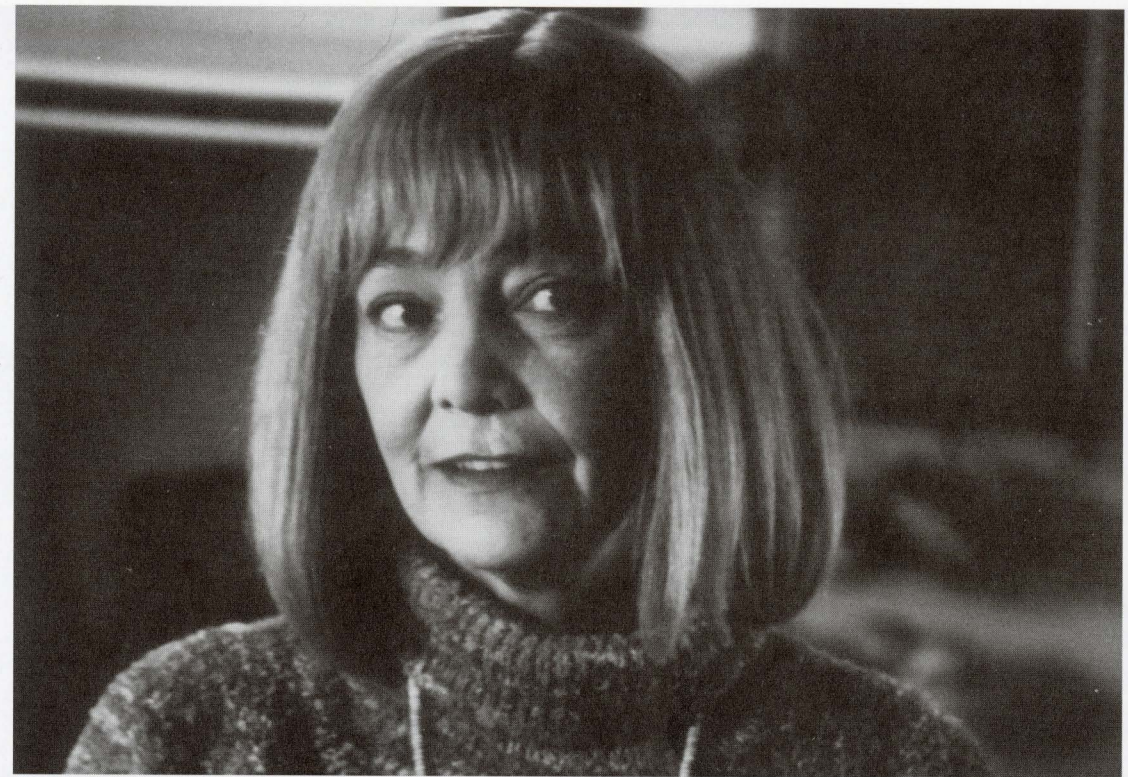
III

Having discussed inversion and suggested its transgressive potential as parody, it seems that there remains another of its aspects to account for: the use of mimicry. Parody depends, of course, on the ability to mimic an "original" with a difference. But how does mimicry function to produce this difference and what is its power? Mimicry (or mimesis, if you want to dress the word up and send it to university) is an extremely elusive concept both because of the variety of ways in which it has been

deployed and because the types of knowledge it produces tend to resist articulation.

Homi K. Bhabha describes the colonial use of mimicry as a strategy imposed on the colonized by the colonizer out of a "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." Although this strategy may be promoted as one of assimilation, Bhabha insists that it must necessarily be "constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference."²³ To maintain the inequitable power relationship, the binary of colonizer and colonized must be maintained, thus an "ironic compromise"²⁴ is made between the notion of a reformable other and an other that is ontologically distinct and inferior. If this seems hopelessly abstract, just think of the residential school system in Canada, the stated goals of which were assimilationist, but which were in fact segregated and not designed on the model reserved for other citizens. Nicholas Flood Davin, one of the visionaries behind the residential school system, was quite sure that Indians "could be taught to do a little at farming and at stock raising and to dress in a more civilized fashion, but that is all."²⁵

This colonial mimicry can very quickly turn to parody, however. According to Bhabha the consequence of the colonizers paradoxical goals is the production of a colonized subject that is a distorting mirror that fractures the identity of the colonizer. This crisis creates a space "between mimicry and mockery"²⁶ that destabilizes the process of colonial mimicry. Through the enforced process of mimicry itself the colonial subject has potentially been armed to exploit the founding contradiction of the assimilationist project. Although Bhabha is not explicit about the extent to which mimicry as mockery becomes a self-conscious act of resistance,²⁷ I would argue that these inversions by Native artists do just that. They seem to say not only "you promised to let us in but look at all the ways in which we are excluded," but also, "we're already in, we're creating in-between spaces for ourselves in the territories you would least expect." Through these inversions "the observer becomes the observed"²⁸ and the very notion of essential, discrete identities serving the categorical authority of the colonizer is undone. Parodic mimicry as an expression of hybridity creates a "category crisis," as Marjorie Garber



Tantoo Cardinal as the character Claire. Production still from *Blood River*, Kent Monkman (director), 2000, 23 min. film. Photo: Alexander Plata. Courtesy: Urban Nation.

puts it. She uses the term in relation to cross-dressing, but I think it applies here too. According to Garber, a category crisis is created by "disrupting and calling attention to cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances." It is the "power of transvestitism [or critically directed inversions of the sort we are looking at] to disrupt, expose, and challenge, putting in question the very notion of the "original" and of stable identity." This creates "a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another."²⁹ Of course the better one knows the rules, the more effectively one can mimic and move across borders.

This suggests that the ability to mimic is tied to power. Freud argued that mimicry is a way in which children deal with powerful or overwhelming situations. By mimicking "they abrogate the strength of the impression and, as one might put it, make themselves master of the situation."³⁰ These works seem to be doing this on a self-conscious, critical level. They are an attempt to wrestle away control of the process of mimicry, to take control of what difference is or is not produced. If capital "A" Art is the highest and most refined manifestation of Western civilization, then these artists are going to rub their knowledge of it in your face. The difference produced, the places in which the mimicry fails to be an exact copy is not the expected failure to understand or get it right, but the failure to agree and submit. Think of *Death of Jimmie Wolf* (1991), Edward

Poitras' back-lit photo-mural parody of Benjamin West's *The Death of General Wolf*. By stepping back from his stage set a little to reveal its edges, the artist is reminding us that he is not only aware of but also in control of the work's artifice. This is not just shallow pomo play in the semiotic fields of art history. Poitras knows and critically subverts the hierarchical codes of representation not only of West's painting, but also of international contemporary art. (I suspect that it is as much a parody of Jeff Wall as Benjamin West: you can see all the deliberately bad acting going on, the failure to take the artifice entirely seriously.)

But here is where mimicry becomes complicated, because when does the copy stop being a copy and start becoming an original? Or perhaps the question is when do we realize that in some sense our notion of what is original and essential and what is not is the product of a particular history of mimicry, as Michael Taussig suggests? In his book *Mimesis and Alterity*, he argues that mimicry is one of the primary ways in which the radically Other is addressed. Mimicry is not only unstable because it originates from conflicting impulses, as Bhabha suggests, but also because it raises serious questions about the originality of the original. Taussig argues that mimicry begins on both sides at the moment of contact as the participants create roles for the Other and in the process a cycle of mimicry occurs that produces their respective identities. The problem is that neither of these identities is discrete, but deeply enmeshed.



Tantoo Cardinal as the character Mattie. Production still from *Blood River*, Kent Monkman (director), 2000, 23 min. film. Photo: Alexander Plata. Courtesy: Urban Nation.

Taussig gives an example of mimicry in another context. A baby, we know, will mimic words prior to understanding their meaning. But as Taussig points out, the process of mimicry can quickly become extremely complex. Don't parents spend a lot of time making baby talk, in essence mimicking *their idea* of the baby's experience of language to project themselves into the baby's languageless (and thus radically other) world? And then the child's response is in part mimicry of mimicry of him or herself. This is not a movement from original to copy, but a movement around and around until it becomes quite unclear who is copying what.³¹ Taussig argues that a similar process occurs in the colonial situation, that the processes of mimicry becomes "a space between," a space permeated by the colonial tension of mimesis and alterity, in which it is far from easy to say who is the imitator and who is the imitated, which is the copy and which is the original."³² Aren't the colonials often play acting the role of the civilized, which not only emerges in response to a savage Other, but is in some sense mimicking what the colonizer imagines the colonized will expect of civilization? Or on the flip side, how do we know whether our quest for cultural authenticity is not an internalized mimicry of Western culture's notion of authenticity, as Durham suggests?

The in-between space that I imagine the inversions I'm discussing opening up is not at all homogenous or thoroughly Westernized, but rather potentially a space for the play (and, yes, struggle) of differences. I think that Kent Monkman's recent film *Blood River* speaks from and to this space. In it, Jennifer Podemski plays Rose, a young Native law student who lives with her adoptive white mother Claire. What Rose finds in her search for her Native birth family is a complex, urban Native world. She finds a brother, Clayton, living on the streets and meets Clayton's foster mother, Mattie, who was a friend of Rose's birth mother. In a brilliant inversion of the Hollywood tradition of casting white actors in Native roles, Monkman casts Metis actor Tantoo Cardinal as both Native Mattie and white Claire.

If you were a Martian new to earth (you may be for all I know) and were pressed to describe white people based only on Cardinal's portrayal of Claire, the first adjective you'd likely come up with is "perky." To keep in line with the Hollywood prototype that his inversion is based on, Monkman, very deliberately mimics back a slightly daffy (but not entirely unkind) white suburban fantasy-land. Claire is a bit clueless and naive, driving

Rose crazy with her expectations about Native life (when Mattie brings up religion, Claire becomes eager for a dose of authentic Native spirituality and seems quite disappointed to discover that Mattie is a Christian), but she is by no means an unsympathetic figure. Cardinal, who had a dialog coach to help her get Claire's accent right, creates a character that allows us to focus, with serious playfulness, on the possibilities, politics, and limitations of representing the Other in a complex, hybrid situation.

Or we can take it from another direction. I like to think about the Indian cowboy. When I was a kid my grandma or my aunt would often take us down to the Omak Stampede, a rodeo and powwow in the interior of Washington state. Although it had its own clearly demarcated "Indian Encampment" it was obvious that many of the cowboys were Indians too. That many cowboys are Indians is worth keeping in mind when looking at another of T.C. Cannon's collector paintings, *Collector # 2* (1970). We might want to think of the Western duds Cannon models in this self-portrait not so much as straightforward inversion, but as the product of the complex, interactive history of mimicry that has produced the modern, romantic West. And we might want to think of his copy of van Gogh's painting in a similar way. Not as a straightforward representation of Western art as Other or opposite, but as something Cannon himself has become intimately acquainted with. After all, the painter learns to paint, in part at least, through copying the work of other artists. At the same time, notice what Cannon holds back from the viewer in the work: cool shades hide his eyes; his arms are crossed defensively across his chest. He looks at you, the viewer ("the observer becomes the observed"), but your gaze is foiled by sunglasses and shadows. He is a collector but not entirely available to the voyeuristic gaze of the collector, defensive because he knows the assertion he is making must elude the little box that is meant to contain a simplistic, marketable Native identity. Here is the complicated territory in which categories begin to break down and the possibility for new types of agency are released.

I'd like to thank the Toronto Arts Council and the Ontario Arts Council for their support of this project. I'd also like to thank A.S.A. Harrison for her generosity and excellent editorial suggestions (as usual).

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Notes

1. O. M. Brack Jr., W. Kupersmith & C. A. Zimansky eds. (U. of Iowa, 1973) Act V, Scene I, p. 49.
2. *A Certain Lack of Coherence* (Kala Press, 1993) p. 154.
3. From the website for the exhibition "Indian Humor" www.conexus.si.edu/humor/exhibit34.htm, November 12th, 2000.
4. J. Durham, "Jimmie Durham," interview with Susan Canning, *Art Papers* (No. 14, July - August 1990) p. 35.
5. J. Durham, "The Centre of the World is Several Places Part II," interview with Beverly Koski and Richard William Hill, *FUSE Magazine* (Vol. 1, No. 4, Fall 1998) p. 53.
6. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Cotton and Iron," *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, R. Ferguson, et. al. eds (New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990) p. 330.
7. A. Ryan, *Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (UBC Press, 1999) The entire book is an argument that humour in contemporary Native art be read as a "Trickster discourse," and Ryan gives examples of a number of works that involve inversion.
8. Also, I've been tending to feel the Trickster has been a bit over-exposed lately, made a bit too explicit. You're welcome to let a "Trickster" reading play in the back of your mind as you read this, but I'll leave it at that. The Trickster needs a little cover from which to work, some room to surprise us, to come up out of our subconscious and bite us on the arse.
9. D. Nemiroff, "Crossings," *Crossings*, exhibition catalogue (National Gallery of Canada, 1999).
10. B. A. Babcock, "Introduction," *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, B. A. Babcock, ed. (Cornell University Press, 1978) p. 14.
11. At the same time I think the term "transgression," used as a synonym for symbolic inversion by Stallybrass and White [*The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Cornell University Press, 1986) p. 17-18] is too broad and does not make explicit the process of inversion that is crucial to the works I'm looking at.
12. Moxey, K. "Hieronymus Bosch and the 'World Upside Down': the Case of the Garden of Earthly Delights," *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, N. Byson, M. A. Holly, & K. Moxey, eds. (University of New England Press, 1994).
13. D. Kunzle, "World Upside Down: the Iconography of a European Broadsheet Type," *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, B. A. Babcock, ed. (Cornell University Press, 1978) p. 40.
14. In his book *Rabelais and His World* the Russian literary critic brilliantly discusses the subversive and inversive nature of the sixteenth-century carnivals humorously dealt with by Rabelais. I have to agree with Terry Eagleton, however, that it is easier to imagine these moments of excess and transgression serving more as a lightly controlled safety valve for the expression of desires repressed by authority than as a truly destabilizing force [Walter Benjamin: or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (Verso, 1994) p. 148-49].
15. Kunzle, p. 40.
16. L. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Methuen, 1985).
17. S. Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, J. Strachey, trans. (Penguin, 1991) p. 147.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
19. J. Parkin, *Humour Theorists of the Twentieth Century* (Edwin Mellon Press, 1997) p. 222.
20. J. Frederick, *T. C. Cannon: He Stood in the Sun* (Northland Publishing, 1995) pp. 101-102.
21. Freud, *Jokes*, p. 147.
22. As quoted in Parkin, pp. 241-2.
23. H. K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994) p. 86.
24. Bhabha, "Of mimicry and man," p. 86.
25. From the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Final Report, Volume 1, Chapter 10: <http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/v1/Vol1Ch10s1tos11.asp>.
26. Bhabha, "Of mimicry and man," p. 86.
27. For a critical evaluation of Bhabha's sense of the participants self-consciousness regarding the destabilizing effects of colonial mimicry, see: R. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (Routledge, 1990) p. 152, and B. Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory* (Verso, 1997) pp. 132-33.
28. Bhabha, "Of mimicry and man," p. 89.
29. I. M. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (HarperCollins, 1992) p. 16.
30. S. Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *On Metapsychology* (Pelican Freud Library, Vol. II, 1984) p. 286.
31. M. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, (Routledge, 1993) p. 77.
32. Taussig, p. 78.

