

FUSE

MAGAZINE

WINTER 1991 Vol.14 No.3

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I started
my career as a
disabled spokesperson
when I was 11 years old.

I was appointed to present a gift to
Bob Hope, celebrity host for the 1965 Easter Seals Show,
on behalf of "all the crippled children in Saskatchewan."
"But I'm not from Saskatchewan," I said. "That doesn't
matter," they replied. Five minutes later, I met Bob
and since then have taken my role as
representative very seriously.

I have never been to
Saskatchewan.

disability: TOWARDS THE TRANSPARENT

by **sandra carpenter**

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Disneyland in Sodom
GAY GAMES VANCOUVER
Marusia Bociurkiw

Talk Radio
SOUND BY ARTISTS
Clive Robertson

Asian Film
LOOKING FOR
THE MIDDLE KINGDOM
Richard Fung

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INTERSECTIONS: ALAN STOREY November 23, 1990, through May 26, 1991.

INTERSECTIONS: TUNGA Installation on view through January 13, 1991.

SANDRA MEIGS: PAS DE DEUX Exhibition on view through January 13, 1991.

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WINTER 1991
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letters

Dear FUSE:

I really enjoy reading FUSE—especially for the critical commentary on racism and feminism. There's always so much in each issue that I feel I *must* read first.

I just want to point out one small detail in the Fall '90 (XIV: 1&2) issue, "Chick Flicks: Festival de films et vidéos de femmes de Montréal" by Marusia Bociurkiw.

There is a third annual women's film festival in Canada: it is new (smaller than Montréal's and Edmonton's), and we co-sponsor it with *In-Sight* as well as NFB. But we do organize it on our own, and have successfully made it an annual event. (The 1990 festival was our second.) And where/what is this? *Calgary's* own Feminist Film and Video Festival! Organized by the dedicated, overworked (who isn't!) women of SWAC (Calgary Status of Women Action Committee); also co-sponsored by the Women of Colour Collective.

I just wanted to pass this on for your info. (I'm a working collective member of SWAC.) Keep up the wonderful work. In peace.

Lisa Jensen
Calgary

UPCOMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF FUSE!

**Lesbian Sexual Imagery
by Cyndra MacDowall**

**The New Jerusalem
by Marlene Nourbese Philip**

errata

"Painting a Collective Herstory: Manitoba Artists for Women's Art" by Bev Pike with Kathy Driscoll (*FUSE* XIV:1&2, 15-17) contained several errors.

Please note the following corrections: Aganetha Dyck is the correct spelling of that name; editing credits for Reva Stone and Grace Thomson should have been listed following the article; the quote from Aganetha Dyck on page 16 should have read: "One of the reasons that women were welcomed in the artist-run centres is that women don't have a memory in history, and I don't think artist-run centres have a memory in history, and I think that those two link. They were both searching, and the women were trying to find their history, and the artist-run centres were trying to make a history, so both of them were interested in putting down roots of some kind." (Italics indicate omissions in the printed version.)

In a letter to the Editorial Board, the author objected to our choice of title for the article, finding it misleading. Its original title was "Among the Alternatives: Manitoba Artists for Women's Art."

FUSE apologizes for the errors made in editing this article and for the misunderstandings that occurred as a result.

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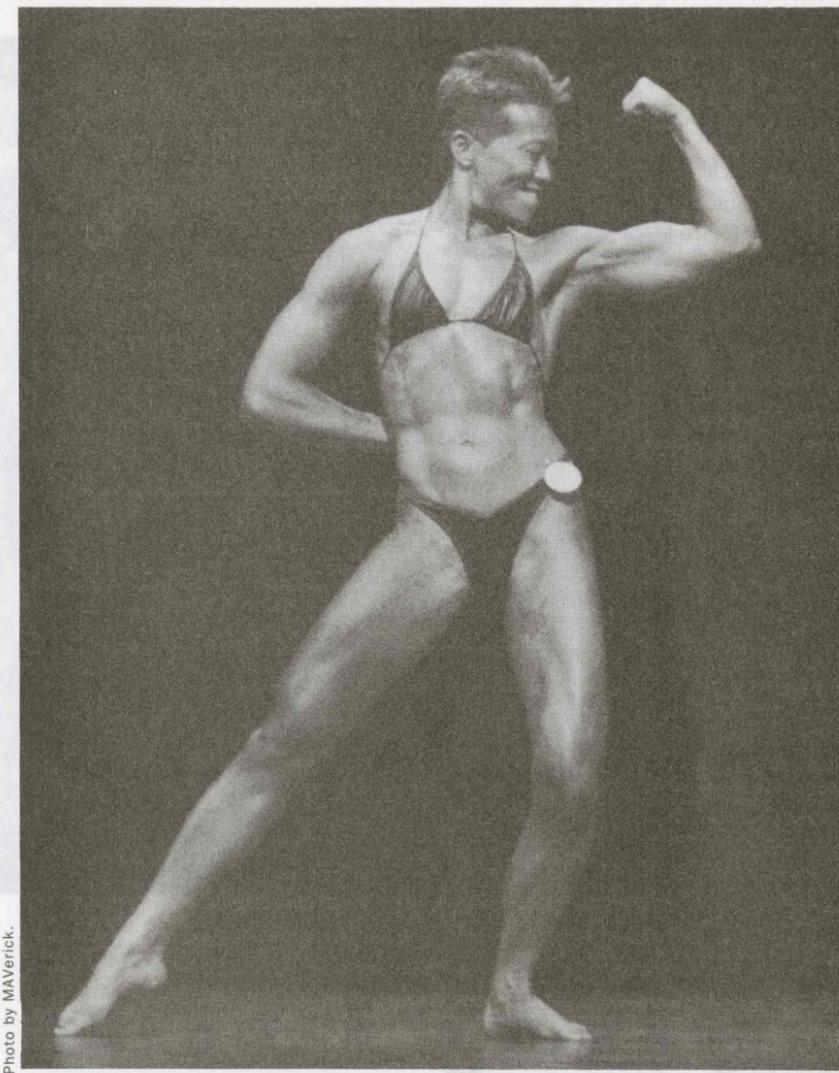
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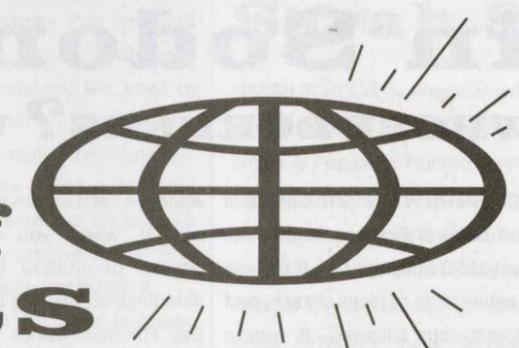
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Photo by MAVerick.



GOLD MEDALLIST KITTY TSUI, GAY GAMES 1990.

Wide World of Sports



GAY GAMES (UN)COVERED BY BRENDA BARNES

The following was broadcast as part of "The Word Is Out" (CKDU-FM Halifax) on August 22, 1990.

Celebration '90, Gay Games III and Cultural Festival is in the archives. It's been recorded as a matter of

public record. The question is, what kind of historical record has been established? Well, to begin with, a pretty sparse one.

First of all, a brick must be delivered to Halifax's local daily, *The Chronicle-Herald*, whose only

story, besides a pre-*Games* CP wire story on anti-gay graffiti, was a fifth page hard line CP wire story on the opening ceremonies, printed two days after they took place.

Moreover, local media, both print and electronic, did not pick up on the

first time attendees and most medal winners. A news release outlining Nova Scotia athletes' achievements was sent out Friday, August 17 by the Gay and Lesbian Association of Nova Scotia and calls were made the same day by its program co-ordinator, J.C. Aucoin, to the local media. No one touched it.

Of the three papers I scanned, the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, *The Globe and Mail* and the *Vancouver Sun*, not one included an exclusive sports story. This is my grievance with the media's coverage of *Celebration '90*.

I never thought I'd be in a position to praise *The Globe and Mail*, but their national edition actually fared a bit better in their coverage than the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*. In addition to covering the opening, they also ran two stories on the cultural festival. Both stories, of hefty length and analysis, were included in the arts section of the paper. . . . *The Globe and Mail* even had a story in the sports section. It was . . . an extremely positive and informed piece emphasizing the *Games'* philosophy of inclusion as opposed to exclusion and their emphasis on the future as opposed to righting past wrongs. Nevertheless, it was an opinion piece and not a sports story covering athletic achievement.