Talking Visions, Talking Art, Talking Politics:



Ella Shohat on her Latest Book

Interview with
Meera Sethi

November 30, 2000
Toronto

In November of 2000, I had the pleasure of interviewing Ella Habiba Shohat, a professor of media studies and women's studies at the City University of New York and an internationally known writer, curator and activist. Shohat was in Toronto to promote her new book, *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age* (reviewed on page 52), an edited collection of new essays and visual artwork by writers, artists, and activists. We discussed *Talking Visions* and its production process.



Photo of Ella Habiba Shohat: Nina Barnett.

Shohat is the author of numerous articles and books on postcolonial theory, multicultural feminism, transnational media and visual culture. Her award-winning books include *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*; *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (with Robert Stam); and *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Over the years, she has served on the editorial committees of such journals as *Social Text*, *Public Culture*, *News From Within* and *Critique*.

MEERA SETHI: What would you like to see happen as *Talking Visions* gains momentum through public discussion?

ELLA SHOHAT: Whenever you work on a project you have hopes for it to enter the public sphere, to be part of a dialogue, and even intervene in the ongoing debate. But over the years I have also learned to tone down my expectations. The impact of this kind of work might be

meaningful, but it tends to be confined within specific circles. And that, of course, has to do with the very nature of the project—the combination of criticizing hegemonic discourses, institutions and cultural practices along with rethinking the social space within which we live. I certainly would like to see *Talking Visions* become part of a larger movement that envisions alternative ways of representing and of knowing. I believe that at the core of the book you can detect ambivalence with regards to the very institutions that made the book possible: the university, the museum and the publishing house. We know that we live within a world of hyper-commodification. The aura around certain modes or artistic and intellectual production doesn't simply reflect quality—it also reflects fashionability. We offer criticism of this commodification, and we even believe that we can kidnap it for our own purposes. Works such as *Talking Visions* are a product of this kind of kidnapping. In other words, for me, *Talking*

Visions tries to look deeper into the issues, not just ride a fashionable wave. In my introduction to *Talking Visions*, I was obsessed with situating the texts and images that compose the book within a longer history. This is especially important, because fashionability is ephemeral; it also means that the seasonal change would produce an expectation for the next thrilling intellectual or artistic garb. But the question I was concerned with had to do with how we go about deepening our critical understanding of current cultural production, rather than just get excited that certain topics are finally institutionally acceptable, or get panicked and mourn their disappearance. I was hoping to see *Talking Visions* as part of envisioning an ongoing battle on how to read, interpret and represent the world we inhabit.

MS: Something I really like about the book is the suggestion that possibilities for social change and deeper understanding lie at the intersections...

ES: I was interested in the work of activists, artists and scholars who have given thought to the intersection of race,

nation, gender and sexuality. In the book, feminism and multiculturalism aren't addressed in isolation from each other. I wanted to develop a relational method of analysis. I encouraged the contributors to think and imagine relationally in diverse areas. For example, dichotomies such as Black-versus-white, or Chicana-versus-white ignore the complexity of our lives and produce a problematic account of social experiences that are generated out of the multiplicity of communities and identifications. It can even become hazardous for political coalitionary work. If we have such fixed dichotomies, what would be the relationship, say, among Black and Asian feminists? What I have tried to do, therefore—through the editing, through my introduction and through the juxtaposition of images and texts—was to have a kind of what I called a “plurilog.” I was trying to find the cracks in this unified category called “women of color,” and search for the contradictions and ambivalences generated by multiple affiliations and shifting positionalities. For example, Chandra Mohanty's essay speaks about coming to the U.S. after a series of displacements (India, Uganda and Britain). She does not simply focus on that narrative of displacement in a vacuum but



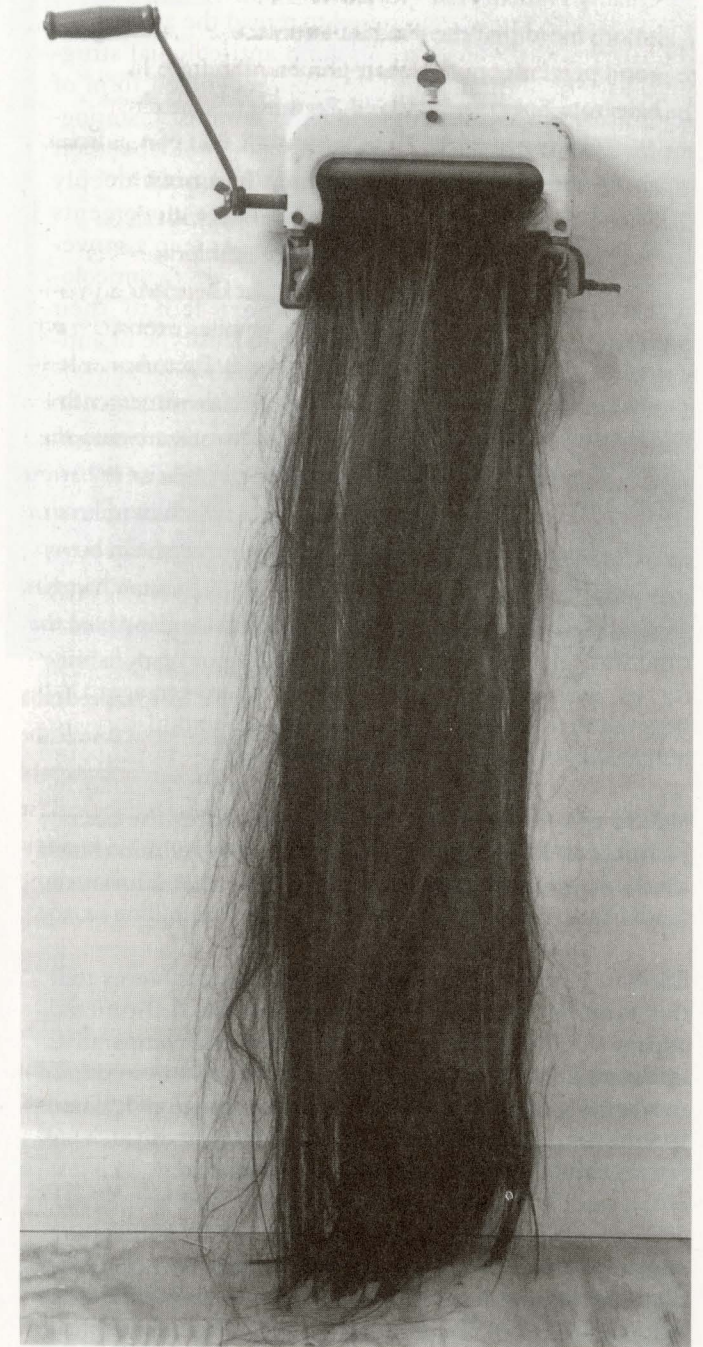
Maria Magdalena Campos Pons

The Seven Powers Come by the Sea, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, 1992, wood, glass, photos, African beads, metal, soil and 45 min. performance. Photo: Melissa Shook.

how this narrative has implications for coalitionary work with communities of colour, such as African Americans.

MS: In your talk last evening, you said that art history also needs to be renarrativized and contextualized in order to bring out the complexities of its historical development. Can you explain this?

ES: Yes. I am concerned with the stagist discourse on the history of the arts and aesthetics. This field is framed around a linear metanarrative: realism/modernism/post-modernism, where everything else is assumed to be pale copies of European originals; where the “rest” (the non-West) follows the cultural innovations of the west, the so-called “advanced world.” This temporality is questionable, since realism was not an aesthetic that was dominant in most parts of the world. The avant-garde rebellion against modernism has to be seen as a local European rebellion, rather than as a universal transformation. In fact, the “West and the rest” were never as segregated as Eurocentrism suggests. This argument was worked out in my book with Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, as well as in our introduction to *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff. We argued that cultures are hybrid, heteroglossic, and are characterized by multiple historical trajectories. And all of these worlds are interlinked; they are not hermetically sealed off from one another. All the highpoints of Western creativity — Greece, Rome, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Modernism — have been moments of cultural mixing. The movement of aesthetic ideas has always been at least two ways. Think, for example, of the Moorish influence on the poetry of courtly love, or the African influence on modernist paintings, or even the impact of Asian forms like Kabuki, Noh Drama, Balinese theatre or ideographic writing on European theatre and film. Or, the more known example of Picasso's encounter with African sculpture and the kind of aesthetic innovations that arise from this encounter. Therefore, even the notion of modernist avant-garde cannot be narrativized in a vacuum without taking into account all these kinds of cross-cultural dialogues. On the other hand, as I tried to show yesterday, at the very same period that Europe was experimenting with breaking away with mimesis, colonial Western institutions were bringing institutionalized mimesis to the colonies as an artistically superior mode to the “local” aesthetics. You can see this kind of institutionalization in the establishment of art schools in Cairo and Istanbul in the first decades of this century. Ironically, Egyptian and Turkish artists began to imitate mimesis in the very same places that have produced the abstract arabesque, which is the product of the Judeo-Islamic prohibition on graven images. This is an example of the kind of relational juxtapositions that expose the tensions and contradictions that come about when you do a deep cross-cultural and trans-spatial investigation.



Wrung, Lynne Yamamoto, 1992, washer part, synthetic hair, nails, 30.48 cm x 106.68 cm x 7.62 cm. Photo: Larry Lame.

There is a misconception that questions of multiculturalism, feminism and queer theory are only relevant to people of colour, women and gays and lesbians. But this kind of questioning is a fundamental critique on our way of knowing, our epistemology. In *Talking Visions*, I was also trying to renarrativize feminist history. I argued that feminism could be found even in unexpected times and places. For example, I proposed to reread the activism of Third World women, especially in anti-colonial struggles, as a kind of subterranean, unrecognized form of feminism, and as a legitimate part of feminist historiography, even if the activists themselves did not label their work as feminist. Colonized women had been deeply involved in anti-colonialist and anti-racist movements long before their dialogue with the “women’s movement.” In fact, it is often their activism within anticolonialist and antiracist movements that led to their political engagement in feminism. But, this type of anti-patriarchal, and even, at times, anti-heterosexist subversions within anti-colonial struggles, remains marginal to the feminist canon, because, unfortunately, one kind of feminism retains the power of naming and narrativizing. My point was that history and its representations have to acknowledge a more complex way of relaying space and temporality. We have to challenge the multiple sites of histories-feminist history and anticolonial history. We have to renarrativize “History” in a polycentric multicultural way, in a non-Eurocentric way. It’s our responsibility as critical artists or thinkers to re-engage the hegemonic narrative by which aesthetics and history are taught and create new ways of knowing.

MS: So this linear stagist narrative simplifies the actual picture, but it also ignores work being done within those aesthetic spaces by others who don’t fit that European model for artist.

ES: Yes, but there are also more concrete problems that this kind of critical work faces within the institutional apparatus. For example, most art history and comparative literature departments usually require from PhD students the learning of only certain European languages: German, French or Italian. Even European languages such as Spanish and Portuguese tend to be marginalized. The rest of the world’s languages, such as Chinese, Arabic or Hindi, are not even perceived as relevant to the study of literature and art. The study of such cultures usually comes under the rubric of anthropology, area studies, ethnic studies or folklore. In *Talking Visions* you have an implicit and explicit criticism of the gerrymandering of knowledges into categories of imagined spaces, which correspond to regions and areas of the globe. I wanted us to pay attention to the ways that universities erect disciplinary borders to maintain conceptual boundaries, and to the ways that they continue to reproduce the discursive divisions of fields of inquiry. The

study of the majority of women in the world can only be found in the margins of most curricula. They are fenced off into the Bantustans called “area studies.”

MS: The dominant reading of “multiculturalism” in Canada is one that derived from its institutionalization. Do you see the potential for this term gaining popularity as an emancipatory counter-hegemonic signifier even in such a political context? Can it effectively translate into Canada?

ES: Although the term “multiculturalism” has different histories in the U.S. and Canada, the issues and problems we’re concerned with are quite similar, having to do with institutional racism, Eurocentric discourse and colonialist history. Every term is problematic and every term, we have to remember, can be coopted and can also be re-coopted. For example, think of the shifts in the meaning of the term “queer.” There are no value-free terms; they change meaning over time. And that’s why we keep changing terminology. In the U.S., unlike in Canada, “multiculturalism” has offered a resistance site and does articulate certain kinds of coalitions of diverse anti-racist struggles. But using the term “multiculturalism” doesn’t mean we should abandon the term “anti-racism,” which is important because it addresses the question of racism.

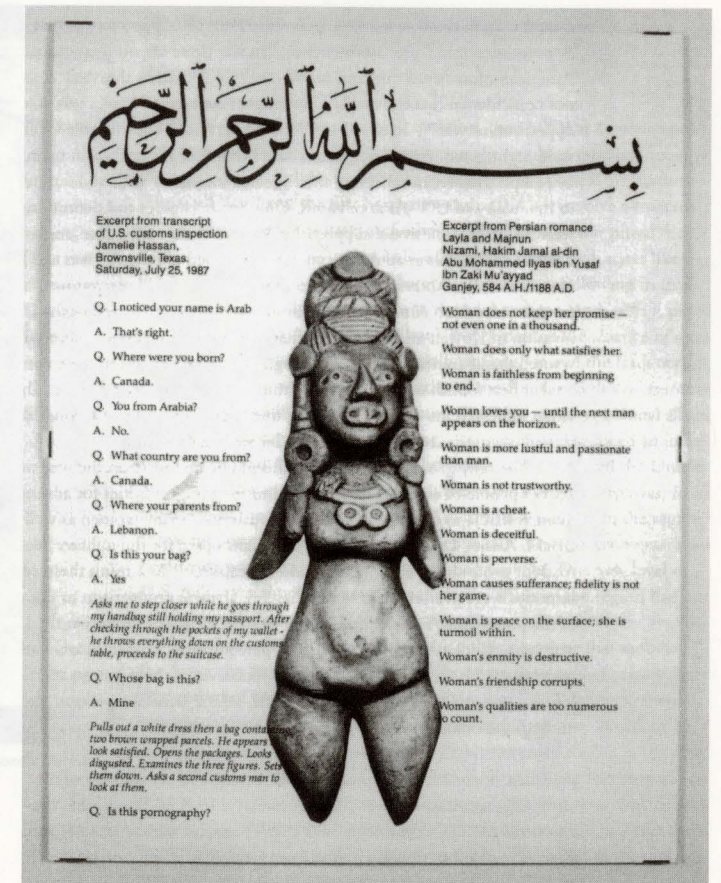


Sgt. Richard Muse Welcomed Home by Daughter, Michael J. Okonlewski, 1991, photograph.

But “multiculturalism” also gives a positive dimension to the anti-racist struggle because it calls attention to coalitions among multiple communities, and to articulating and celebrating non-Eurocentric cultural production. But of course, the term “multiculturalism” has become problematic in the U.S. too. It’s not a coincidence that many of us are redefining or adding adjectives to the term: “radical multiculturalism,” “critical multiculturalism” or “polycentric multiculturalism” — the term Robert Stam and I proposed in *Unthinking Eurocentrism* — which implies many different vantage points and situating knowledges from different perspectives. So, as critical intellectuals, we have to constantly redefine the terminology, and we have to be strategic about terms. I’m not privileging the term “multiculturalism,” per se, as the only word to be used. In a war one has to use diverse artillery and constantly invent new weapons to resist the new weapons of oppression. I’m also suggesting that we can re-kidnap the term “multiculturalism” that has already been appropriated from its original critical context by Benetton’s type of advertising strategy that promotes the ethnic “flavor of the month.” The term “multiculturalism” is problematic, but so are many terms. Just because it’s coopted institutionally does not mean that we cannot challenge it by injecting it with more radical meanings. It’s a dynamic process.