Admittedly, the Vancouver media said from the outset that they weren't going to cover these games as an athletic event. Their reasoning was that the *Games* weren't recognized as internationally sanctioned meets. Only the swimming and track events were recognized by their respective international bodies. So, even when significant athletic achievements were made, they were still covered within the body of another story, as if the accomplishment were

local angles stemming from these Games. They did not talk with any of Nova Scotia's 13 participants, all not newsworthy enough to lead the story. . . .

Let's put this thing into perspective. *Celebration '90, Gay Games III and Cultural Event*, with over 7,300 athletes, was the biggest amateur sporting event in the world this year. In terms of numbers of athletes, only the *Seoul Olympic Games* have been larger. Next year, Victoria will host the *Commonwealth Games*. Maybe 3,000 athletes will be there. Just for the sheer size of *Celebration '90*, the coverage was pathetic.

Besides Vancouver's campus/community co-op radio station, which interviewed athletes at length and covered most of the sporting events every day of the event, the electronic media's coverage was sparse and tokenist.

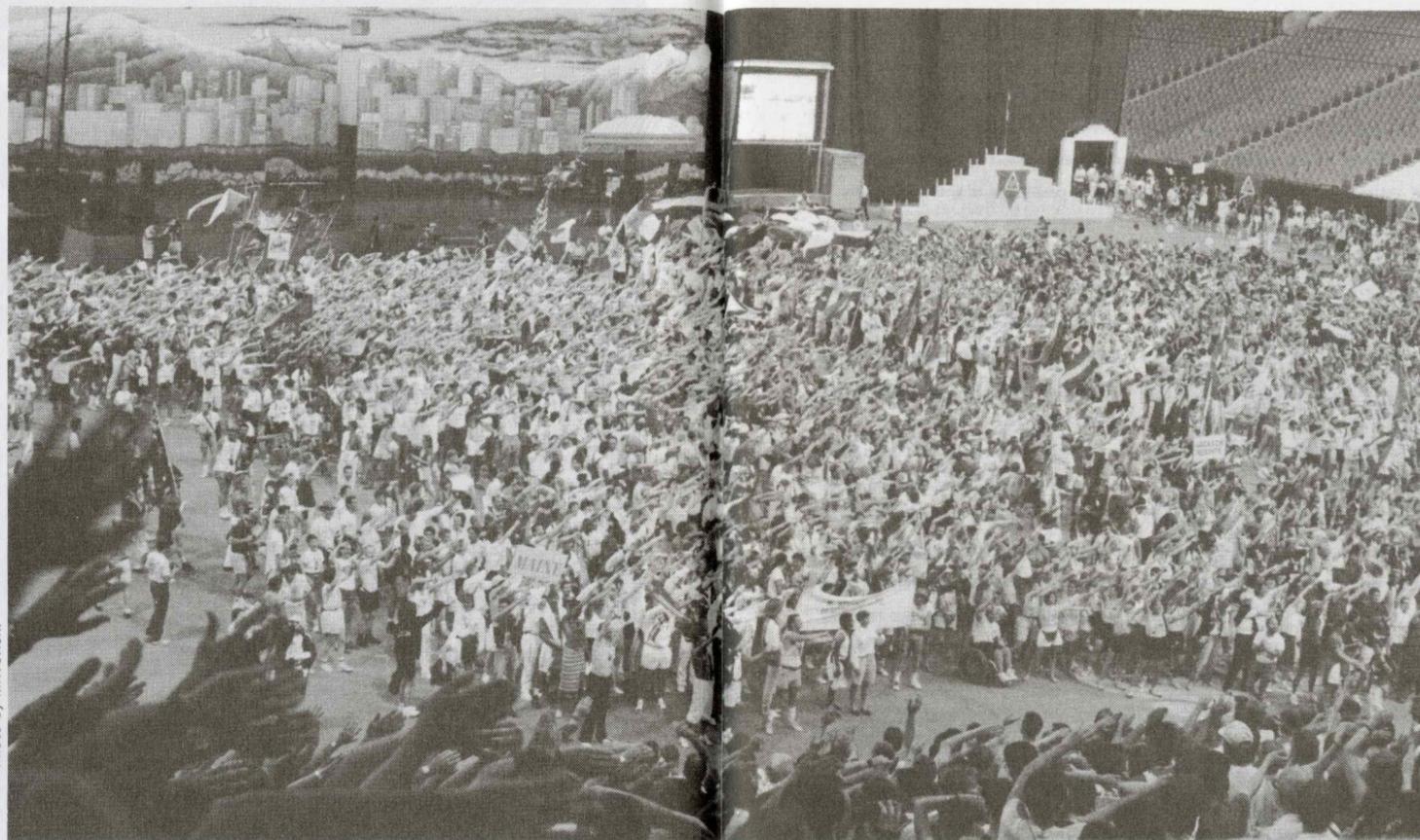
The particular story I observed, a four and a half minute feature on the opening ceremonies, started with a clip of a man dressed up to resemble Queen Elizabeth. He declared the games open. The announcer said in the voice-over, "Queen Elizabeth couldn't be there, but they had one of their own." . . . Does this lead into the story suggest that gays and lesbians have a sense of humour about themselves? No, it implies that gays and lesbians are silly people and the story about to follow is frivolous. It is set up as a non-event. The biggest chunk of time, over 30 seconds or one fifth of the story, is devoted to providing a soapbox for four fundamentalists thereby lending them credibility. They had already been mentioned in the in-studio set-up by the anchor. Why did they need to be mentioned again? Unless what they said was considered important? . . . The first so-called positive remark made about the event (the eighth of 12

items mentioned) was about how much revenue will be generated in Vancouver by participants and spectators thereby measuring it by economic standards, which totally misses the point. . . .

Comedienne Robin Tyler, who emceed the opening and closing ceremonies, said, "Now's the time when gays and lesbians are finally talking not only about their lifestyle but also about their lives." Perhaps one day the mainstream media will catch up. For now it seems any apparent lack of legitimacy ascribed to gays' and lesbians' accomplishments, as viewed by the mainstream, can be measured still not only by what is said, but most importantly by what is not. ●

Brenda Barnes hosts and produces "The Word Is Out," Atlantic Canada's only gay and lesbian radio program.

Photo by MAVerick.



CLOSING CEREMONIES, GAY GAMES 1990.

50 lesbian and gay writers from around the world, and featured panels and workshops on such issues as lesbian/gay history, erotic writing, playwrighting, AIDS, and publishing. But, the festival mirrored the elitism of *Celebration '90* with its low representation of writers of colour, ridiculously high admission costs, lack of childcare, and a relatively inaccessible venue (Simon Fraser University).

At a panel on racism (unfortunately) titled "From the Outside Looking In," Beth Brant, a Mohawk writer from the Bay of Quinte Reserve in Ontario and author of *Mohawk Trail*, critiqued the notion of a universality of language and voice being promoted within the lesbian/gay mainstream:

"As a Mohawk, I'm inside my culture looking out at you, the descendants of white Europeans who

colonized us . . . Literacy is a new concept to indigenous people: 50 per cent of my people are illiterate. So we have to rely on our memories, our elders, and our collective dreams to find the pieces that were cut away from us. We are always in a state of translation. We have to write in the enemy's language. We have to be careful and responsible. Sometimes the word I want to use is a Mohawk word. But my Mohawk language was destroyed in my family and we were taught to hate it. . . . I try to shape this hated language into a tool that I can use to make truth. I don't write for you who are white. I write for my own people. . . . No one can speak for us but us."

At a panel on censorship, "Banning Our Words," Dionne Brand, who recently published the collection of poetry *No Language Is Neutral*, spoke drily about the naming of the event:

Disneyland in Sodom

BY MARUSIA BOCIURKIW

WHOSE BORDERS? WHOSE WORDS?

CELEBRATION '90: GAY GAMES III and Cultural Festival, held in August 1990 in Vancouver, B.C., was a celebration of jocks, kitsch, and mainstream silliness. It was a homecoming for every closeted gym teacher and dyke basketball starlet, a paean to Weimar-esque notions of the body beautiful, a reclamation of spectacle, a temporary utopia that removed the taboo and made queers feel normal—if only for a week. It was a week where you weren't supposed to

wonder what it means to want to be normal, where you weren't expected to analyze the deeper meanings of, say, the Lesbian and Gay Freedom Bands of America marching around B.C. Place during the opening ceremonies, or the presence (at those same ceremonies) of Sacred politicians, or the erasure of the word "lesbian," or the whiteness of almost everyone's skin. For once in Vancouver it was flawlessly sunny, hot, and incredibly, festively, frenetically queer.

Athletic competition was just one part of the umbrella event entitled *Celebration '90*, a neutral name specifically chosen by organizers so as not to offend the general Vancouver population.

One notable intervention was *Sodom North: Bash Back*. A video screening organized by Video In, it featured explicitly political lesbian and gay work. Other interventions occurred at the literary festival *Words Without Borders*. The festival was an exciting presentation of some

"Words Without Borders' . . . it sounds like Columbus. Sometimes, in trying to say what is most fine about us, we borrow from the wrong terrain. We, as lesbians and gays, need to fight against the culture rather than fight for inclusion. . . . We must take on dissidence rather than inclusion."

Brand referred also to the limitations of the anti-censorship debate, its failure to include white colonialism in its analysis of censorship: "It seems to me that a country that has not settled Native land claims in 500 years can stop a book at the border. It is not a difficult thing to do."

Throughout the festival, in hallways and after panels, lively discussion about the forms and language of *Celebration '90* ensued. If nothing else, many of us received a clear vision of what we *don't* want lesbian and gay utopia to be. A petition was circulated; recommendations were made to organizers.

B.C. writer Betsy Warland, most recently the author of *Proper Deafinitions*, spoke up from the audience:

Information on under-representation always gets lost at events like these and there's always a new group of organizers. But there is one way to change under-representation real fast. If you're asked to speak on a panel, check out who else has been invited. If it's all white, refuse to be on it.

Beth Brant denounced the *Gay Games* as "very racist and very white. . . . It's very disappointing to have to say the same thing again and again. . . . Who listens? Who hears?" But, in a moving and emotional appeal to the conference participants, she said: "Owning up to racism is a very healing and empowering thing. Like other addictions, we can recover from racism." ●

Marusia Bociurkiw is a writer, activist and video/filmmaker.

Some Kind of Vision AN INTERVIEW WITH Sarah Schulman

SARAH SCHULMAN, American writer and activist, was at the *Words Without Borders Literary Festival*. She has written four novels, the most recent of which is *People in Trouble*, published by E.P. Dutton. Schulman's work is remarkable for fusing a feminist-left sensibility with lesbian subcultural humour and eroticism. Schulman is also a member of ACT-UP, the New York-based AIDS action collective and has most recently been a vocal critic of the mainstream art community's approach to the NEA funding crisis. As NEA-like initiatives begin to trickle over the border into Canada, artists and arts organizations here may be able to learn from the mistakes of the American NEA lobby.

MARUSIA BOCIURKIW: What do you feel are the immediate ramifications for artists vis à vis the new NEA criteria?
SARAH SCHULMAN: There's a big danger that the word "censorship" is just going to mean a few individuals getting less money than they expect. We're being manipulated in this direction by the media and that has very long-term ramifications. There's a very small artists' movement organizing around the NEA cutbacks that's putting out a

really mainstream line. All the organizing is located within the art "ruling class," and no one else cares. . . . It just doesn't resonate with them.

So people are running around crying "Censorship!" and "Freedom of speech!" without thinking about what those words really mean and using them in a manner that completely upholds the status quo. So, if the NEA doubled their funding for gay artists tomorrow, it would not affect gay people in the least. Nothing would be changed in the culture.

There's a lot of rhetoric going on in the anti-censorship movement about the superiority of artists. For example, we don't have state-funded healthcare in the U.S., but there's this rhetoric about health insurance for artists. Well, what about health insurance for everybody? There's an elitism and a sense that artists deserve a certain level of services that most Americans don't have. It really shouldn't be surprising that the NEA cutbacks have happened after 10 years of Reaganism in which every other group has been attacked or deprived.

When you're on welfare, you can get your money withheld on the basis of your sexuality. Artists are acting like the NEA cuts are the first time anything like this has ever happened.

BOCIURKIW: How do you think artists should respond to economic censorship?

SCHULMAN: I think we should take a three-pronged approach. First of all, I think that artists should be talking about institutionalized censorship, instead of just talking about their own careers. Secondly, I think that we have to act as though these cutbacks are part of a larger picture. People should be acting in community activist groups and not in these rarified artist groups that are only fighting for artists' rights. One of the reasons that no one cares about these cutbacks is that

most artists haven't built up relationships with communities over the years. Thirdly, I think that activist artists should act like the left-wing of the art community and put out some kind of utopian vision, something big and positive, as a goal. For example, in the gay movement we've seen ACT-UP arise as its radical flank. It's given more credibility to the gay mainstream so that now things like domestic partnership rights are being taken seriously. Artists can play that same role. I think we should be saying things like, "Peer arts council juries should be 100 percent Black artists." Or, that money should be distributed regionally, and not just to areas that have only white artists in them. . . . Artists are taking a single-issue approach, and we know from, say, the abortion rights movement that single issue never works. You have to have a political context within which you make your stand.

At the opening gala of *Words Without Borders*, Schulman gave a talk entitled, "Is the NEA Good for Gay Art?" Portions of her talk are excerpted below:

The government is using homophobia again as an instrument of social control. We need to focus on homophobia and not on "saving the NEA." Of course, museums and boards of directors find it easier to articulate "Save the NEA" than to engage in fighting their oppression of gay people. . . .

At the same time, the organized arts community has a lot of soul-searching to do about its own history of exclusion. Before Helms, many other biases existed in the funding and presentation of artwork. Historically, the reward system in the arts has been reserved primarily for white people from the upper and middle classes whose work fits the aesthetic agenda of critics and arts administrators. Yet the majority of artists previously admitted

to the reward system never spoke up about institutionalized discrimination until it affected us. . . .

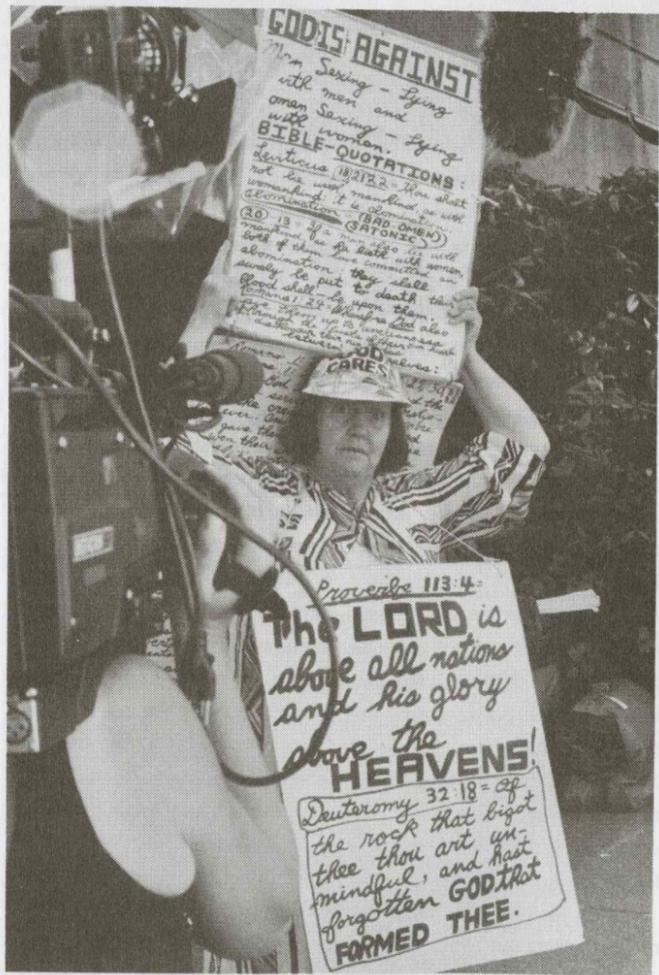
For any minority artist, part of being admitted to the reward system is that while the benefits are great for the individual, the price for the community is tokenism. I know this firsthand, having personally benefited from the exception distortion. . . .