MS: Can you speak about the process of relationalizing that frames your introduction to *Talking Visions*...it’s about people coming from different disciplines...

ES: Well, it’s more than just disciplines. I proposed relationalizing as a mode of knowledge production. I wasn’t interested in creating an anthology about women of colour where each woman of colour represents a specific group and usually speaks vis-à-vis a white or Anglo-Saxon norm. In the past it was important to have anthologies within this frame because there were hardly any spaces for women of colour to articulate themselves as “women of colour.” But, when I started working on *Talking Visions*, I felt that this had already been done. I also felt that there was a danger in creating neat binarisms of Black-versus-white, or Chinese-versus-white, or Chicana-versus-white. Unthinkingly, or unconsciously, these binarisms recenter white norms because a series of different minorities are positioned against white hegemony, but not positioned vis-à-vis each other. This binarism, which is critical of whiteness, ironically repositions whiteness as a normative interlocutor, and puts on hold everyone else who does not fit in either category, as if sitting in her couch awaiting her turn to speak. This “on hold” method ends up producing gaps and silences where the relationship among the diverse “others” remains obscure. Our challenge, I think, is to produce knowledge within a kind of kaleidoscopic framework of communities-in-relation; to explore — what I called in the



Shame (from the Trilogy), Jamelie Hassan, 1990, detail from mixed media installation. Photo: Patricia Holdsworth.

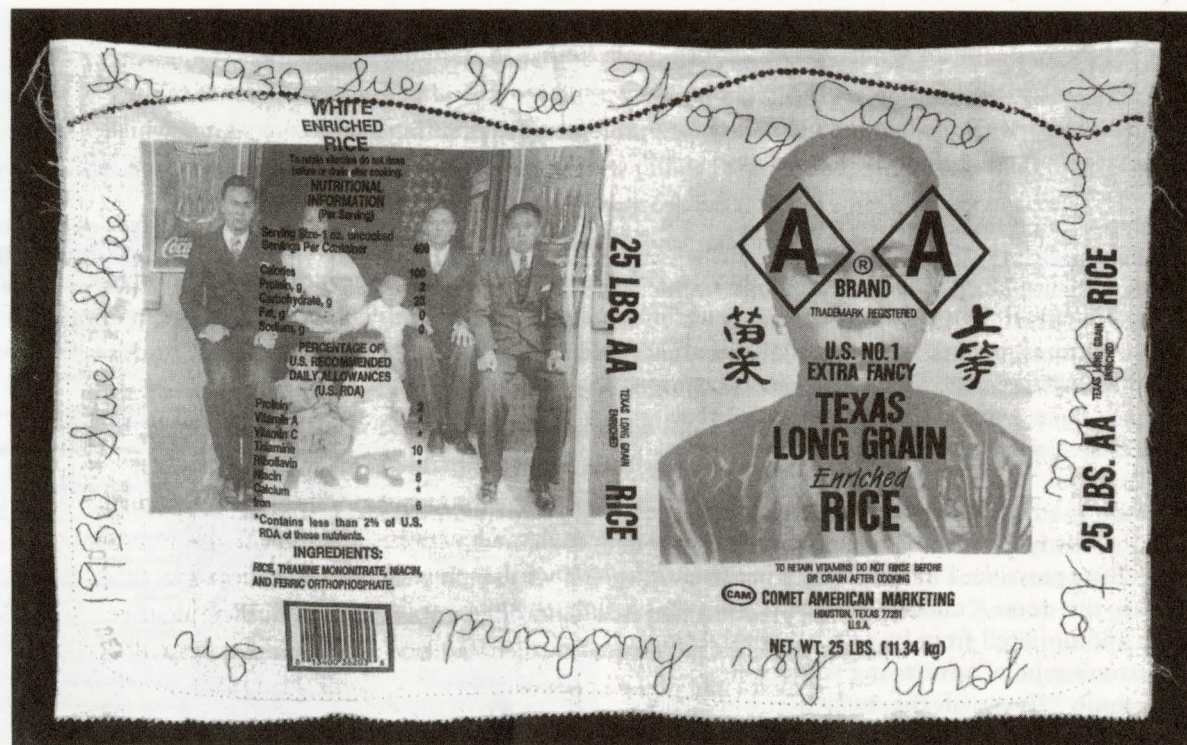
introduction — the “linked analogies” and the “dissonant polyphonies” among the diverse so-called “margins.” So, as you can see, the method of relationality is multiple. In the book, relational includes dismantling the neat boundaries of disciplines, cultures, identities, nations, geographical spaces and historical periodizations.

MS: ...also relational between text and image, artist, activist, academic?

ES: Yes, certainly. This is one example of the relationality that *Talking Visions* tries to offer. And the book also insists that this relationality is at the very core of the idea of the intersection between gender, race, sexuality, nation, class and religion.

MS: Your work suggests that we should move from identification to affiliation to social transformation... can you elaborate?

ES: In *Talking Visions* I tried to go beyond issues of identity, to identifications. That’s why in the introduction I stated that this is not a book about women of colour but about multicultural feminism as a political, social and epistemological project. At the same time, I said that it’s not a coincidence that multicultural feminism was largely produced



In 1930 Sue Shee Wong Came from Baby Jack Rice Story, Flo Oy Wong, 1993, rice sack, silkscreen, sequins, thread, 50.8 cm x 81.28 cm.

by women of colour because their experiences at the intersection of oppressions have generated their pioneering work toward a different kind of knowledge. In a sense, multicultural feminism is an inclusive space, but this is not to suggest that there are no contradictions. I was also hoping to articulate those contradictions. I wanted us to be more conscious of what's taking place and why it's so hard to actually do coalitionary work. Perhaps there are different interests at stake; perhaps there are different utopias, social desires and political visions.

This relationality can also be found in the way articles echo with each other in *Talking Visions*. For example, the articles by Wahneema Lubiano and Mervat Hatem. Wahneema's essay is a fascinating piece on the representation of gender and African Americans during the Gulf War. She analyzes a *New York Times* photo of a Black soldier embracing his daughter just as he returned from the Gulf, with the American flag in the background. This image is unusual given that Black men tend to be criminalized in the media, portrayed as absent fathers, and Black women are stigmatized as welfare mothers. What happened in the Gulf War that suddenly the Black father was celebrated? Female Black soldiers were erased and the "welfare queens" disappeared for this patriotic moment, when suddenly the patriarchal family was put on display. It is only in times of war that you suddenly find a different kind of representation. In a sense, the essay addressed the contradictions arising from the fact that minorities, who are subjected to racism at home, and are

recruited to the military (because of the U.S. class/racial system), are also fighting imperialist wars abroad.

The other essay is by Mervat Hatem, an Egyptian feminist who teaches at Howard University, a Black university in Washington, D.C. Her article, in a sense, addressed partly this problem of being an immigrant from Egypt in the context of Afrocentric ideas about what Egypt is. The fact that she doesn't look sufficiently "Egyptian," in other words, Black, leads her to encounter the questioning of her identity as Egyptian. The expectation is that all Egyptians are Black, when in actuality, there is a range of different colours in the Arab world. What did it mean to be an Egyptian immigrant in a Black American context during the Gulf War, when anti-Arab images proliferated all around? So, in *Talking Visions*, you have different implicit dialogues, not just vis-à-vis whiteness.

MS: For women writers of colour, writing has been theorized as a key vehicle for empowerment and "coming to voice." Why hasn't visual art also been recognized as such? Do you think Eurocentrism is more deeply embedded in art theory than literary theory?

ES: Well, I think different fields have different histories. First, I would say that those battles have been true everywhere and in every academic field. The very formation of the disciplines, as we know them today, is a product of the Enlightenment and of the rise of knowledge in the nineteenth century, during the height of the imperialist era.

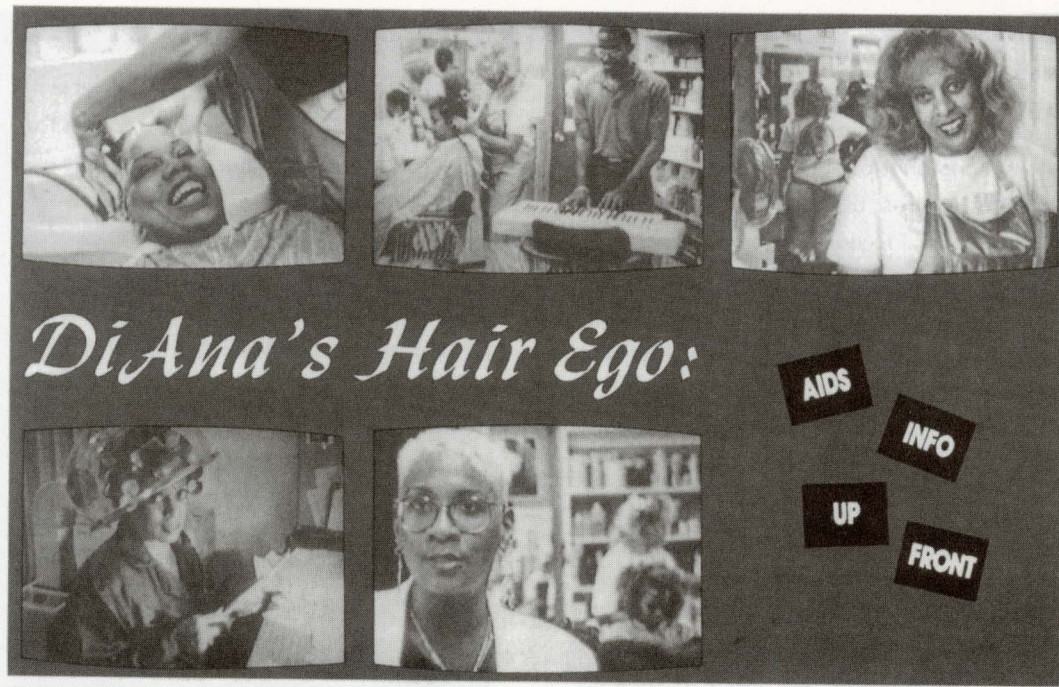
But I do think there are also some nuanced differences among the disciplines. For example, I would say that cinema studies actually — of all the humanities — has been quite at the forefront of more critical formulations. For example, in this field, the study of both the visual and the sound elements were not segregated from each other as they have been in literature and art history. Partially, this has to do with the medium itself; but it also has to do with the formation of cinema studies as an academic field. Unlike literature and art history, cinema studies was established more recently in the late '60s/early '70s, alongside ethnic studies and women's studies. Many of the people who founded cinema studies were themselves renegades from literature departments and art history departments. They felt that these departments were very conservative spaces and consequently moved into film as a more popular vehicle for social change. Even the Eurocentrism within cinema studies tended to be expressed within a leftist-liberal frame. Since the late '80s, some of us established, within the Society for Cinema Studies, the caucus on race, which helped reshape the field by bringing more attention to a multicultural method. Currently, art history comes into critical thinking after cultural studies (which has been an interdisciplinary formation, especially since the '80s in the U.S.) has already made important impact. Art history is discovering interdisciplinarity; it largely can be seen in the new area of inquiry called "visual culture." Visual culture can potentially form a break with the linear Eurocentric metanarrative of realism/modernism/postmodernism, with the entire hierarchical ethos that is imbedded in it. But not necessarily so; it depends on how you go about it. In any case, my endorsement of the term "visual culture" does not mean a new kind of hierarchy of the visual over other kinds of elements (like the oral and aural). What interests me is the relationship among the diverse expressive media.

The discipline of art history is deeply linked to museum culture. "Art" has meant Western art. There hasn't been much space for artwork from Asia, Africa and the Americas, until non-Western artists reinvented themselves according to Western norms of the individual artist with a signature. In any case, Art, in many parts of the world, had a different kind of history; it wasn't segregated from everyday life; it was part of ritual, part of religion and of different cultural practices. As such, this kind of art couldn't be subsumed under the aura of "Art" that the museum represented. The term "artifact" signified objects that were inferior to 'Art.' Therefore they were put on display in separate sections or museums — folklore or natural history. This terminological distinction is classed and raced, and has its origins in Eurocentric, capitalist, and colonialist modes of seeing the world. Art history as a field is embedded in this distinction. The idea of the museum has to be understood in the context of colonialism. In other publications I suggested that the



Political Self-Portrait #2 (race), Adrian Piper, 1978, poster, 60.96 cm x 91.44 cm.

rise of the museum is connected to the transporting of new "exotic" objects from the "discovered" continents of Americas, Asia and Africa. Categorizing and classifying this wealth of new objects was a form of mastering their foreignness, and defining the West vis-à-vis the rest. In other words, I argue that the museum contains in its foundation an epistemological project. The ethnographic museum, the exposition, the circus and the fair exhibited objects, plants, animals and people from the colonized world. But the "art museum" exhibited the subjecthood of the Western artist creator. The ethnographic museum, such as the *Museum of Man* in Paris or the *Museum of Natural History*, has signified the space of the "other," the marker of an inferior culture. Obviously, this history creates for me ambivalence toward the very idea of the museum. When, as multicultural feminists, we fight to be included in art museums, which represent the capitalist commodification and the Romantic celebration of the



Video still from *DiAna's Hair Ego: AIDS Info Up Front*, Ellen Spiro's video, 1990.

individual creator, what kind of space and discourse are we entering and becoming part of? And in what ways can we kidnap that space for more critical purposes? So, there is here this ambivalence of fighting Eurocentric discourses and institutions with one hand and, with the other, banging at their doors to enter.

MS: What is your experience of writing radical theory within an institutional space, particularly within an academic world that has, relatively speaking, embraced "post-colonial" theory, but has yet to embrace academics of colour and share institutional power with them?

ES: This is exactly what I am trying to point out here; there are plenty of contradictions. Institutions allow, or have been pressured to allow, spaces for publishing and curating on themes having to do with multiculturalism and postcolonialism. At the same time, it is a controlled space. Institutions pay lip service to multiculturalism. Academic freedom might allow you to teach critical thinking, but obviously multiculturalism, as the critique of Eurocentric thinking, is not the centerpiece of a Eurocentric curriculum. I'm still going through curriculum battles in my own institution. For the past five years, I've been harassed around teaching the required film theory course because of my approach. I was told by my chair that multiculturalism has nothing to do with film theory. While I'm being invited all over to address the importance of multicultural thought for the questions of aesthetics and the production of knowledge, in my own institution I have been told that I can't do that. So, while we may think that multiculturalism

and postcolonialism have gained visibility when it comes to publishing, the reality is that most of us who do this work comprise a very small percentage within our home institutions. And most of us feel quite lonely within them. What you see here is a discrepancy between two different institutional activities. Even fashionability doesn't always guarantee that multiculturalism, postcolonialism and transnationalism will affect the way institutions continue to produce knowledge.