Up until five years ago, lesbian artists were almost completely excluded from the reward system. . . . Lesbians were not reviewed in mainstream publications; we were not presented in prominent art projects. As a result, the work remained invisible and many women were unable to develop their talents, while others could and their work thrived. This is still the case, with the small exception of the

30 or so "out" lesbian artists across all genres who have access to the tokenism. However, before funding work was supported by the audience and determined by the lives, needs, and experiences of the community.

Individuals are even easier than political movements to contain. . . . In this manner, much of the development of lesbian arts are taken out of the hands of the audience and given instead to a small group of critics and administrators. . . .

The NEA scandal is giving us all an opportunity to rethink the values we've created as well as the ones we've been handed. At the same time that we won't lie down for a homophobic, anti-sex NEA, neither can we roll over for elitist exclusion in our own community. . . . ●



MEDIA ATTENTION OUTSIDE ATHLETE REGISTRATION CENTRE.

Photo by MAVErick.

Video News

BY KIM TOMCZAK

The first annual Bell Canada Award in Video Art was presented to Robert Morin and Lorraine Dufour of Vidéo Coop de Montréal. The \$10,000 prize is awarded each year to an artist who has made an exceptional contribution to the video medium in Canada, and to the development of video language. A retrospective survey of Morin and Dufour's video works was on display at A Space in Toronto in January. The exhibition was curated by Brendan Cotter, and is accompanied by a comprehensive, bilingual catalogue with essays by Jean Tourangeau, Peggy Gale and Dan Walworth. Order this 104-page illustrated catalogue for \$10. (add \$3 for shipping) directly from A Space
183 Bathurst Street.
Toronto, ON, M5T 2R7.



STILL FROM MORIN AND DUFOUR'S *LA FEMME ÉTRANGÈRE*, 1988.

A retrospective of Colin Campbell's video works is currently being held at Winnipeg Art Gallery. Campbell, who has been producing videotapes since 1972, is one of Canada's foremost video artists. The Campbell retrospective travels the National Gallery of Canada where it opens February 14, 1991. A catalogue published by the Winnipeg Art Gallery and featuring writing by Bruce Ferguson, Stuart Marshall, Dot Tuer and Susan Ditta, is available. Order yours from The Winnipeg Art Gallery, 300 Memorial Blvd. Winnipeg, MN, R3C 1V1.

National Video Resources (NVR) a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding audiences for educational, cultural, political and social films and videos, has been announced by the Rockefeller Foundation. NVR's activities will include identifying potential markets, offering advice to independents on rights and promotion questions, packaging ideas, and new distribution developments. NVR also publishes a newsletter on its current research and activities. Contact National Video Resources, 73 Spring Street, Suite 606, New York, NY, 10012, (212) 274-8080.

The Inside/Out Collective is presenting the *Toronto Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival 1991*. Comprised of 24 programs this festival will fill a gap in the cultural events of Toronto. The focus of Toronto's first gay and lesbian film and video festival is to bring audiences up to date with an exciting selection of works. The program includes work from as far as Thailand and as near as Toronto. It includes shorts, experimental productions and feature length works, both big budget and modest. From

Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* to the BBC's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, the festival promises to both inform and entertain audiences with a focussed look at film and video by and about lesbians and gays. The Festival runs from March 21 to 31, 1991 at the Euclid Theatre. For more information contact the Inside/Out Collective, P.O. Box 121, Stn. P, Toronto, ON, M5S 2S7 or call (416) 924-3902.

Making Waves

BY CLIVE ROBERTSON



RADIO ART SYMPOSIUM GALÉRIE SAW VIDEO, OTTAWA

FOR THOSE performance, video and audio artists who could not quite make it into the museum structures of the '80s where curatorial shuffleboard replaced either incoming surveys or outgoing retrospectives of what such artists will or have been doing, media artists in general have continued to work and keep a social memory alive. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier's book *Sound By Artists*, jointly published by Art Metropole and the Walter Philips Gallery, is out (see sidebar review, p. 9 & 10) and a new 20 year survey/anthology on Canadian performance art will be published by Editions Intervention in January 1991.

Galérie SAW Video, frequently in conjunction with the University of Ottawa, has been building an impressive series of day- or evening-long community discussions where both social memory and cultural confrontation are mutually productive. (The panel discussions on issues of contemporary Native art, histories of performance, non-Western art traditions, the FLQ crisis and, "Radio as Art: Issues of Creation; Issues of Regulation" are available to researchers on VHS tape).

Creation theories

The symposium "Radio as Art: Issues of Creation; Issues of Regulation," held on August 11, 1990, was deftly mediated by Jody Berland, professor of Communications at Concordia University, musician and corresponding edi-

tor of *Borderlines*. Guest panelists included Gregory Whitehead (Philadelphia); Andrew Herman and Paul Cheevers (Boston); Claude Schreyer, Chantal Dumas and Kim Sawchuck (Montréal); John Oswald and Dot Tuer (Toronto); David Mouldon (Winnipeg); and Patrick Ready (Vancouver).

There is something to be said, now that we've put aside the previous decade of greed and imagined affluence, for coming to grips with radio, a cultural practice that is clearly service- rather than community-based. The majority of panelists were speaking from their experiences as radio producers/programmers from community/college radio rather than state or commercial radio. The problem with an incomplete evolution of cultural practice from commodity production to community service is, as we know, a reliance upon unpaid or low-paid labour. Programmers and/or the content producers within the community/college radio network have to see their contributions as a socio-political engagement, in effect sponsoring the radio audience. The audiences, in turn, show their gratitude for alternative programming and, to a lesser degree, alternative politics by making annual donations to each station's local fundraising marathons. There are definitely parallels between such a radio network and an uncomfortable status quo of how community-based artistic/cultural practices (magazines, theatre, music, visual art)

maintain their social relationships and quasi-economic base. The beginners of the discussion focused on the concepts of creativity, an implied social usefulness, and a type of marginality that places the individual creator in the shadow of the corporate behemoth.

Over the six-hour symposium it was often difficult to shake the most traditional notions of creativity and the accompanying personal protectionisms such ideology favours. (Institutions invariably favour implicit forms of politicized art, if for no other reason than the producer thereby acknowledges the hallowed authoritative site of the institution). As Kim Sawchuck clarified: "I am uncomfortable with the notion of the artist as marginal and that as being the agenda for 'alternative.' For me, alternative radio is political radio. I do a feminist radio show which is not just about introducing the female voice but dealing with aspects of sexuality not talked about on mainstream radio."

The ability to form a continuous time analysis (where we are, how we got there) is frequently interrupted within current production communities and their increased social and disciplinary fragmentation. I recently heard an artist wondering aloud during a public presentation why art critics and historians don't write about new work from specialized voices. Such questions demonstrate an innocent forgetting of why it became necessary for

artists to additionally involve themselves in programming, criticism and publishing co-operatives.

Dot Tuer repeatedly raised basic questions about the assumption of a common vocabulary and the shifts which take place with regard to the mainstream culture: "What does popular culture mean now? What does it mean to be an artist in the '90s? What does it mean to be 'marginal' compared to 15 years ago? In terms of a global intellectual crisis, we are losing a common vocabulary; communications are breaking down into a white noise. Such a situation is part of the mechanism of what happens when our contemporary artistic practices confront major challenges. Fifteen years later, we're sitting in this room and we're not even broadcasting this discussion which, I suggest, demonstrates how little we've been able to move into this [radio] medium."

Several times, Jody Berland connected the polar interests of the debate: alternative political radio versus radiophonics (the phenomenological distinctness of the radio medium and its accompanying aesthetics). Paraphrasing Brecht's analysis from the '30s of opera and the stage, Berland noted how artists think of different forms and forums existing as outlets for their work and existing somehow for the artist, rather than considering how such apparatuses perpetuate themselves once they have a so-

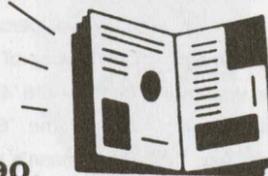
cial, economic and institutional base. Under such conditions the artist is a tool for the institution, rather than the institution being a tool for the artist. Berland continued: "We have to ask ourselves what was the purpose of the development of community radio. Is radio art about experimental music? experimental fiction? experimental sound being broadcast over radio waves? Or was there an implicit need to change the conceptual relationship between the artist and the audience and to change notions of how art would function economically and contextually?"

Berland also recalled McLuhan's observation of the evolutionary stages of a medium: one, the new medium programs leftovers from the medium it is displacing (as Gregory Whitehead stated, "Radio quickly became the distribution slave of the music and newspaper industries"); two, because initially there is a lack of understanding of what a medium can do, there is a classic period of developing and discovering inherent content; and three, once a medium becomes supplanted, it becomes an art object instead of a mode of communication (for example, theatre was supplanted by cinema, changing theatre from a popular form to an art form).

An interesting Canadian prototype that used radio as an overlapping medium with a heterogeneous audience was HP Radio begun by panelist Patrick Ready and co-produced by Hank Bull. Their weekly Vancouver community radio program borrowed formats from the classic radio era and was toured live as a counter-culture narrative exchange device. Ready also gave one of too few examples of alternative public

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE >

Sound by Artists
Edited by Dan Lander
& Micah Lexier
Published by Art Metropole
& Walter Philips Gallery, 1990.



THIS IS THE SIXTH BOOK *By artists* published by Art Metropole since 1976. (Their title list includes *Video By Artists* (1976), *Performance By Artists* (1979), *Books By Artists* (1981), *Museums By Artists* (1983) and *Video By Artists 2* (1986). And sad to say, aside from NSCAD Press and a few other isolated titles (mostly from art museums and public galleries), this is the sum of Canada's book publishing output on contemporary art activity.

Art Metropole's books have always been quirky in terms of a representational editorial mix of domestic and international activities. *Sound By Artists* does not entirely break the mould. There are essays from the U.S., Belgium, Holland, Italy, Germany, Japan, England, and English Canada, but nothing from Quebec, a place teeming with audio art interests and practice. What has changed in the structure of *Sound By Artists* is an end to the segregation of artists documenting their work from curators and academics providing the theoretical essays. The 32 contributions cross generations and approaches to sound work—from soundscapes to installations, from radio to cassette publishing.

There are good stabs at known audio history from Douglas Kahn's "Audio in a Deaf Century" to contributions from Max Neuhaus, John Cage, R. Murray Schafer, Richard Kosetelanetz, Suzanne Delehanty, Alvin Lucier and Bruce Barber. Women's audiowork, if not equally represented, makes a substantial presence, particularly in reports from Marysia Lewandowska (of the London (England) Women's Audio Archive), Annea Lockwood, Hildegard Westerkamp and Rita McKeough.

The essays that cover the overlap between art and independent pop/industrial music are not particularly accurate. But the blame for this lies somewhere in the sources and ingrained habits of the alternative music press, that always demanded a schizophrenia from its interviewees. So instead of getting a useful reassessment of Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra and its influential political and collective compositional techniques, we have, in Chris Twomey's essay on industrial music, mention of Scratch survivor David Jackman using "unusual sounds such as an alarm clock being rubbed against a rusty bicycle wheel," which is sort of where John Cage came in in 1948. Other goofs occur in Ihor Holubizky's essay "Very Nice, Very Nice." In Holubizky's appendix on groups "who collaborated on sound performance," he lists artists who participated in Fluxus. Among them is the Velvet Underground who were definitely not members of Fluxus.

A more interesting polemic that takes a run at the history of contemporary art and underground music is Donal McGraith's "Anti-Copyright and Cassette Culture." McGraith rants: "Art is a display of food to the starving. Our lives pale by comparison. On the other hand, that endless stream of originality does seem to protest too much. These artists and commodities do seem to decorate the lives of the most sleazy scum on the face of the earth."

Aside from its few faults and unavoidable exclusions due to the sheer volume of potential material, this book is worth having. Lander's and Lexier's prolonged efforts are much appreciated. ●

CR

audio transmission: "In Mozambique, villages would hook up a cassette recorder to an amplifier and place the speaker system in various locations within the community. Information useful to the village (hog and corn prices, social news, music) was recorded on tape and broadcast. The cassette tape would be changed when enough displacing new material was gathered." John Oswald mentioned a programmer in Los Angeles who would broadcast a live alternative soundtrack for the TV program *Miami Vice*. The audio broadcast would include alternative narratives, sampling of previous *Miami Vice* soundtracks and live sound effects.

Gregory Whitehead (who is co-editing *Wireless Imagination*, an anthology on the histories of sound and radio art, for MIT Press) intervened on the side of phenomenology. As his colleague Douglas Khan has suggested, social change is nominated or prophesized within an increased scientific understanding of perception and/or a heady belief in technological invention breaking open the formal possibilities for a new intellectual disruption (see Khan's essay and comments about sampling in *Sound By Artists*). As Whitehead remarked: "Sound is incidental to radio; the real material is the relationship, sometimes tricky, sometimes duplicitous and/or dangerous, that the radio artist/broadcaster has with the invisible other, the isolated other. I have to resist the art of radio, if you're talking about the ordering of acoustic space. Who cares about the facile programmer? What's interesting is the bizarre relationship between two nervous systems; this other that you have no real relationship to, you're there, in their brains."

Whitehead may have been unaware that the exact language he

used about radio was used by artist/visual perceptionists (the scientific wing of the Op Art genre) from the late '40s through until the end of the '60s. (See Charles Biedermann's massive, influential tome, *Art As The Evolution Of Visual Knowledge*, self-published in Red Wing, Minnesota in 1948). The "invisible/isolated other" also sounds like the imagined bonding between a museum curator's materialized concept and an off-the-street exhibition viewer/receiver. Dot Tuer offered a friendly amendment: "Can we admit that this 'nervous' public intimacy is at least taking place at the heart of late capitalism?"

Regulation, Gender and Representation

WHEN IT COMES TO ART AND GENDER, acknowledgement of difference is still hard to come by. The male panelists all concurred on the difficulties of dissuading men from exercising their techno-fetishism but not all agreed that access to the identity of "artist" is different for specific groups of individuals. This was consistent with the reluctance to see notions of creativity within radiophonics (expressed earlier) as, in part, a gendered construction. The (B.C. feminist writing collective) Femmatix film theory paper on *Dead Ringers* was cited: when women are interested in trying to find a voice and create a social subject where there hasn't been one, male theory responds with the "You can't fire me, I quit" syndrome—the white male construction of the "death of the author."

From the audience, feminist curator Christine Conley asked: "What has it meant to be excluded? what does it mean when those people are going to speak? how are they going to be heard—not women

being honorary men but displacing the white male discourse completely? So what is art? is art simply the myth of the non-agenda of white middle-class males? In other words, if you don't seem to have an agenda and you are creative is that what art is? What happens when the people who have been excluded try to practise or try to insert themselves into that definition?" The flag of marginality (as opposed to actually being marginalized) was finally struck when Dot Tuer said: "It's fine to be on the margins, if conceptually you are at the center of power."

This discussion was part of *Touch That Dial: Creating Radio Transcending the Regulatory Body* (August 8 - September 12, 1990) which included an exhibition, a workshop by Dan Lander and an

evening of audio performances. The exhibition included Nicholas Collins' suspended cybernetic transistor radiowork "Sputniks"; Kim Sawchuck and Nell Tenhaaf's installation "There's a mirror/ear the end of my bed"; Marguerite Dehler's "L'espace voulu"; and a video station playing Dewayne Readus' videotape *One Watt of Truth*, a documentary on the civil disobedience of a Springfield, Illinois community pirate one-watt radio station and Readus, its blind, Black program director. Also in the exhibit was an audio cassette library with a sampling of American and Canadian audio/radio art works. The entire programme was jointly organized and curated by Christof Migone in Montreal and Jean-François Renaud in Ottawa. ●

Mary Catherine Newcomb
sculpture
du 12 janvier au 10 février

Edward Poitras
installation
du 16 février au 17 mars

Juan Gomez-Perales
sculpture
du 27 mars au 28 avril

articule 4060 St-Laurent #106
Montréal, Québec H2W 1Y9 (514) 842 9686

subventions: Ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec,
Conseil des Arts du Canada, Conseil des Arts de la C.U.M.