I'll give you another example. In the late 80s, I was invited to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to speak in conjunction with an exhibition on nineteenth century photography which had quite a bit of material on the Orient. I was very much surprised at the invitation. I think that the Orientalists were so enamoured with their invented object — the Orient — that they did not even begin to question what was at stake in the critique of Orientalism. I gave a talk on Egyptology in the context of colonial discourse. It was a critique of Eurocentric photographic practices. They were totally shocked, disoriented. They didn't expect it. Obviously they didn't understand the thrust of my work when they had initially invited me. Here I was, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where there is a huge and well-known section on Egyptology, but the curators and audience refused to engage what it meant to own objects that were taken from somewhere else and displayed as the product of the victory of Western science — archeology and Egyptology. I don't think they were ready to deal with the act of dispossession that such museums embody. In other words, you can do critical work within an institution and yet you may have little power over the

way that your ideas are being "read" and incorporated into the institution's purposes.

MS: Can you elaborate on the subtitle of the book, "Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age?"

ES: The subtitle calls attention to issues that tend to be segregated and not addressed in relation to each other: feminism in relation to both multiculturalism and transnationalism, and also transnationalism in relation to multiculturalism. The term "multiculturalism" tends to be associated with issues of race addressed within the North American context that usually doesn't take into account a transnational and cross-border perspectives. "Transnationalism" is associated with a debate about globalization, immigration and displacement that is not usually associated with issues of race in the North American context. And both of these debates do not necessarily address issues of gender and sexuality. In *Talking Visions*, I was trying to create multiple debates. Therefore, I tried to prod the contributors, whose work is associated with transnationalism and postcolonialism, to address the linkages to North America and vice versa. That's why Wahneema Lubiano, who is associated with work on African Americans, is talking about the Gulf War, and Mervat Hatem, who is associated with Middle Eastern studies, is talking about the relationship of Arabs to Blacks. And that's why I included Jacqui Alexander's piece, which speaks about the question of North American gay travel to the Caribbean; it's about how gayness, which is associated with progressive sexual politics, can also function within a class and racial transnational commodification of sex. You see what I'm saying?

The subtitle reflects my effort to go beyond the zoning of knowledges according to cartographies, which have been invented by and throughout the colonial project. As I tried to show in my talk yesterday, the circulation of goods and ideas, of images and sounds, and of people is not a new phenomenon, but it has been intensified over the past decades due to new technologies and new modes of capitalism. I felt that even if the major point of reference in the book is the U.S. — since that is the context of the production of the book — the book isn't nationalist in scope. In fact, in my introduction, I criticized certain modes of multicultural and queer works that often have an implicit U.S. nationalist agenda; just as I critiqued a certain tendency in transnational and postcolonial studies in the U.S., to detach itself from issues of race within the U.S.

MS: You had asked people to write articles?

ES: Oh yes. Except for one article by Adrian Piper, all of them are new. Lisa Jones' article was actually published previously in a different context, but she had presented it at the conference. *Talking Visions* is not an anthology based

on previously existing materials. I selected the contributors, discussed with them the topics, and then edited the text, going over it sentence by sentence. It was a laborious project that took many years. Some of the contributors were not writers, but I felt that they had important things to say. So, in a few cases, I had to converse with the contributors and, in a sense, wrote the essay in dialogue with them. Other times, I felt that the format of dialogue would make more sense. For example, I asked my student at the time, Ginetta Candelario, to dialogue with Marina Alvarez, who has been a major voice in AIDS activism. She herself is HIV positive, and has overcome a life full of obstacles like imprisonment, drugs, and, her work reflects the complexity of affinities and identifications, as she has worked with ACT UP, and speaks of the Chinese and African-derived healing practices that are used in the Latina community to cope with HIV. In some cases, I felt that I had to encourage the contributors to work on a topic they were somewhat hesitant to work on, for one reason or another. Caren Kaplan was quite hesitant to write about whiteness and Jewishness; but I felt that her taking on the subject would contribute immensely to the debate. It was also personally important to me, as I have tried in my own work to offer a more complex understanding of this category called Jewish identity. As someone whose family is Baghdadi-Iraqi Jewish, who, along with all Asian and African Jews in Israel, was perceived as Black, I was interested in having an American Jew of Ashkenazi origins dialogue with the perspective I have tried to elaborate in my work — addressing Jewishness in a non-ethnocentric and Eurocentric manner. The essay by Kathleen Zane, which focuses on cosmetic eye surgery, is a product of many discussions I had with the author and even some disagreements. During the conference, Kathleen's presentation celebrated cosmetic eye surgery in the Asian community as a form of self-transformation and recreating of the self. It wasn't that I thought it was totally wrong, as some of the audience participants felt. But I thought that the analysis should negotiate this argument with another perspective that looks at the internalized colonialism and the pathologies of self-hatred. And, I do think, that the final essay incorporates these opposite views. So, in other words, the making of *Talking Visions* is a result of an ongoing dialogue with the contributors and, above all, I think, it reflects an effort to have the images and texts combined in a way that would lead the readers into an exciting voyage.

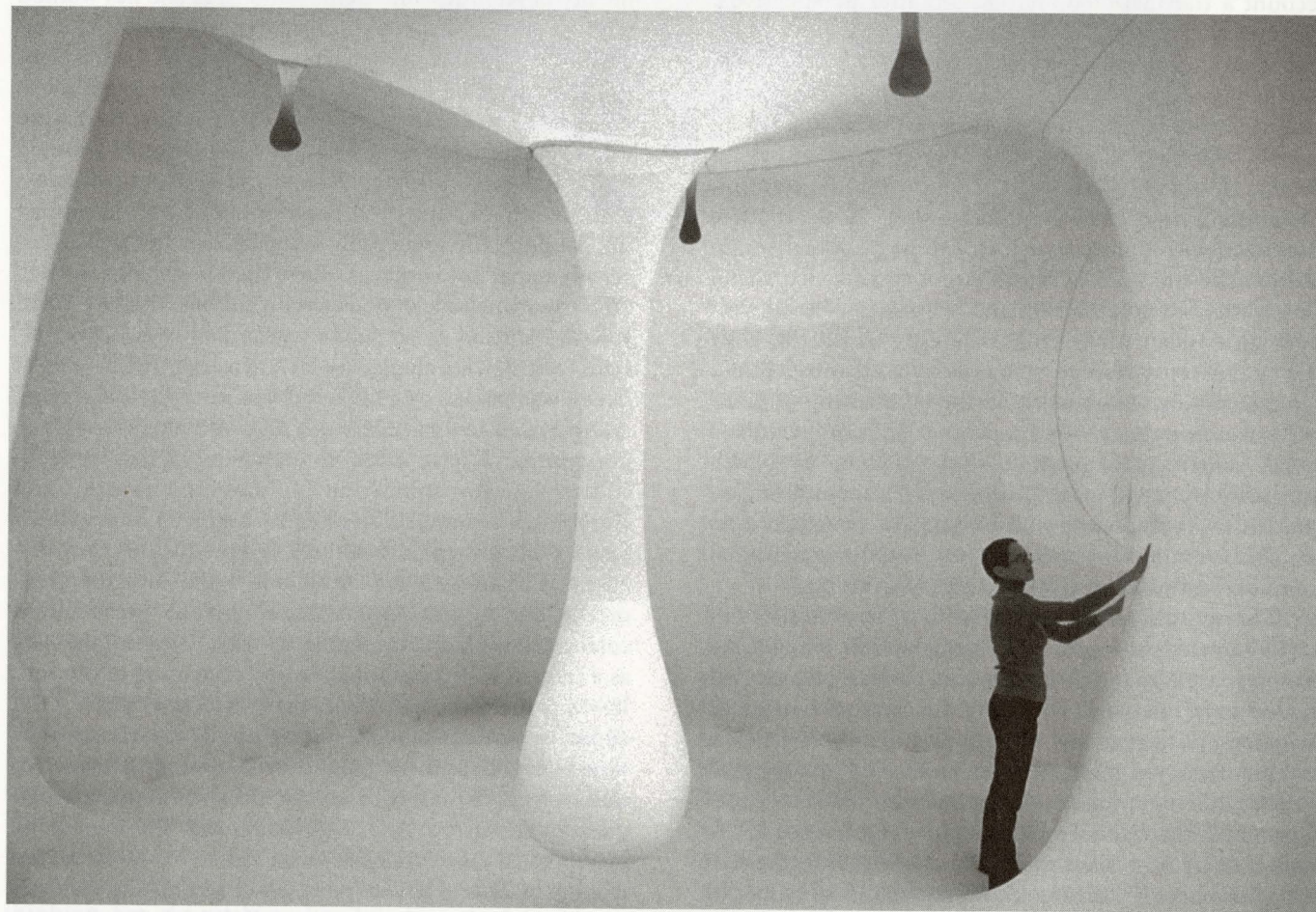
I would like to thank Anjula Gogia of the Toronto Women's Bookstore for help with arranging this interview. I would also like to thank Ella Shohat for her wonderful generosity of spirit during our conversation.

Meera Sethi is a writer, visual artist and cultural critic living in Toronto. She works on the editorial board of FUSE Magazine.

Carnegie International

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, November 6, 1999–March 26, 2000

Review by Sylvie Fortin

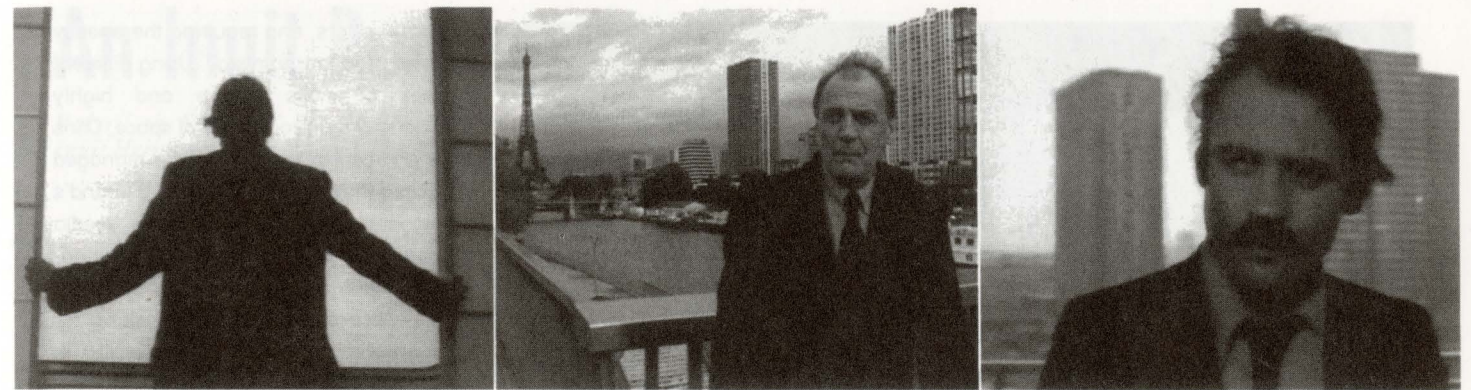


Nude Plasmic, Ernesto Neto, 1999, lycra fabric, sand, Styrofoam, lavender, exhibition installation dimensions: 5.5 m x 21 m x 5.2 m. Courtesy: Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

A 103-year-old landmark, the Carnegie International now functions in a system shaped by the recent pullulation of international surveys of contemporary art, whose preferred format is the biennale. Unlike other international surveys of contemporary art, it is produced by a museum and presented exclusively on its premises. Consequently, it is expected to contribute institutional memory as it

engages the Museum's audience and impacts its collection. After all, collecting museums are in the business of presenting and collecting/conserving objects. Despite their stated educational ambition, they remain driven by objects, and only peripherally (and often instrumentally) by ideas. Knowledge is enlisted as supporting cast to objects, rarely are objects used to generate knowledge.

Starting from a definition of artworks as "first and foremost materially based, experiential forms that make their impact on the level of affect," Madeleine Grynsztejn, curator of the 53rd Carnegie International, brought together works by 41 artists. Most of them were born in the '60s and late '50s. As "art today possesses not so much a similarity of style as a shared focus, a philosophical investigation centered



L'Ellipse (The ellipsis), Pierre Huyghe, 1998, three-part video projection on parabolic screen, 13 min. Courtesy: Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

precisely on what constitutes the real—"authenticity," "truth," "certitude"—at a moment when the real is not secured..." she propounds "a meaningful discussion of the real" as central to the practices of many contemporary artists, and so the show's curatorial premise focuses on "conveying the contemporary condition and its focus on the real." Against such a vast premise, she carves out three privileged areas for the exploration of the real: "works in the exhibition are phenomenologically based and rely on the spectator's psychosomatic response; they construct emphatic total worlds while exposing their means of fabrication; and they deliberately reveal rifts in their narrative and formal structures." This tripartite approach emphasizes the body, materiality and experience. Unfortunately, this legitimate if vague point of departure turns into a muddled discursive field that encompasses the real, reality and realism—the latter justifying the inclusion of Alex Katz and John Currin—as well as such foreign notions as the "actual" and "truth," while they open up to surreal and surrealism, as "excess of the real," in the works of Martin Kippenberger and Jose Antonio Hernandez-Diez. Similarly, identity, the self, the subject, the subjective and subjectivity are bandied about too indiscriminately to be provocative or productive.

While emphasis put on the works is ultimately constituted by the viewer, and constitutive of the viewer, a productive and indeterminate inter-space of becoming, Grynsztejn nonetheless resorts to notions of "transformation" and "change" that imply a fixed and knowable "before" upon which

a force is exerted that produces a recognizable "after." If, indeed, contemporary being is becoming, a process, a staying in translation, shouldn't notions of transformation be abandoned as obsolete and redundant? Most important, her argument relies on the advent of an (isolated, single) agent of transformation—namely, technology—which reconfigures reality. This technological agency erases the powerful process of redefinition of reality and identity that were operated by such discourses as decolonization, feminism, and multiculturalism, which find themselves relegated to a discussion of art-historical precedents.

Most problematic, however, are the terms in which video works and installations are discussed. They become the ground upon which such divergent notions as technology and its imaging applications, namely new media, digital and virtual, are lumped together. This produces two fundamental problems in the exhibition: the exclusion of new media or interactive works, and an ungrounded discussion of video-based works. Denying both the materiality and the mobility of projected video images—note the use of the term "video image" as arrested and singular-video-based works are discussed as "virtual" and "digital." Particularly problematic is the analysis of Pierre Huyghe's *L'Ellipse* (1998), in which she aligns the newly recorded, real-time episode inserted by the artist in the space-time of the jumpcut with "life" and "reality."

It would be certainly productive to further study the relationship between the curatorial essay and the exhibition. I suspect that, somehow, the lack of precision of some of

our thoughts might get amplified when spatially translated in the exhibition. How do the temporalities and processes enlisted in the selection/presentation of works in the group exhibition and the writing of the essay influence one another? On this haunting question, lets now discuss the exhibition: an elegantly designed gathering of works as a succession of discreet encounters; few of the works entertain relations between themselves. The two most rewarding works foreground the "reality" of experience and rely on an uneasy privacy in public. They enlist location through site-specificity and incorporate viewers' embodied experiences as constituents of the work. With her labyrinthine video-walk through the Carnegie library, *In Real Time* (1999), Janet Cardiff succeeds in heightening the destabilisation and intensified body awareness already present in her audio-walks. It produces a further vulnerabilisation of the viewer who is now walking around a library, pointing a hand-held video camera—a highjacking of recording equipment, with its screen normally used to frame a live encounter, to playback edited footage. I find myself wanting, expecting to move the camera to see the "hors-champ," but disquietingly realize this isn't so. I am somewhere between recording and playback, caught between the narrator's story and my own desires and suddenly realize I am lost. Almost by magic, it brings us back to the departure point.

Suchan Kinoshita's piece, entitled *Who the Hell is Hannah?* (1999), consisted in 17 rough plywood "loggias" dotting the grand staircase and attached to walls, balustrade, and windows of the institution's back

An Inuit Perspective

*Baker Lake Sculpture, Itarnittakarvik
Inuit Heritage Centre, Baker Lake, Nunavut, July–November 2000*

Review by Sheila Butler

Differences between everyday life in the Arctic and southern Canada are vast — including the material conditions of artistic production. Here is an example that is emblematic of that disparity: artwork produced in Baker Lake, Nunavut, typically leaves the artists' hands almost immediately after it is finished—and it is generally never seen by the artist again.

The situation stands in stark contrast to the conditions for production and exhibition to which southern Canadian visual artists, including Aboriginal artists, are generally accustomed. Curator Marie Bouchard focused on this disjunctive aspect of the northern creative process in "An Inuit Perspective," a politically dynamic sculpture exhibition that recently opened in Baker Lake.

Bouchard, an art historian of Métis descent, spent ten years in the Arctic as an independent visual arts coordinator. For "An Inuit Perspective," she assembled slides of sculptures from Baker Lake that had been produced some thirty years ago, and were now in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario. She then took the slides to Baker Lake, where an assembly of local artists reviewed them with great intensity and enthusiasm, and selected the works that would comprise the show.

This is the first significant exhibition of visual art to be organized by Inuit and to open in a northern community. As Bouchard notes in her catalogue essay, the exhibition "grew out of a desire to create an alternative model for understanding contemporary Inuit art—The result is an exhibition that

presents 'art by Inuit' as a self-defined twentieth century hybrid art form, intensely poignant and rich in contrast to the more popular image of 'Inuit art' as primitive, exotic, ethnic production as defined by Western-trained curators and scholars."

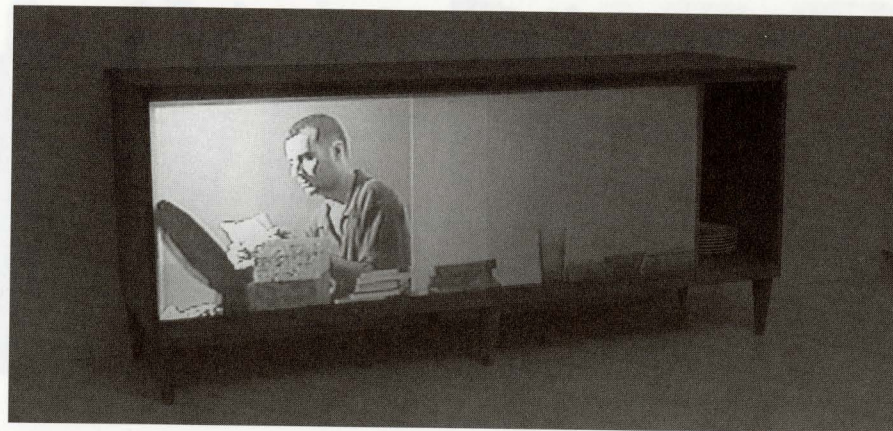
By all accounts, the selection process for "An Inuit Perspective" was highly emotional, an occasion for recounting memories and articulating rigorous standards for the artists' own quality judgments. They had specific aesthetic demands in mind and this process encouraged a public forum on the topic of aesthetic decision-making. According to artist Janet Nipi Ikuutaq, the results reflect the artists' dynamic acculturative milieu: "This is who we are, this is what we believe in."

Because there is no single word for "art" or "artist" in Inuktitut, Bouchard notes that the discursive process required incorporating the Inuit's own form of "art speak" (rather than "artist," the Inuit themselves prefer a designation better translated into English as "carver").

The selection process raised fundamental issues of the relationship of individual productions to social context, which was identified as paramount to the aesthetic of the Baker Lake carvers. Distinctions were made between carvers with a committed long-term practice and those who produced only intermittently, but respect for sincere effort was ranked on par with technical excellence. Bouchard notes this is rooted in



*A Drum Dance, Luke Iksiktaaryuk, 1975, antler, skin, wood, sinew, metal, 21 cm x 40.5 cm x 33.8 cm (assembled).
Photo: Carlo Catenazzi. Courtesy: Art Gallery of Ontario.*



El Ciebo (The sideboard), Jose Antonio Hernandez-Diez, 1998, wood, glass, six ceramic plates, video projection, 90.5 cm x 208.5 cm x 60.5 cm. Courtesy: Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

entrance. Inside, on and around these precarious enclosures are arrangements of second-hand furniture, vision devices, and sculptural assemblages. This work triggers an awareness of the porousness of boundaries, of the interconnectedness of apparently discrete components. The tenuous privacy of my loggia allows me to spy on others, to extend my presence through viewing devices to other loggias and areas as remote as the museum shop, and to see things made exclusively for viewing. But in doing so, I also put myself on display, activating a set designed by the artist.

Sarah Sze's *Seamless* evinces an awareness of the conditions framing the experience of works by using the gallery's structure as a component. Her piece not only monumentally exists in the institution but literally through it, as it nervously latches onto floors, walls and ceiling. *Seamless* was, however, less successful than Sze's concurrent project at the Fondation Cartier in Paris. Its relationship to the architecture bordered on the decorative, lacking the organicism, the breadth, the powerful fragility and the crazy hybridity of her best works, which tackle monumentality through an insistence on the domestic and the mundane.

The institution's collections as a series of knowledge and history construction sites was addressed by Mark Dion's *Alexander Wilson Studio* and *Ornithological Selections from the Collections of Carnegie Museum of Art* (1999). Kendell Geers' *Poetic Justice* (1999), a fantastic multi-channel, multi-monitor, aggressive and immersive sound

and video installation was located in an area endowed with murals of labour and industry (typical of the early part of the twentieth century). Kara Walker's *The Emancipation Approximation* (1999) was installed around the Hall of Sculpture Balcony and thus much less successful because of the unproductive and univocal predictability of placement. Working against the barely-clad yet utterly virginal white marble female nudes of the balcony, Walker's black cut-out silhouettes became an overstatement, a trick rather than a provocative proposal. While relying on her signature format, the two-screen video and sound environment, Shirin Neshat's *Soliloquy* (1999) manages to powerfully and precisely evoke being-in-between, complexifying notions of both home and exile.

Ernesto Neto's *Nude Plasmic* (1999) and Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Water)* (1995) are particularly successful in their ability to enlist simple and intense physical responses to trigger psychological and mental responses. Franz Ackerman's delightful mixed media works on paper and Bodys Isek Kingelez' *Ville Fantôme* (1996) demonstrate a productive understanding and translation of real, experienced space. Jose Antonio Hernandez-Diez's video-sculpture *El Ciebo* (1998) conveys a profound loss and resorts to the video loop with deftness and elegance. Roman Signer's quirky video works are sordidly presented. They offered a great (missed) opportunity to create powerful dialogue with, for example, the playfulness and intelligence of Gabriel Orozco's *Ping Pond Table* (1998), a work foregrounding a ruleless play to be invented

anew by visitors, and requiring the uneasy attendance of museum staff. Using different strands of mass culture and highly conscious of the productivity of space, Chris Ofili's and Laura Owens' paintings managed to exceed their iconicity. Thomas Demand's chromogenic prints show mass media images as constitutive of reality as they are launched into a lateral detour through an intricate process of maquette-making for photography, a material involvement with no other point than to return to the image.

A crucial aspect of the works remains unexplored: where the works critically exceed their curatorial frame. In many works, artists enlist phenomenological response and viewer's participation as constitutive of the works. While doing so, they manage to eschew and thus question notions of interactivity. This is critical in the era of information technology, with its emphasis on interactivity and simulation, an era of customizing for consumption. If, indeed, "it is in the collaboration with the spectator that (the works') deeper meaning—their ethical charge, even—is revealed," how is it possible, or even desirable, to skirt the very ethical dimension of that collaboration? How might it differ from the forced interactivity of everyday machines and the data tracing and digital profiling that they permit? When the most important resource, information, is acquired through various forms of interaction, why not stress the significance of "unproductive" labour, of free play, of pointless but intrusive surveillance. Didn't Kinoshita's work foreground surveillance? Didn't the experience of Janet Cardiff's piece begin with leaving in the safekeep of museum staff the quintessential mobility guarantor that is the credit card? "Don't leave home without it!" goes the saying. In all but border checks, it has replaced the passport... a more efficient way to track and trace people—mobile bodies, flowing capital. Now, that's real!

Sylvie Fortin is curator of contemporary art at the Ottawa Art Gallery (OAG), where she has organized numerous exhibitions since 1996. She is a member of the board of directors of Oboro Gallery (Montréal), and a member of the advisory board of the Arab Image Foundation (Beirut/New York).

"an enduring communal approach to decision-making," placing "emphasis on the group rather than individuality, yet providing space for individuality." In this context, overt privileging of individual excellence, viewed outside the context of the group, is seen as ethically questionable.

For many carvers, this exhibition embodied social continuity: a connection to the past and a concern for the welfare of generations to come. Josiah Nulialik states, "When I first started carving, I was told to make human figures or animals. I carve more complicated pieces than this today by remembering legends and stories that I have heard from my grandparents, who raised me, and by using my imagination. Through our sculptures, we pay tribute to our ancestors. They survived a difficult life for us. It is because of them that we are here today. Future generations will see and remember this exhibition and also learn from it."



Drum Dancer with Helping Spirits, George Tatanniq, 1973, green-grey stone darkened, antler, bone, 21.7 cm x 27.1 cm x 11.6 cm. Photo: Carlo Catenazzi. Courtesy: Art Gallery of Ontario.

Within mainstream contemporary art criticism, "the death of the author" — the notion that meaning in art is contingent upon the viewer's completion of the creative process — is a widely accepted concept. For Inuit sculptors, this theoretical position holds special ironies. To a great extent, viewers of this work exist as an audience that is largely unknown to the sculptors. Thus, external demand informs the standards of excellence brought to bear on the creative process.

In this way, the emphasis on construction of the self in terms of the gifted individual, so central to the European and North American philosophical heritage, has had an influence on Inuit traditional, communal decision-making. In Bouchard's words, "In response, originality, novelty, and a distinct personal style have evolved as important elements of the Inuit's visual production." By evidence of the artists' own statements, however, this takes second place to notions of group cohesion.

The mimetic powers of art are also accorded a prime place in discussions of aesthetic quality. Artworks are seen to embody the "real." In the words of Toona Iqulik, "I need to return to the land from time to time so that I can reacquaint myself with its shapes and

forms." The visual pleasures of beautifully worked surfaces are another important consideration. This is expressed in a collective comment attributed to the group, regarding a work by deceased sculptor George Tatanniq, "This robust figure of a drum dancer, aided by his bird helping spirits perched on each shoulder, is interesting for its subject matter as well as the sheer beauty of its form."

This exhibition places control over the analysis and presentation of Inuit art back in the hands of Inuit themselves. Many factors have inhibited this sort of self-determination in the past, especially when work was displayed in the south: immense geographical distances with no highways for thousands of kilometers, the extremely high cost of air travel and a strong language barrier. (English, when spoken, is a second language learned in adulthood; few southern Canadians speak Inuktitut, which is unrelated to European languages.) The vast distances between place of production and marketplace often contribute to situations where fair payment does not make its way back to the carvers themselves.

The processes of aesthetic analysis and self-definition reflected in "An Inuit Perspective" challenge the barriers that have discouraged innovative work among Inuit artists, and they reflect ongoing political developments in the North. As carver Nulialik states, "Today, Inuit have Nunavut—we have regained our homeland." Bouchard notes the impact of political self-determination upon Inuit cultural production: "Inuit are no longer relegated to a neocolonial status of exotic 'other' in this country." As a part of this process, "An Inuit Perspective" both reflects the current political context, and engages art-making and viewing as an effective force to propel social change.

Sheila Butler is a practicing visual artist and teacher. She has exhibited in both solo and group exhibitions in Canada and abroad. Her work is included in many Canadian collections, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, the University of Toronto and the Winnipeg Art Gallery, among others.

Sheila holds a BFA from Carnegie-Mellon University and an MA in theory and criticism from the University of Western Ontario.

"Private Thoughts / Public Moments"

NEENA ARORA, ASMA ARSHAD MAHMOOD, RACHEL KALPANA JAMES, MEERA SETHI, GUEST-CURATED BY SUTAPA BISWAS

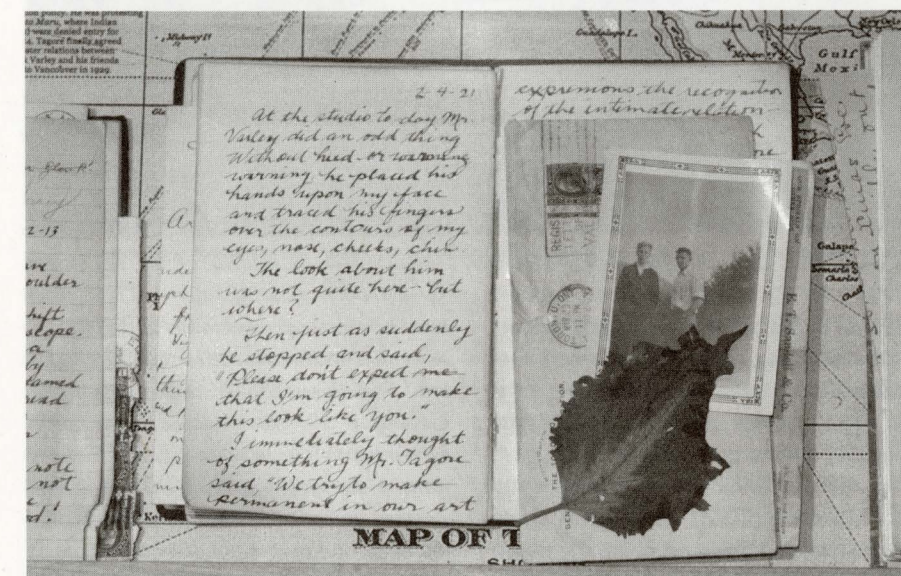
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 13 September–10 December 2000

Review by Germaine Koh

There is by now a well-established category of museum exhibitions premised on inviting living artists to intervene in permanent collections galleries or the collections themselves. We know we are to understand such exhibitions as signals from these institutions that they have opened themselves to alternative histories and underrepresented communities, and such exhibitions almost always feature artists who are members of such groups. The Art Gallery of Ontario's group exhibition "Private Thoughts / Public Moments" conforms to this model, featuring interventions into the historical galleries by four emerging artists of South Asian heritage. Developed from workshops led at the museum by London-based artist/curator Sutapa Biswas, the exhibition avoided being overtly polemical while issuing from a culturally specific mentoring process.

The works in the exhibition sought to locate personal identity within established public narratives. Invited to respond to any of the museum's collections, all the artists chose to work in relation to the *Group of Seven*—dominated Canadian historical galleries. Significantly, each piece also incorporated elements of the museum's highly visible educational material, acknowledging the influence this has on perceptions of the artworks in the galleries.