Bronzed Egos

BY SCOTT ELLIS

SOMEONE offers to donate a valuable art collection to your city. It could only be a blessing, right? Well, possibly. Winnipeg City Council is considering an endowment which raises a number of fiscal and arts policy questions. Council recently approved funding a \$100,000 feasibility study for a proposed garden and garden house devoted to the work of the Winnipeg-based sculptor, Leo Mol. The Ukrainian-born artist has offered to donate his personal collection to the city, if it is "suitably" housed. What Winnipeg could be getting is 50 to 75 bronze statues, installed in a sculpture garden costing an estimated \$500,000, phased in over several years.

A garden house and gallery for Mol's smaller statuary, porcelain figures, paintings and sketches is also under consideration. The estimates for this facility range up to \$425,000, if it were to include a proposed formal English tea room.

So what's wrong here? According to Hartley Richardson, a friend of Mol's who is negotiating with the city on his behalf, Ottawa, Toronto and Munich have expressed interest in acquiring the collection, worth an estimated \$3 to 4 million. Theoretically, Winnipeggers will have the best of both worlds, a bargain and someone else's say-so that they're not getting rooked.

Well, maybe not quite. The feasibility study may be the first step toward spending upwards of \$1 million to house the work of one artist. This, in a city whose grants to individual artists totalled \$14,000 last year.

Also, one can't help noticing that the feasibility study figure of \$100,000 is just about the same as for the recent Arts Policy Review Committee, a volunteer group that was convened to study the province's total arts policy. This \$100,000, however, is for one project's consulting fees. The Arts Advisory Council was not even consulted in regards to this matter, which lies squarely in their purview. Imagine how many artists could have benefitted and what art Winnipeg could have for even the cost of the study, let alone the project!

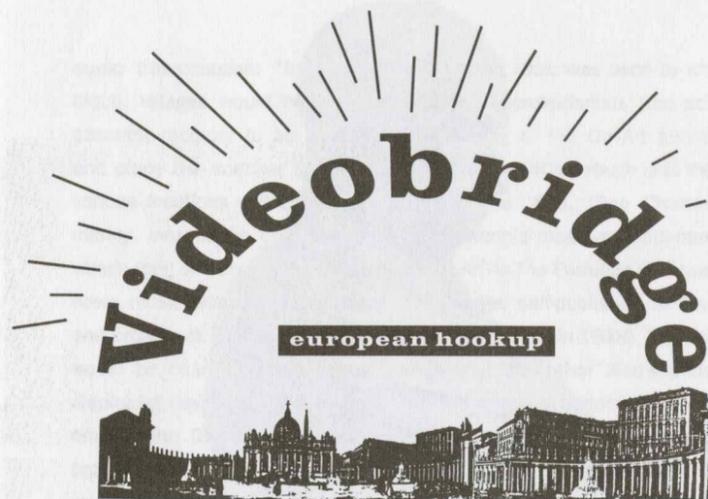
Proponents of the Mol garden point out that a citizens' committee has volunteered to raise private sector money for the project. However, as Councillor Rick Boychuk notes: "The city and taxpayer will foot the maintenance bills in perpetuity. That's everything from structural repairs to polishing the bronze." The lone dissenting voice on the Culture committee, Boychuk also points out that the project's supporters have yet to make a commitment as to how much money they will raise.

Artists and arts organizations have long been aware that the money involved in financing "High Art," e.g., feasibility studies, cost overruns and maintenance, is money that never gets to artists or makes art. Is there really a huge demand for a costly institution so that spectators can view busts of Eisenhower and Paul VI among the asters and baby's breath? ●

Scott Ellis is a freelance writer and critic based in Winnipeg.



LEO MOL'S 1968 STUDY OF A.Y. JACKSON.



BY NINA CZEGLÉDY

RUMOUR HAS IT: It is easier to swim across the Danube than to make a phone call from Buda to Pest. Hungary, however, is a country of contradictions. Accordingly, between June 21 and 23 (from 7 to 10 p.m.) five open telephone lines facilitated *Interferants*; a video bridge linking the French town of Albi to Budapest, Naples, Berlin, Ljubljana and Cologne. The Hungarian performances took place in the studio/theatre of the Academy of Applied Arts where Pierre Lobstein, "architect" of the video bridge, could be found surrounded by monitors and entangled in a maze of electrical wires. *Interferants* was supported by the French Institute for Hungary; access to the telephone lines, however, was obtained by some miracle-making of enthusiastic organizers from the Academy.

Lobstein is a Paris-based multimedia artist who has become interested in cross-cultural projects in the last few years. "I made my first 'connection' back in 1982 on the last day of the wine harvest between a small French village and the Pompidou Centre in Paris thus linking the age-old tradition of wine-making to the ultra-modern bastion of contemporary culture," said

Lobstein. "The idea behind *Interferants* was to present a conceptual solution of how to communicate kinetics of sound, images and text across a distance. I like to use low technology, such as this little handy-cam and the digitized frozen pictures. By utilizing telephone transmissions through modems, *Interferants* allowed us to establish communication between writers, videomakers, performance artists and musicians from the five participating centres."

In "Europe House," the artists were performing in the "courtyard" (that is, the stage). The show was viewed from "the balcony" (that is, a scaffolding). A video camera was suspended and transferred at fixed time intervals through telephone lines of Albi, France. In Albi, the image was projected vertically onto a large screen on the ground thus providing the viewers with the "camera's view" from Budapest or Berlin.

"The performances can be compared to thoroughly electronic polaroid images," said Lobstein. "The camera captures real events indirectly, but these events are presented to the viewer at intervals creating the illusion of reality, which

might be even more vivid than a continuum. Interpretation enhances reality. The continuous soundtrack establishes a further dimension and re-interpretation of reality. A curious balance develops between vertical perception, which is abstract, and a feeling of continuity."

Interferants scheduled a summer and fall program. Each link of the video bridge represented a different approach to the project. For example, Allen Fleischer's plan was to build two black chambers, one in Naples, one in Albi. In each of these rooms, incomplete stories were presented by photos and text. The missing parts of these stories were transmitted regularly through telephone lines between Albi and Naples using a modem and photosensitive paper. A video projector, transformed for this occasion into an enlarger, developed line by line the negative images, which were projected immediately. Thus, day after day, the public discovered the story to its conclusion. From Berlin, Bure Soh participated with an experimental "Opera" project, linking images and sound, and using the telephone as her "trampoline," while Philip Gerbaud's "Reunification with a Tool Box" utilized geometric computer-generated images.

By the invitation of Lobstein, Hungarian artists Janos Szirtes, Aron Gabor, Janos Sugar, Tibor Szemzo and Laszlo F. Lugossy participated with individual performances in the Budapest link of *Interferants*. Classically trained composer and performer Tibor Szemzo is one of the pioneers of Hungarian electronic music. Most of the other performers come from a visual arts background, but work frequently in multi-media, a strong trend among contemporary Hungarian artists. The enormous ball of twisted wire slowly untangled by

sculptor Janos Sugar or Aron Gabor's use of reflecting mirrors combined with his own symbolic paintings and layered with a video of paintings, all reflect the dominant visual aspect of the performances. Janos Szirtes, painter and performance artist, tests his physical endurance on stage. His *Interferants* performance, involving huge German Shepherds, was no exception.

One evening there was the surprise appearance of the Montreal rock group FAT. Apparently Lobstein met members of FAT (Eric Rosenzweig, Philip Giborski and Jeff Noble) in a bar the previous night and promptly invited them to participate. The audiences in Albi and Budapest were not treated to just any old Montreal music. "After a prolonged stay in Morocco where we studied Berber music in depth, we integrated it with our own brand of New Music," said lead guitarist Rosenzweig. The group has been on the road for the best part of three years.

The Hungarian link of the fall program of *Interferants* involved the participation of architects Laszlo Rajk and Gabor Bachman. Rajk, a well known political activist, has cooperated on several projects with Bachman. Albi (the French base of *Interferants*), a site of industrial rehabilitation, is of specific interest to them. Bachman has been working in video lately and he planned an installation titled "East/West Alarm" for the occasion.