Meera Sethi intervened upon the albums of didactic material housed in prominent kiosks throughout the Canadian galleries. The existing laminated pages present photographs and documents not only of traditional historiographical subjects such as leaders, decisive battles, political events and narratives of development and techno-



Detail of *Crossing Histories*, Meera Sethi, 2000, laminated pages in existing albums. Courtesy: Art Gallery of Ontario.

logical advancement, but also of tendencies in popular culture, everyday life and entertainment. Inserted amongst these, Sethi's pages for *Crossing Histories* (2000) bore quotations from Canadian statutes, which marked policy changes in the treatment of marginalized peoples, such as the Chinese exclusion act of 1927, revisions to the Indian Act, and a 1793 Upper Canada statute limiting slavery. Presented as long tracts of text drawn from legal statutes, the dryness of Sethi's insertions signaled a certain historical seriousness distinct from the lightness of the existing image-based pages, and had the effect of complicating them. It was appropriately ironic that she borrowed certain trappings of academic historiography (unembellished primary texts) to recall the non-dominant narratives often excluded from established histories. However, this gesture of remembrance

might have had even more impact did the albums not already tacitly acknowledge the contentiousness of presenting a uniformly heroic historical account, including as they do some documentation of more infamous moments, such as the operations of slavery and the existence of the Ku Klux Klan in Canada.

In her video installation *Space-Shifter* (2000), Neena Arora adapted an audio track from another didactic station — a conspicuous, chapel-like structure housing headphones and seats for viewing J.E.H. MacDonald's painting *The Beaver Dam*. The original 12-minute educational soundtrack (curiously available in both male and female voices, providing different flavours of expertise?) leads the museum visitor through a series of relaxation and viewing exercises, emphasizing awareness of one's

The Shit I Ain't Got

Hip Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes and Rage, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York, 22 September–31 December, 2000

Street Market, Deitch Projects, New York City, 5 October–2 December, 2000

Review by Peter Hudson

Among the sweaty curios on display in the Brooklyn Museum's "Hip Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes and Rage" is a snapshot of a grinning Ronald Reagan surrounded by a group of Black and Latino teenagers. Next to it is a copy of the program for the Fiftieth Presidential Inaugural Ball. A caption accompanying the two artifacts tells us that the New York City Breakers, the youth in the photo, performed at Reagan's 1985 inauguration. For his part, Reagan probably doesn't remember the inauguration let alone the New York City Breakers. In a suitably karmic twist of history, the mnemonic strategies of the Iran-Contra hearings have caught up with him. His memory wasted by Alzheimer's, Reagan, pleasant and bemused, now spends most of his days on a park bench somewhere in California unable to recall his glory days in Washington.

Understandably, for hip hop, Reagan is hard to forget. He presided over the decade that produced, through the caustic deployment of neo-liberal economic and social policy, the landscape of scarcity in which inner-city kids managed to forge what is arguably the most important artistic and musical innovation of the last quarter century. In turn, the eighties are also seen as hip hop's supposedly golden era — which is possibly why Reagan's invocation in "Hip Hop Nation" is closer to a bizarre and unironic claim to b-boy legitimacy than anything even remotely resembling critique, or even historicization. One would think that the hip hop nation had wished it were so lucky.

Unfortunately, this absence of critical discourse applies to the rest of the exhibition as well. "Hip Hop Nation" draws on

memory and history in uncertain terms. While its curators, Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum and Vibe magazine's Kevin Powell, have culled a quantitatively impressive number of objects from hip hop's archive, it is assembled without any governing meta-narrative. Instead, it bears the same arbitrary presentation found in the ethnographic displays of early-twentieth century North American ethnologists and collectors determined to acquire the artifacts of the "dying" and "disappearing" indigenous cultures of Africa and the Americas. In this instance, meaning emerges through primitive aura and fetishistic authenticity.

There are some interesting objects — the agitprop flyers promoting Bronx street

parties and the mock-ups of pre-zine revolution graffiti mags, for instance — and on the level of sheer populism, the show is successful. It brings in busloads of "not traditional" museum-goers who seem to enjoy it precisely through their identification with the aura of the object. Judging by the reactions elicited from the tittering teenage girls running through the exhibit, Jay-Z's Nikes seemed to be something of a fan favourite ("Man, he got some big feet!"). One would think that any show that could draw this many people would be more concerned with its pedagogical implications and potential, but "Hip Hop Nation" never moves beyond the surface of its objects. Thus *41 Shots*, a multimedia presentation about police brutality, was left out. By way of explanation of this exclu-



Run DMC, detail from installation of Hip Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes and Rage. Photo: Andrew Morton. Courtesy: Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, Cleveland, Ohio.



Still from Space-Shifter, Neena Arora, 2000, video installation with accompanying soundtrack. Courtesy: Art Gallery of Ontario.

physical and emotional responses in face of the painting. Arora re-recorded the dialogue in her own voice, changing only the object of the discussion from "the painting" to "the person in front of you." This played in another cozy seating nook in an adjoining gallery, as the soundtrack to a small-screen video showing the bare-foot artist, dressed in gown and robe, gliding through the deserted galleries and moving her body in response to the architecture and paintings. To hear the same words used as instructions for viewing both a painting and a person was unsettling, adding a touch of vulnerability to the video-figure's movements, despite — or perhaps because of — the fact that the shared dialogue was worded to encourage the viewer's self-scrutiny as much as understanding of the external object. As with the albums used by Sethi, the original educational soundtrack has moved beyond a strictly authoritarian methodology in that it does acknowledge the importance of subjectivity in viewing — yet it nevertheless produced a discomfort when Arora shifted this painstaking language to the examination of a person and, by extension, to the structures of interpersonal relations. It was through this unease that Arora effectively evoked the complexities of negotiating personal identity.

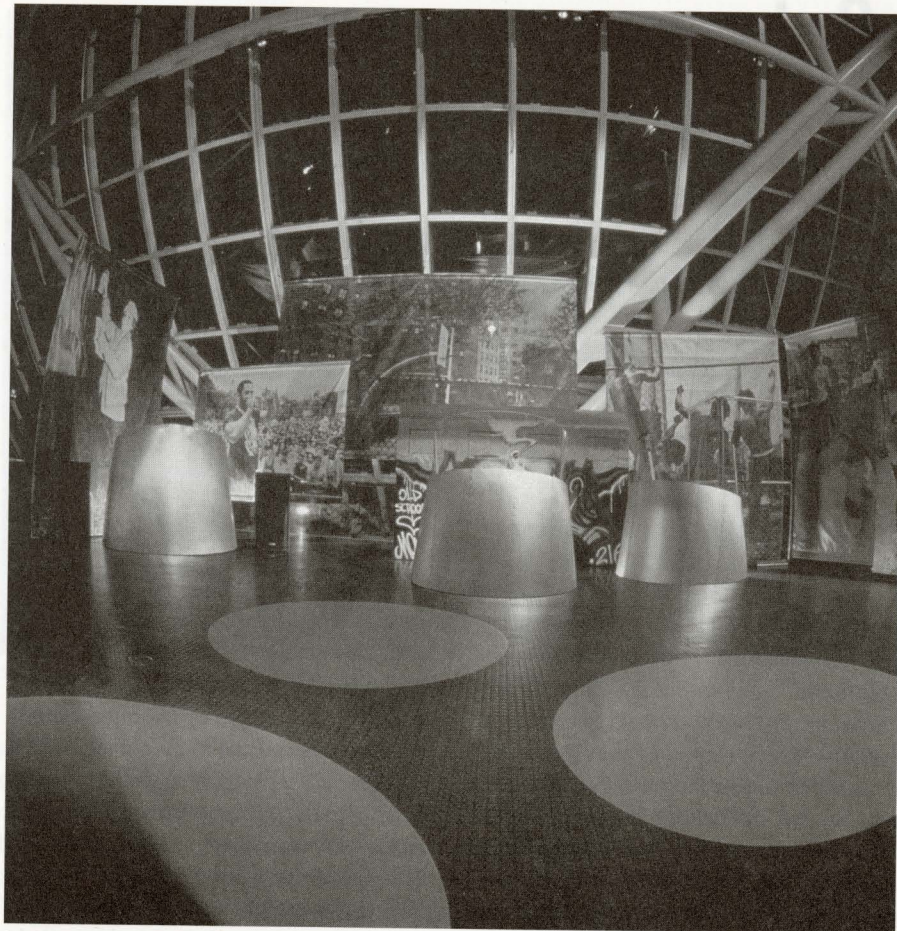
Also addressing ownership of the gaze, Asma Arshad Mahmood's sound installation *The Peep* (2000) made use of an existing fabric blind protecting a chalk drawing of a female nude by J.W.L. Forster from prolonged exposure to light. The viewer's action of pulling a cord to raise the blind and reveal the drawing triggered the sound, issuing from over one's shoulder, of a man clearing his throat. Somewhere between reprimand and nervous interjection, the cough injected into the viewing situation the conflicting emotions of shame, complicity and humour. Perhaps depending on the identity of the viewer, it functioned to reiterate established viewing conventions (male gaze regarding female object), but at the same time to destabilize these with a sense of embarrassment about what began to appear as pathetically elaborate precautions (the curtain) to preserve this authority. With playful charm this simple intervention exposed and disrupted these unspoken expectations.

For *Tagore and Mrs. E* (2000), Rachel Kalpana James departed from a 1921 portrait by F.H. Varley of one Minnie Ethel Ely. Hung amongst upright society portraits of the early twentieth century, the painting is conspicuous for the informal, bohemian

character of its sitter. The relaxed yoga pose and loose, colourful clothing of the figure of "Mrs. E" hints at stories unacknowledged in adjacent paintings, namely the influence of theosophy and Eastern thought on Varley and others of his circle. Nearby, James filled one of the flat drawers usually used to present *Group of Seven* sketches with simulated memorabilia and fictionalized diaries "written" by Mrs. Ely at the time of the real visit of the Indian mystic poet and Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore to British Columbia in 1929. Describing a spiritual excitation related to Tagore's writing, the strikingly-authentic-looking diaries become a second, imagined, portrait of a person finding personal identity through the guidance of another. The work also subtly recalls histories of exclusion: the drawer is lined with a world map tracing the trans-Atlantic routes that both Varley and Mrs. Ely would have followed when immigrating from Britain, and those taken by Tagore in 1916 — when he was denied entry into Canada — and in 1929.

The Art Gallery of Ontario has made an admirable effort in recent years to open its doors to emerging artists, through its contemporary project room and now in this exhibition. We can hope that the subtlety of the works developed for this exhibition will set a precedent for future propositions of this nature. The fact that the permanent-collection intervention is now an almost-hackneyed museological trope does not necessarily dilute the effect of such exhibitions, but only means that they need to be viewed not primarily for the fact of their occurring, but as any other show for their content, and in these terms "Private Thoughts/Public Moments" did judiciously present provocative works under a cohesive theme. Still, without pre-determining the shape of future interventions, it does seem that — given that the AGO has, like museums everywhere, developed an overriding preoccupation with its educational mandate — there is a whole new generation of "user-friendly" interpretive materials proliferating in its exhibition halls, awaiting the critical response of artists.

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Installation view of *Hip Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes and Rage*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York, 2000. Courtesy: Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, Cleveland, Ohio.

sion, Brooklyn Museum resident curator Kevin Stayton told the *Village Voice* that he "could hear people coming through, saying 'What's hip-hop about — this?'" Of course, one could ask the same thing about Kool Herc's track suit, Biggie's gold chains, Jay-Z's Nikes, or a photo of Ronald Reagan and the New York City Breakers.

A culture as rich and complex as hip hop deserves better than this. Hip hop's aural archive could have been better represented; the evolution of hip hop's linguistic form or of break-dancing's kinetic innovation could have been discussed. Instead, "Hip Hop Nation" is a warehouse of gaudy objects that brings to mind Marx's quip that "the wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an 'immense collection of commodities.'" "Hip Hop Nation" is the literal enactment of such an appearance, in every instance suggesting that it was never about anything but the money. "Street Market," on the other hand,

recently on display at Deitch Project's Wooster Street gallery, while not "subverting" or "resisting" capitalism and commodity culture in any assumed way (such as the ridiculously smug "culture jamming" of *Adbusters*) offers a critical take on its cultural, ideological and spatial formations. The collective project of Barry McGee, Todd James and Stephen Powers, gallery artists who all lead parallel lives as graffiti artists going under the respective names of Twist, Reas and Espo, "Street Market" is a recreation of an urban streetscape made out of found objects and their graffiti tags. There is a liquor store with pock-marked bulletproof Plexiglas, a bodega stuffed with foodstuffs and household items, a tiny vendor's stall selling bootleg CDs and fake watches, and a small arcade. Two trucks lie on their sides, turned into temporary shelters. One contains a carseat and a shopping cart, the other a dirty mattress and a dozen porn mags. A trailer stands between the

trucks, the office of "Robbie Pimple Bail Bonds." In the gallery's small mezzanine, appearing like a kind of afterthought with no organic relationship to the rest of the show, there is a cluster of McGee's framed signature illustrations — Dr. Seuss-like derelicts and sad-sacks, the detritus of the urban postmodern. On the north wall of the gallery presiding over the entire affair is a massive illustration of one of these figures, along with the gigantic tag of ESPO-REAS.

"Street Market" suggests a relationship between graffiti tags and advertising logos, their public contest and their reciprocal borrowing and, more generally, the lack of distinction between art and commerce. Of course, this last part in and of itself isn't terribly new. If that were all there was to it, the show would be reduced to a series of visual and textual one-liners. Granted, there are plenty of those throughout the show—used to tremendous effect. Their bodega contains bottles of bleach labeled "Extra-Abuse All Purpose Punishment," detergent labeled "Belief: Guaranteed the Only One You Need," two-litre bottles of orange soda labeled "Mama Size Drama," as well as Cans of "Delusion (Down Your Trouble)," "Sarcasm (Subtle Yet Bitter)," and "Dignity (A Wallow in Every Swallow)." The liquor store sells bottles of "Loathe" whiskey, its logo a broken mirror with the slogan "Lucky to be You," and lottery tickets called "Fuck Your Boss."

Product labels merge with store signage, billboards and outdoor product displays bearing the bastardized iterations of the Espo-Reas tag. The tag itself is remade as a trademark (or is it the opposite)? In the process, it creates a streetwise language poetry or an extended scat in capitalist broken English derived from the seamless conjunction of a series of non-sequiturs that, on one hand, begins to make sense, and on the other, exposes such a parsed narrative for the meaningless, Tourette's-like drivel that it actually is:

Espo-Reas / handmade myth / Espo-Reas / autothug / Espo-Reas/quick fast action / Espo-Reas / supreme quality / Espo-Reas / Surface and symbol / All sizes and styles in

stock / Espo-Reas / Doing more for art and fashion since 1985 / esporama / sensibly Slum / Espo-reas: just ice.

If this is the language of commodity fetishism, it also has a specifically racial inflection. After all, it gains value and street aura of contemporary urban culture through the appropriation of the language, style and music of working-class Blacks and Latinos. Of course, they are the ones who derive the least benefit from this process. This fact is the unacknowledged subtext of "Hip Hop Nation." But while in "Hip Hop Nation" commodity fetishism is seen as an end to itself, "Street Market" questions patterns of consumption and the banality of reification. The label whoring that is present within so much of hip hop (the ghetto opulence of Jay-Z's "Big Pimpin" video or Ghostface Killah's "Cherchez La Ghost," directed by Toronto's Little X, are my faves) is replaced by the collapsing vernacular architecture of *el barrio*. Nike kicks, Prada bags, and Gucci jackets are replaced by ironically labelled "Street Market" household items. The dreams of wealth of Master P and the Dirty South are rearticulated on the cover of a bootlegged compilation CD entitled "The Shit I Ain't Got Volume 6," replete with No Limit-derived graphics of diamonds, platinum fronts and crisp thousand dollar bills. "Street Market" offers a bitter commentary on a culture where malt liquor is cheaper and more readily available than fresh fruit, though on BET, everyone is drinking Cristal.

"Geography can be manipulated, invented, and characterized quite apart from a site's merely physical reality," wrote critic Edward Said, summarizing the dynamic relationship between material and metaphorical space. Of course, in industrialized countries, the production of space occurs through the modalities of capitalism and its generation of signs and symbols, trademarks and brands. Public space is increasingly taken over by corporate, that is, private, signs. No wonder graffiti, as a predatory incursion into capitalism's state-sponsored claims for public space, is illegal. (And in a curious moment of life imitating art, one of the artists was arrested for vandalism during the hanging of

the show.) In "Street Market," graffiti covers practically every inch of the gallery space. The sheer ubiquity of tags and signage is overwhelming, making the idea of "bombing" incredibly apt here. "Street Market" can be seen not only as a re-articulation of the spatial hegemony of capitalism, but as a suggestive interpretation of a morbid coincidence of Giuliani's New York: the fact that the gentrification and Disney-fication of the city has occurred alongside an increasingly violent repression of Black people; that "quality of life" has meant the incursion of capitalism at the expense of Black bodies.

Peter Hudson is a doctoral candidate in American Studies at New York University. He is the editor of "North: New African Canadian Writing" (West Coast Line, 1996) and a former editor of "diaspora" and "Mix: Independent Art and Culture."

Notes

Lee, Chisun. "Roots, Rhymes, and What?: Critics Say Brooklyn Museum is Soft on Hip-Hop Politics." *The Village Voice*, Oct 4-10, 2000 (available at www.villagevoice.com).

Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings*. Lawrence H. Simon, ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1994.

Said, Edward W. "Invention, Memory, and Place." *Critical Inquiry* 26.2 (Winter 2000): 175-181.



Street Market, Barry McGee, 2000, detail from installation at Deitch Projects, New York City. Courtesy: Deitch Projects.

Richard Fung's Sea in the Blood: Visualizing Memory, Complicity and Love

Sea in the Blood
Directed by Richard Fung
Videotape, 26 minutes

Review by Margo Francis

Richard Fung's new videotape, *Sea in the Blood*, narrates an intensely personal history—so personal, in fact, that the director didn't initially think of the work in political terms. It's not uncommon to separate the painful detritus of our pasts from the public business of politics, but this accomplished and evocative new tape reminds us that our most personal histories may also contain the most volatile political content of our lives. *Sea in the Blood* provides a powerful meditation on questions of complicity—not in relation to trauma in a place far away, but like much of Fung's most widely recognized work, within the bonds that are closest to home.

Sea in the Blood chronicles two of Fung's most intimate relationships—with his sister Nan, who suffered from a rare blood disease called thalassemia, and with his partner Tim McCaskell, who is living with HIV. The tape juxtaposes home-movie footage from Trinidad and England with photographs, e-mail text and interviews, to construct a visual history of the videomaker's relationships with the sister who "shared all his childhood adventures" with and his lover of twenty-four years.

Early in the tape, Fung inserts material appropriated from a Michener Institute slideshow to illustrate medical opinions of thalassemia that were current at the time of his sister's illness. The archetypal "voice of the male medical expert" informs us that the Greek word thalassemia is literally translated as "sea in the blood."

Thalassemia was originally associated with people from the Mediterranean, so



Video still from *Sea in the Blood*, Richard Fung, 2000, 26 min. Courtesy: V Tape, Toronto.

the "sea" refers to the Mediterranean. This led to Fung's choice of title for the video, and to his decision to explore the marine metaphor by filming a series of underwater shots for the movie. A "fortuitous technical mistake" produced a rust-coloured tint in these pictures. The

images, combined with early home-movie footage of the Fung siblings at the beach in Trinidad, provide the visual anchor for the video, evoking an eerie commingling of water and blood as both a medium for (sexual) play and the route of transmission for life-threatening disease. While the

haunting nature of the archival images prompts the viewer to consider the role of the visual in mediating family history, Fung's comments about "fortuitous" technology provoke us to notice how seemingly random visual "mistakes" can act as points of condensation for personal and political consciousness.

In a recent interview, Fung noted that AIDS cultural politics have provided the intellectual context for re-examining the discursive aspects of thalassemia, which is also

"I grew up with death in the house. The funerals were always happening in those days. I knew each step of the whole ritual by heart as a child. The smell of all those fresh flowers."

transmitted through blood. Specifically, Douglas Crimp's observations in the essay "Mourning and Militancy," a reflection on the importance of considering both the emotional and political tolls associated with AIDS, provided the conditions for deciding to make such a personal inter-

vention. This history, along with the eugenic tone of the Michener slideshow, reminds us how racialized and sexualized populations continue to be ordered in the social imaginary through discourses of hygiene located in the blood.

Reactions of the medical establishment to the emergence of thalassemia differed sharply from its response to AIDS and HIV. British researchers were eager to treat unusual new cases of thalassemia, so Fung's sister Nan was referred to England to be treated by noted hematologist Sir Ronald Bodley Scott during 1963–64. Nan's treatment resulted in a dramatic improvement in her prognosis, but her examination by doctors at a teaching hospital can be juxtaposed with the racialized perspectives that shape medical knowledge.

The video explores the objectifying lens of medical instruction, including the classification of those affected by thalassemia as having "mongoloid" features—a racist term which associated "mongrel" Asian facial characteristics with the features of Down Syndrome. But Fung's treatment of this objectification is sensitive and complex; he shows how his sister's few opportunities for public recognition were structured through the medical gaze. As Nan's mother Rita Fung comments, when Nan was presented to medical students, she "liked all these things, you know, (she) liked to show off!"

In *Sea in the Blood*, Fung brilliantly fashions an evocative narrative, inviting viewers to re-examine the frames of certitude that ground our understanding of our selves and our relations to those we love. Central to the work is Fung's narration of a sequence of events that brought his relationships with both Nan and Tim into fleeting contact. In this moment, the joint themes of intimacy and complicity are most fully articulated. Here the experience of a youthful and fully relished queer independence collides with death and betrayal.

In an e-mail text, Fung's surviving sister Arlene comments, "I grew up with death in the house. The funerals were always happening in those days. I knew each step of the whole ritual by heart as a child. The

smell of all those fresh flowers." An uncannily sunny image of her mother's garden floats in the background, behind the text. Despite the painful nature of these reflections, Fung's restrained emotional narrative never veers into easy sentiment. Instead, both the visual and auditory accounts eschew the literal—inviting the viewer into a form of witness that goes well beyond simply hearing a story previously unknown. Instead, this tape asks us to consider how we fashion the "truths" of familial memory from deeply discrepant worlds.

One of the root words for "complicity" is complex, and part of the etymology of complex is compass. *Sea in the Blood* presents a form of autobiographical video-making where the compass of memory acknowledges irreconcilably different stories—while at the same time allowing the emotional resonance of those dissonant narratives to strike a bearing. If autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where a videomaker understands the personal journey to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes, then it is the compass of our bodies, and the bodies of those we love, that pay the price of these crossings.

Sea in the Blood leaves one asking what it might mean to take in this narrative, not as part of the endless flow of stories and images found in the multitude of Toronto film and video festivals—but as what Walter Benjamin (in his Storyteller essay) called a form of "counsel." If most family histories cannot bear to admit disparate stories, we are fortunate to have artists such as Fung who insist that we do. *Sea in the Blood* suggests that it is only through acknowledging our complicity within these differential narratives that we can engage the contradictions of both memory and love.

The author wishes to acknowledge Joe Hermer for his intellectual companionship and assistance in writing this review.

Margot Francis is a doctoral candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and writes about sexuality, race and the nation in the work of Canadian visual artists.

Glitter Stucco & Dumpster Diving: Reflections on Building Production in the Vernacular City

by John Chase, Verso, New York, 2000

Review by John McCullough

In the 1980s, commentary and theory about contemporary architecture initiated a testy debate about the existence and nature of postmodernism. The work of Charles Jencks and Robert Venturi, for instance, argued that popular vernacular, not aesthetic modernism, was comprehensively changing and defining the rules of architecture. In some cases, this was connected to political economy and the emergence of what Ernest Mandel called late capitalism. But these aesthetic arguments sometimes avoided discussion of capital entirely and connected the changes in architecture and design to more abstract conceptions of a changing zeitgeist or social imaginary. In either case, the point was made that a decisive break with modernism had occurred.

This challenge engendered a series of counter-attacks, alternative theories, conferences and publications. Soon

enough, cultural theorists of all stripes had entered the fray and some of this battle is glimpsed in Hal Foster's *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), a classic of the period. In retrospect, it is difficult to understand what all the panic was about. Certainly, one could see that some of the frenzy was connected to career-building and self-promotion. But that didn't explain, for instance, the Marxist literary critic Frederic Jameson's fetishization of the Bonaventure Hotel. His attention to the elaborate sign systems of the architecture were perceptive, as aesthetic analysis goes, but these ruminations appeared to be fatal distractions to relevant critical theory. It is no wonder that Baudrillard's unremitting nihilism seemed so exciting.

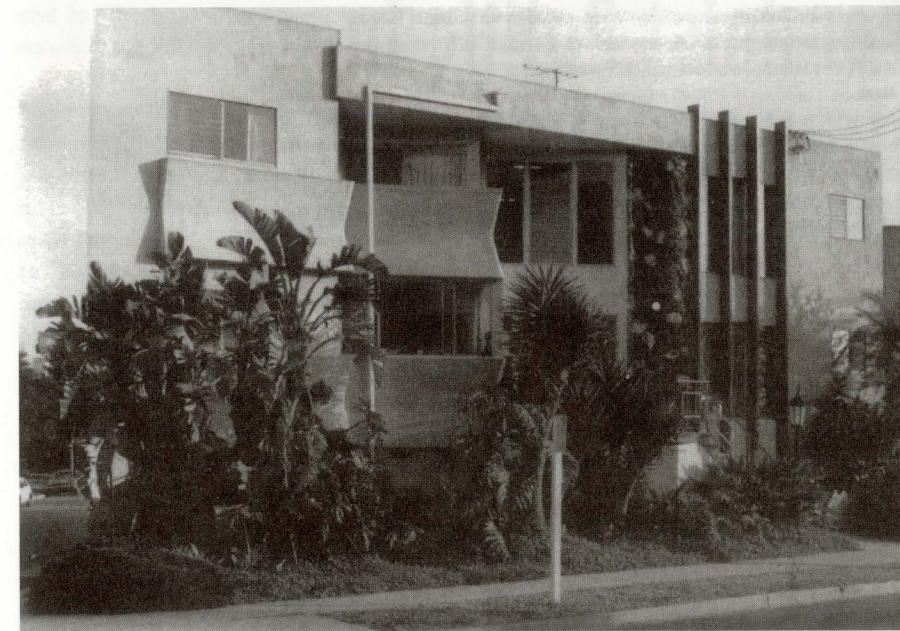
By the end of the 1980s, architecture theory was usefully reoriented by theories of urban space and the city. If Marxism seemed to falter in Jameson's hotel room then its

revived pertinence has to be seen as a result of the work of, among others, David Harvey, Doreen Massey and Mike Davis. It was Davis' *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage, 1992) that made the necessary connections between new urban space and contemporary social life. He showed how architecture, city planning maps, demographics and the movies (and a whole lot more) could provide a politicized snapshot of L.A..

Over the years, Davis has achieved a degree of autonomy and power in the publishing industry and has developed a series of projects which supplement and augment his initial research and interests. John Chase's *Glitter Stucco and Dumpster Diving* is part of this larger project. The fundamental approach the book takes is to judge "architecture as an applied art" and to understand "architecture as a form of social and economic exchange." Moreover, the book



From wilderness to trash dump to subdivision, Mountaingate in 1978. Photo: John Chase.



8600 W. Rugby Drive, West Hollywood, Herman Fidler (architect), 1957, built by the Monica Estates Corp. Photo: John Chase.

"focuses on building types that often remain outside architectural culture because of cultural viewpoint and/or financial limitations." The assertion that there could be a materialist theory of architecture is exciting and it is particularly provocative that this work is authored, not by an academic Marxist, but by a West Hollywood city planner and former Disney Imagineer.

The book opens with a discussion of a building type which is a popular and somewhat definitive Southern California architectural form: the stucco box. More precisely, this is a form of speculative apartment house which, in the 1950s, "reflected at once the pragmatic and hedonistic character of Southern California." They were "made out of the cheapest materials, by the simplest construction methods, allowing a maximum number of units to be shoe-horned onto a single lot." But, also, "these buildings were glamorously packaged consumer objects." The breadth of the analysis which is suggested in these excerpts is indicative of the scope to which Chase aspires throughout the book. For example, in his analysis of the upper-middle-class suburb of MountainGate, the alleyways of Venice, the urban spaces of Las Vegas and the interplay between fictional and real space in the shadow of

continue to have value as determinants of behaviour and symbols of territorial occupation.

Chase's arguments are refreshing and challenging (particularly for a bureaucrat). They have the advantage of understanding contemporary architecture without the pitched crisis and naive celebration which postmodern theorizing tends to evoke. In fact, Chase is adamantly opposed to post-modern architecture and design, which flip-pantly derides vernacular building production. He argues that "this kind of abstraction may be an aesthetic accomplishment, but it contradicts the nature of architecture as a socially based, applied art form." By contrast, his materialist approach is meant to provide the possibility of understanding urban space and buildings as redemptive experiences of the everyday.

Hollywood, there is an overwhelming sense that Chase wants to account for all that architecture touches.

The success of this approach is evident in the chapters which include substantial historical research (e.g. Vegas sign producers, Hollywood design of the 1930s, suburban planning of the 1960s and 1970s). Additionally, those instances in which Chase inflects architectural and spatial theory with autobiography can prove to be poignant and significant moments of shared identification. For instance, his account of the "Great Sapote War," during his tenure on Ethylene Avenue in Silverlake, and the materialist history of trash collection and maintenance in his neighbourhood near Venice Beach (where trash exchange becomes a form of "privatized welfare") are breezy but profound articulations of the everyday politics of urban living. As he thinks about trash, for example, he helps us realize that:

In that liquid rhythm of the alley as shifting private/public space, trash is one of the elements that mark the narrative history and uses of the space. In that sense trash isn't really "thrown away" so much as transformed in its role. Like it or not, the discards

The book is not without faults. Chase should be admonished for his landlord and car-owner biases and there is a curious sense of First World privilege that emerges in some of the jokes and references (e.g., the joke that positions Imelda Marcos as the epitome of crass consumerism). Furthermore, his inability to draw relevant connections between trash in the alley, suburban landfill developments like MountainGate and consumerism suggest significant blindspots in his own critical analysis. This may be due, in part, to the fact that the book is a collection of essays drawn from twenty years of writing on the subject. Finally, the writing, editing and copy-editing are of low quality at times, but the photographs which accompany the text are cleanly printed and fascinating evocations of the built environment.