On the last evening of *Interferants*, the summer video bridge in Budapest, we left all the monitors and wires at the Academy and retired to the elegant reception rooms of the French Institute on Castle Hill. A truly low technology venue for creating cultural exchange. ●

Nina Czegledy is a Toronto-based video artist and curator of international video.

the poetic politic

TRINH T. MINH-HA'S SPECTATOR

BY MARY ALEMANY-GALWAY

THIS YEAR the annual conference of the Film Studies Association of Canada was held at Carleton University in Ottawa. One of the highlights of the conference was the opportunity to see the films of the Vietnamese-American filmmaker, Trinh T. Minh-ha. The pleasure was deepened by the fact that she attended the conference and presented a paper at the Martin Walsh Memorial Lecture.

Trinh T. Minh-ha was born in Hanoi and educated at the University of Saigon and the National Conservatory of Music. She moved to the U.S. in 1970 and received graduate degrees in ethnomusicology, music composition and comparative literature. She lived and taught in Dakar, Senegal from 1977 to 1980 and is now an Associate Professor in the Department of Cinema at San Francisco State University.

Her paper, entitled "The Spectator on Trial," was an impassioned defense of the ambiguity of mean-

ing inherent in the poetic sign. She used, as an example, the many meanings that can be attributed to the colour red in an Asian culture. She also quoted some poems that juxtapose visual images to create meanings which remain ambiguous and thus rely on the individual reader for their ultimate coherence. Her films certainly carry out this strategy. They work much like the Haiku poem in that the images are juxtaposed with one another to create a mood, a perception of the world which is suggested but not defined for the viewer. The soundtrack works in a similar fashion: different discourses associated with different voices are placed in juxtaposition to one another.

So far Trinh T. Minh-ha has made three films: *Reassemblage* (1982), *Naked Spaces: Living is Round* (1985) and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989). That she was not trained in filmmaking probably helped her to establish a disjunctive visual style which, because of

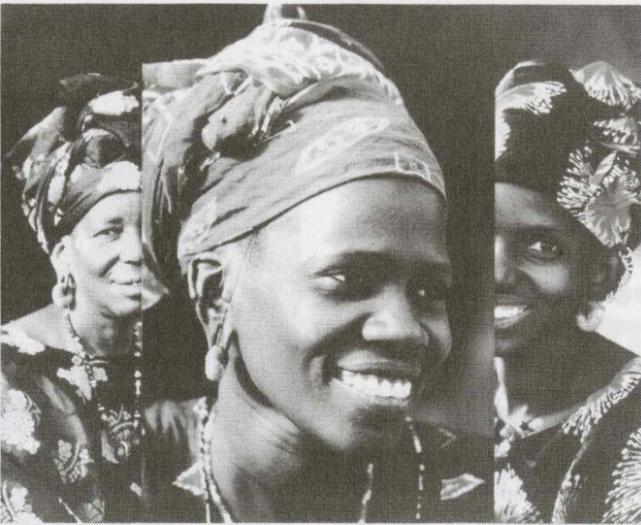
its primitive qualities (jump cuts, rough pans, unexpected close-ups), jars the viewer out of the lull of realism inherent in normal documentary. For these films are actually documentaries of a sort. That is, they could be seen as ethnographic documentaries and yet they also deconstruct that genre. The first two of her films were shot in Africa. They are particularly interesting because they are works of a Vietnamese woman who, while not a white Westerner, is very much aware that she is an outsider to that culture. She is very aware of the objectification that can occur when the gaze of the camera is directed at the "Other." Trinh T. Minh-ha has stated, "To raise the question of representing the Other is, therefore, to reopen endlessly the fundamental issue of science and art; documentary and fiction; universal and personal; objectivity and subjectivity; masculine and feminine; outsider and insider."¹ To adopt the point-of-view of the "scientific" ethnographer-documentarist would be to objectify the Other, the outsider to patriarchal Western culture.

Craig Owens, in "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," begins his essay by stating, "Decentred, allegorical, schizophrenic . . . however we choose to diagnose its symptoms, postmodernism is usually treated, by its protagonists and antagonists alike, as a crisis of cultural authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions."² The films of Trinh T. Minh-ha are exemplary postmodernist works, both in style and in subject matter. They deconstruct the customary unitary vision posited in the Western system of visual representation through their use of a disjunctive cinematic language. They "make theory" by constructing a different way of



STILLS FROM SURNAME VIET GIVEN NAME NAM.

Photos courtesy Women Make Movies.



STILL FROM REASSEMBLAGE.

seeing. But it is not only theory that is being created. The beauty of the images carries us into a world that is poetically seen and felt and the values in that culture are communicated much more effectively than in any logical discourse.

Her first film, *Reassemblage*, stresses the hesitancy and doubts of the filmmaker in taking on the role of the observer. The mixture of different discourses in the voice-over keeps the audience aware of the role the ethnographer-documentarist takes on when s/he "studies" another culture. The second film, *Naked Spaces: Living is Round*, explores traditional village architecture in six West African countries. The beauty of their architecture, which blends so naturally into their surroundings, speaks for itself and asserts its significance and value from a culture which has been labelled "primitive."

Her third film, *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, is more personal in subject matter since it investigates the oppression and resistance of Vietnamese women in Vietnam and in the U.S. both historically and in contemporary society. The film problematizes a favourite device of many documentaries: the direct testimony. What we see at

first seems to be Vietnamese women talking about their experiences of oppression under the present socialist regime. But, we find out that these are actually actresses enacting published interviews done in Vietnam by Mai Thu Van in 1982. Later in the film these women speak as themselves, that is, as Vietnamese women living in the U.S. In the credits each actress is listed as playing two roles, her interview character and herself. Here again, as in the previous films, meaning is problematized and made ambiguous so that the viewer must come to an individual conclusion about the material presented to her/him by the filmmaker. "The Spectator on Trial" could be an overall title for her films as it is for her paper. ●

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ENDNOTES

1. Susan Ditta, "The Film and Video by Artists Series: In-Between Spaces: The Films of Trinh T. Minh-ha," (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada, May 1990), 10-27.
2. Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic*. (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 57.

RUDE MEDIA MEN

Get that guy out of here!

BY ANDREW J. PATERSON



ON THE EVENING OF SATURDAY December 8 at the Bloor Street United Church, A Bunch of Feminists collective (who chose their name in response to Montreal rifleman Marc Lepine's designation of his intended targets) held the final presentation of their month-long series of panels, events and art exhibitions on male violence against women. The evening's program included a poetry recitation referring to patriarchal incest and a performance piece linking the Montreal murderer's uniform fixation with those of other mass murderers such as U.S. Lt. William Calley and Adolf Hitler. In other words, the evening's program contained material which could safely be described as "highly sensitive" in nature.

Suddenly, and right in the middle of a performance, an unidentified man with a video camera began shooting the performance with his camera light on at full beam. One of the collective requested that the man not shoot with his light on; he responded by telling to her back off.

The man had not identified himself to the media spokespersons for A Bunch of Feminists upon arriving at the Church. Media liasons Flo Sicoli

and Gwen McGregor informed the man, who claimed to be working for CITY-TV, that they would speak to him during the intermission in a hallway and that he could not continue any further documentation of the performances without authorization from or on behalf of the performers.

Sicoli and McGregor were, at first, prepared to take the man at his word and give him an interview clip for the sake of diplomacy. But, the man maintained his belligerence so they began requesting identification. And, the more the intruding camera operator refused to present his identification, the more heated the exchange between him and the two Bunch of Feminists media liasons became. He persisted in shooting despite the fact that the two women were now demanding that he stop, because of his refusal to produce identification. Finally, the man was asked to leave the building.

After exiting into the parking lot he renewed his territorialism. He taunted Sicoli and McGregor to "go ahead and complain" to his employers; he was confident that the two

women would have no credibility there. He beamed his camera light into the women's faces and told Sicoli to "get out of my face, you cow." (I was witness to this exchange.) On his way out of the parking lot, his station wagon managed to knock over a few bicycles parked at the foot of the parking lot exit way.

Although A Bunch of Feminists had sent publicity outlining some of their other programs to CITY-TV, as well as to other media, CITY-TV had not contacted the collective regarding coverage of this particular performance event. The intrusion by the cameraman (who turned out to have a senior position at the station) violated any sort of journalistic etiquette—reporters and videographers, if indeed invited to an event, are required to identify themselves to either the artists/performers themselves or to the media liasons for the event's sponsors. An event does not become public property simply because its existence is known to the media.