John McCullough is a graduate student in social and political thought, York University. He teaches in the department of film and video, York University and the new media programme, continuing education at Ryerson Polytechnic University. He is the co-editor of the "John Porter Film Activity Book" and his writing has been published in "Lux: A Decade of Artists' Film and Video," Cineaction, FUSE, the Independent Eye, Canadian Journal of Film Studies and Canadian Review of Books.

Toward a New Feminist Politic in the Age of the Transnational

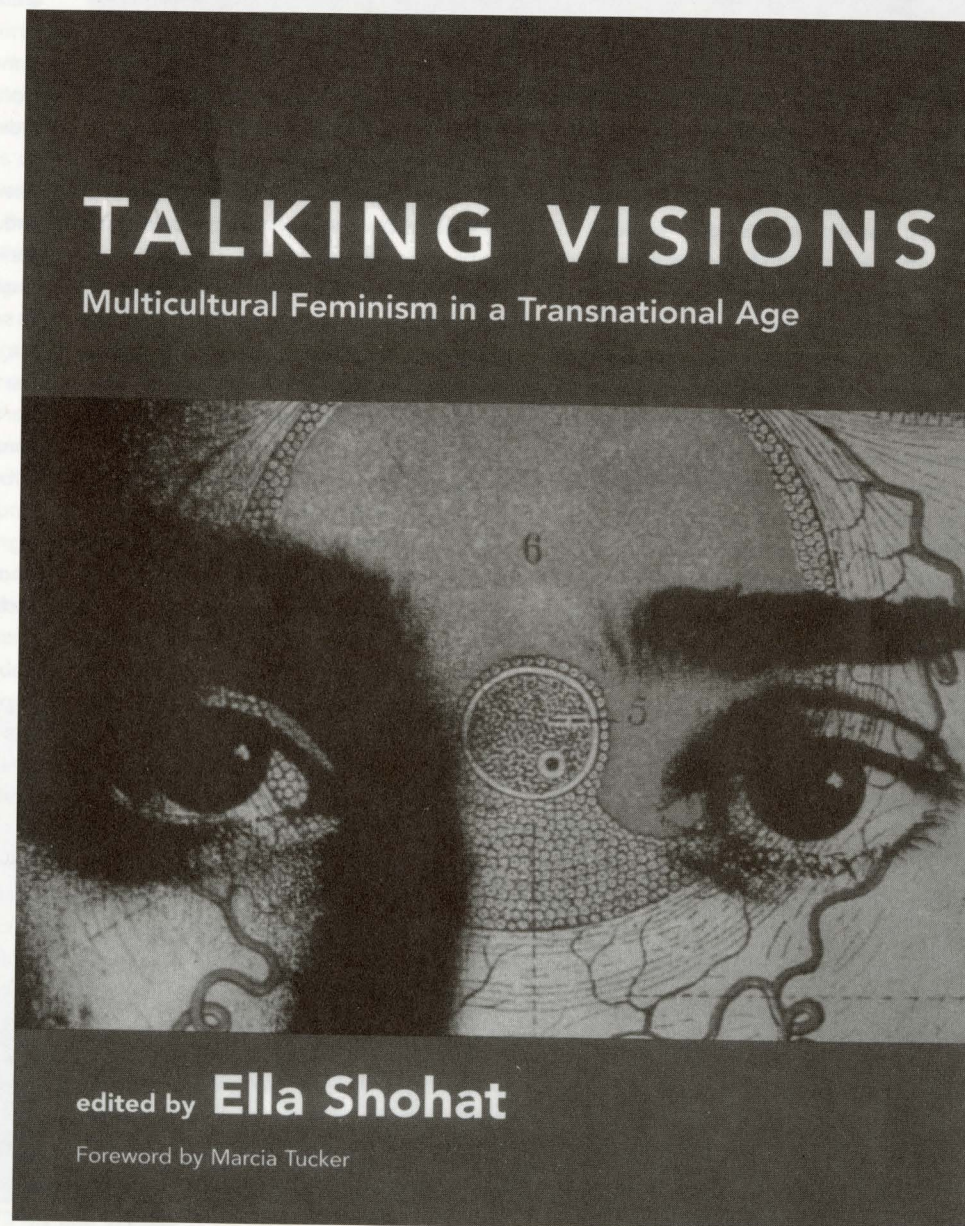
Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age

Edited by Ella Shohat
New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 574 pages

Review by Rinaldo Walcott

Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age is a big book. It is a book big on ideas about feminism, multiculturalism and the transnational. The book has its origins in a 1993 conference, "CrossTalk: A Multicultural Feminist Symposium." More recent contributions round out the discussion of possibilities of multicultural feminism — of what its politics and visions of community might be.

The contributors represent a cross-section of artists, academics, activists and curators engaged in a conversation on feminism in the age of transnationalism. Each essay is illustrated, in conversation or sometimes counterpoint with a visual representation. The visual representations are diverse: advertisements, stills from installations, film stills, photography, paintings, mixed media. The essays take up a wide range of positions on the relationship between multicultural feminism



and its other — what we might take as a non-multicultural feminism.

The book strives to delineate the terms and conditions that constitute a multicultural feminism. Editor Ella Shohat tells us that multicultural feminism is about relationality: the ways in which complex political relations are made and points of political identification arrived at. This perspective allows for a politic that does more than merely mark difference and index it as a moment to be reckoned with. Instead it takes difference as central and operates on the terms that the meaningful aspects of difference are always felt and play a crucial role in the political identifications we make and what we think makes a useful political project at any given moment. Therefore multicultural feminism is about the politics of community and how to make it work.

The politics or projects that fit within the aegis of multicultural feminism are only limited by the imagination of multicultural feminists themselves. Multicultural feminism, as a term, is an attempt to unhinge feminist politics from biology. Shohat acknowledges that most multicultural feminists tends to be women of colour. But importantly its relation to postmodernism, postcolonialism and post-national narratives also complicates the term.

Multicultural feminism is not concerned with pinning down origins, nor is it invested in merely asserting cultural relativist positions as the beginning and end of any conversation or dialogue. Instead it signals something more — something that might be characterized as the "ethico-political." Multicultural feminism acts as a challenge to its opposite; to not assume what a woman is, what she wants and how to get it, without at first engaging that woman in conversation and dialogue so that common political desires might be articulated, debated, assessed, arrived at and worked for.

Thus multicultural feminism brings with it a broad philosophical base about what makes difference, community and nation operative as sites of marginalization for women. In this way, multicultural feminism

is neither rhapsodic nor sentimental about women as an assumed category. Instead, it continually probes the questions of what is being done so that women might live better lives. But this does not represent a return to liberal humanism; it is far more complex. The complexity lies in the nature of the political priorities of multicultural feminists — the projects and issues they deem crucial to the self-determination of their communities.

The visual art in the book aptly conveys these complexities. The artists engage the complexities of bridging numerous cultural spaces between ethnicities, genders, sexualities, politics, communities and nations. The importance of both the art and the essays is that because each work emphasizes the doing of politics, questions of fragmentation and materiality of multicultural feminism. This in and of itself is one of the important distinguishing aspects of multicultural feminism from some aspects of the postmodern.

Yet multicultural feminism does not assume a central core to what is a woman or community, for instance. The art in this book demonstrates that and supports that claim that in the last fifteen years of the multicultural wars artists from subaltern communities have produced some of the most engaging and complex images of our common conditions.

One of the ironies for me is the ways in which the shifting fluidities of this art in many cases best represents the shifting ground and terms of the postmodern and the postcolonial, while still articulating a very concise and precise project concerning the unfinished terrain of the materiality of liberation. The images in the book often remind us of and cajole us into confronting the ways in which the discourse of political mobilization, transformation and liberation still retains an urgency for many of us.

The essays are in many cases a continued provocation in concert with the art in the book. While it is impossible to discuss each essay in this short review, some general remarks can serve as an introduction to the

ideas presented. The essays challenge what with dissatisfaction I will call a dominant feminist narrative and politics. But they also negotiate the complex terrain of how multicultural feminists practice a complex politics both within communities it is assumed they belong to along the lines of culture, ethnicity and sexuality as well as in relation to a more generalized women's community. The authors require that readers engage the limits of how we sometimes think of our possible affiliations and disaffiliations in relationship to what kinds of politics we think is imaginable and possible.

These writings represent the fruition of the last twenty or so years of feminist communities working through the very difficult politics of identity and still trying to do something political. In short, this book represents the benefits of those painful and traumatic multicultural wars in feminism circles where the romance and sentimentality of women's community is no longer assumed. Instead folks are asked to be accountable and to be ethical about the complex political positions they take — making clear that something is at stake in each political position we take.

Talking Visions is destined to be a signal marker of the 1990s—much like such predecessors as *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Home Girls* and *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*. Its chronicle of that decade's culture wars reminds us that the proclamations of all kinds of ends — the end of nation, the end of history, the death of the author and so forth—might have been a premature celebration as the vicious aspects of modern nation-states continue to assert conditions on many of us who must still struggle to attain citizenship and personhood in the North Atlantic and elsewhere around the globe. This book reminds us that we must better understand our relations to others both at "home" and elsewhere.

Rinaldo Walcott is an associate professor in the humanities division of York University, and a member of the FUSE editorial board. He is also editor of "Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism" (Insomniac Press, 2000).

Going POSTAL

by Alex St. Marc

P O S T A L

first is a grainy, black and white montage that cuts quickly between news/celebrity photos, footage of the Post's writers, and mysterious fragments of text that I suppose are meant to be evocative without actually meaning anything. All of this is set to a nifty jazz tune that is far more hip and exciting than the Post could ever hope to be. The images show a diverse, global population. The Post writers, in contrast, are all white.

The second commercial has the same soundtrack and style, but colour has been added and the focus seems to be shifted primarily to Toronto (the "national" paper's only real market). The director has clearly taken pains to make the city look action-packed and even throws in a few shots of Chinatown, although the impression given is not so much of cultural diversity as exotica. Again, all the Post writers are white.

Does anyone else find this a bit weird (I mean aside from the deranged notion that a two-and-a-half story high image of Christie Blatchford's smug face is a good way to sell something)? The implication is that the world—even boring old Toronto—is a dynamic (you might say frantic), slightly scary place best experienced as text, mediated through the Post's whitebread writers and editors (not to mention the reassuringly patriarchal tone of the narrator's voice).

This is what newspapers tend to do, of course; they make sure that there's a conservative buffer between radical events and ideas and the public. And despite their promises to be "objective" the Post is one hell of a buffer. After all, this is the newspaper that has never seen a report from the Fraser Institute or the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that it didn't want to put on its front page. It makes you realize how far away we are from having genuine diversity represented in mainstream print media.

Alex St. Marc is not the art critic for the National Post. He lives in Toronto.

If Canada were really as neo-conservative as Conrad Black & Co. would like us to be then Stockwell Day would be our prime minister and the National Post would be our favorite newspaper. We'd read it over breakfast, munching toasted Wonder bread while rejoicing over the privatization of our health-care system or the development of boot-camp prisons.

But, alas, what are a poor multi-millionaire and his cronies to do? They spent a fortune but they couldn't put old Stock in the prime minister's office and their newspaper, well, it's just not making money. What could be wrong? It can't be that Canadians just don't want to read a newspaper that keeps implying that our social policy ought to be modeled on a progressive U.S. state like, say, Texas. Clearly it's time for a serious advertising campaign.

And what a campaign it is. I've seen two distinct commercials in movie theatres (which means I paid nine bucks to see them!). The

SATURDAY NITE @ RISING SUN CAFÉ
Aboriginally produced weekly showcase of Aboriginal talent in the arts, sports, recreation, acting and music hosted by **Sabrina Wood** and **Leon Anthony**. Saturdays at 9:30 PM, EST

THE SEVENTH GENERATION
Young Aboriginal achievers showcase their excellence in various fields including arts, entertainment, music, business, politics, sports, medicine, science and technology. Hosted by **Jennifer Podemski** and **Laura Milliken**. Fridays at 4:30 PM, & 11:30 PM, Saturdays at 12:00 noon, EST

ABORIGINAL VOICES
Join **Loma Mathias** as she interviews Aboriginal peoples across the nation and the people who work with them in the arts, entertainment, culture, social, and political arenas. Sundays at 12:30 PM, 6:00 PM and 12:00 AM, EST

BEYOND WORDS
The art and tradition of storytelling performance showcasing Aboriginal performers in conjunction with international guest artists. Wednesdays at 3:30 PM, and 9:30 PM, EST

FIRST STORY
Aboriginal culture and issues beyond the headlines in a magazine format hosted and produced by **Tatiana Housty**. Weekdays at 11:30 AM, 5:00 PM and 2:00 AM, EST

BUFFALO TRACKS
One of the most exciting new shows on APTN, Buffalo Tracks is a talk show hosted by **Evan Adams** interviewing a wide range of aboriginal celebrities and personalities from across Canada. Fridays at 2:00 PM, 8:00 PM and 2:00 AM, EST

FIRST MUSIC AND ARTS
Up and coming artists and musicians in the Aboriginal community. Hosted by **Waneek Horn**, Mohawk from Kahnawake Mohawk Territory. Saturdays at 9:00 PM EST

SHARING CIRCLE
Join **Lisa Meeches** and **Tina Keeper**, along with reporters from across Canada, the Dakotas, the Yukon, Hawaii and beyond, as they gather stories affecting the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada and the world. Saturdays at 4:00 PM, EST

QIMAIVVIK (To Leave Something)
Qimaivvik is the cultural program of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC). This program includes topics such as hunting and hunting methods, sewing techniques, legends, stories, language and traditional skills such as igloo building. Inuktitut Wednesdays at 1:00 PM, EST

TAMAPTA (All of Us)
Tamapta is a cultural and information program about the Inuvialuit people, the communities and aboriginal

traditions of the Western Arctic. Inuvialuktun Thursdays at 12:30 PM, 6:00 PM and 12:30 AM, EST

HEARTBEAT ALASKA
Heartbeat Alaska is an internationally syndicated program that deals with Aboriginal issues. Produced and hosted by **Jeanie Greene** from Anchorage, Alaska featuring news, village events and life, hard-hitting features, music and interviews. Saturdays at 1:00 PM, EST

COOKING WITH THE WOLFMAN
Join international award-winning chef **David Wolfman** and his special guest **Loma Mathias** for delicious Aboriginal fusion food ideas and demonstrations. Thursdays, 12:00 noon and 2:30 AM and Saturdays, 2:30 PM and 10:00 PM, EST

NEDAA - YOUR EYE ON THE YUKON
Yukon Territory current affairs, culture and entertainment. Sundays at 1:00 PM, 5:00 PM and 10:00 PM, EST

WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE
Debuted February 25 on APTN, "WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE" is a series of productions that present the diverse perspectives, lives and cultures of Aboriginal peoples around the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Central and South America, Greenland, Northern Europe, Asia, Hawaii, Alaska, and the continental USA. Sundays at 1h30 and Mondays at 15h00 and 21h00 EST

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