CITY-TV prides itself on being "everywhere" and they have shown a willingness to cover events and issues that their media competitors either trivialize or shrink away from. But on this particular evening CITY-TV was somewhere where it had not established its right to be. To the station's credit, news editor Steve Hurlbut wrote a considered apology to A Bunch of Feminists after the collective deemed a verbal telephone apology insufficient. It would seem that the testimony of "a bunch of feminists" does have credibility at the station despite the territorial rhetoric of one of the station's senior cameramen. ●

Andrew J. Paterson is a Toronto-based fiction writer, video producer and performance artist.

Photo by Sandra Haar.

Seeing Yellow

ASIAN FILM & REPRESENTATION

BY RICHARD FUNG

UP UNTIL THE 19TH CENTURY, Chinese people imagined themselves at the centre of the world. They saw themselves occupying the space between Heaven and Earth: The Middle Kingdom. As an imperialist, colonizing power they developed what is now politely called "Han chauvinism," which saw all non-Hans—Mongolians, Miao, Tibetans . . . and white people—as barbarians. In popular speech, Chinese people still often refer to non-Chinese people as ghosts. I also remember reading books which debated the "Hanness," the racial legitimacy, of the Hakka, my father's people.

But when Chinese workers—most of them peasants—immigrated to the Americas, they came under another form of racism. They lost (to the extent that rural, working class people ever really have it) their ability to define others, and instead became the defined, the circumscribed. They were told who could come, where they could live, where they could work, who they could marry . . . and they were charged a head tax for the privilege of all this.

The Japanese, who believed they were descended from the sun goddess, suffered a similar fate. Their ancestors had repelled the Chinese in the 12th century when the wind of the gods, the

kamikaze, rose up to destroy the invading ships of Kublai Khan. They had dominated Korea and received tribute from Okinawa—that is, to the extent that peasants receive the benefits of tribute. But when they came here they too found that they were told where to live, where they could work, and who they could marry.

While the Chinese, the Japanese, the Koreans, the Vietnamese, and the Filipinos had fought each other in their old countries, and sometimes continued to do battle in the new, they had one thing in common. Here they were all branded with a mark which read "Oriental." Before, they had each only seen themselves as east or west or south of a given mountain, a town, or an island. Here they were collectively and permanently east of something . . . or someone. And while one was occasionally singled out above the others for praise or hostility, so that they were seen as too rich and buying up all the land, or too poor and working below market value, or owing allegiance to a threatening foreign power, or flooding the land with refugees and street gangs, the makers of laws and decisions really couldn't tell one from the other, and could only see the yellow of their skins. In World War II the Canadian government issued but-

tons which read "I am Chinese" to distinguish the wearer from the Japanese "enemy." There are stories of buttons being lent to friends so that they could pass. To the Japanese, the Filipinos, the Chinese, the Koreans and the Vietnamese, their skin had of course been just skin. But then, maybe even some of them began to look at their hands and say that they were yellow. Soon, rather than different shades of human, they began to notice that the hands of others were white, brown, red and black.

Asian consciousness only begins to eclipse national consciousness in the context of white racism, and particularly as experienced here in the diaspora. Not surprisingly then, the struggle for Asians to reclaim our subjecthood (or to shed our otherness) has been phrased as a tug of war between yellow and white. But there is something wrong with this binary opposition. Non-white people are also subjects in the sense that we have agency and are not simply victims of oppression. Though the particular ideology of racism in which we live promotes whiteness, everyone, no matter what their colour or status, has the ability to invoke it—to be racist in other words. While some obviously have greater access to it than others, power is more fluid and negotiable than is some-

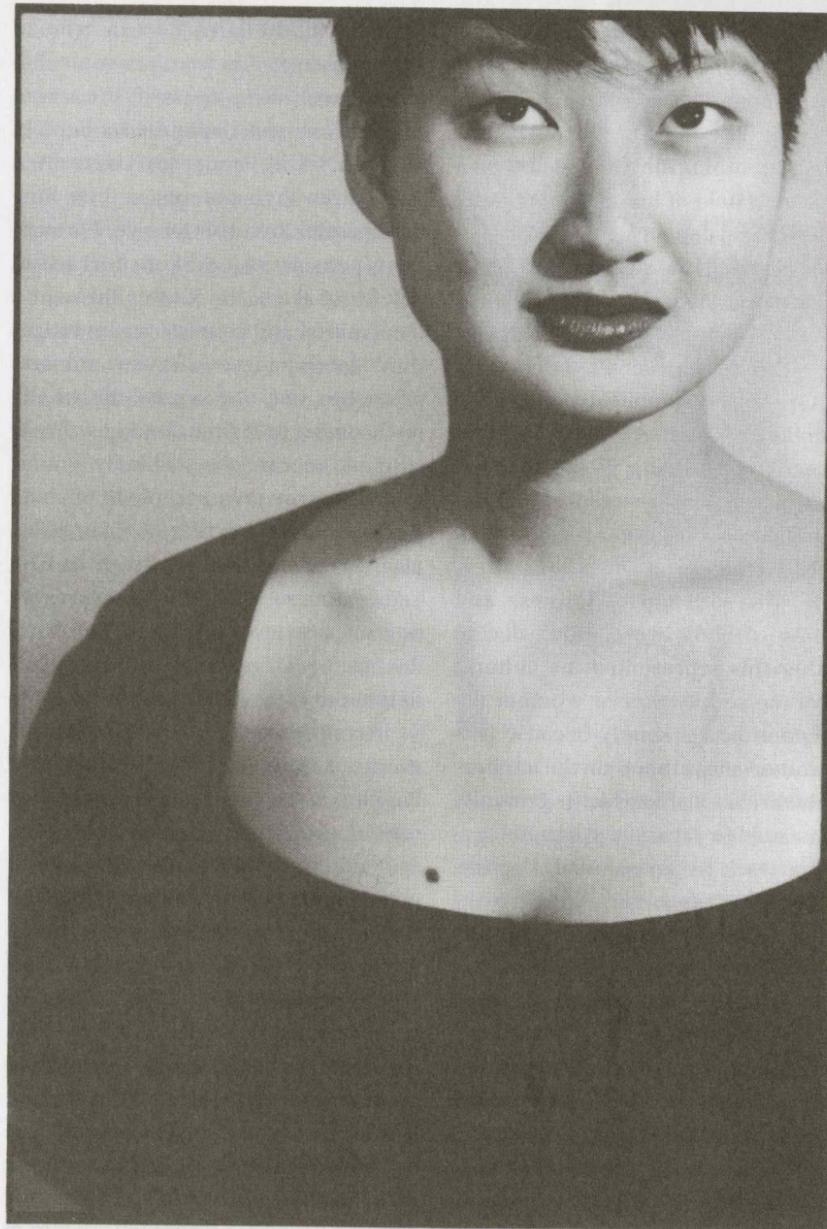


Photo by Rick McGinnis, courtesy CFMDC.

STILL FROM *SALLY'S BEAUTY SPOT* BY HELEN LEE.

times acknowledged. In addition, our own national chauvinisms often threaten to upset the tenuous unity that is important in our political struggles.

At this year's *Festival of Festivals*, my attention was drawn to a small number of films by Asian directors which addressed issues of identity and politics beyond a simple axis of white and yellow. They were part of a larger number of works reflecting the cross-cultural confrontation that is now the norm in our post-modern, post-colonial world.

Examining the place of the Asian subject in the diaspora, films such as Sook-Yin Lee's hilarious *Escapades of One Particular Mr. Noodle* looked at the dilemmas of growing up yellow in a white world. Most however focused on immigration, the initial point of contact, with all its trauma, liberation and eventual resignation. In Solrun Hoaas's *Aya*, a Japanese woman settles in Australia as the wife of a soldier returning after the Allied occupation of Japan. Set in the U. S., *Farewell, China* by Hong Kong's

Clara Law is built around the current exodus from the People's Republic of China. Harrison Liu's *Strange Dialogue* is a subjective account of the actor/director's exile in Canada.

While the issue of the yellow subject in a white dominated world has been the focal point of much deliberation, there are much more ancient confrontations. The histories and cultures of China and Japan, for example, have been intertwined for over a thousand years. Yet the relationship between the two countries has long been one of rivalry, mistrust and direct confrontation. Since the particularly violent occupation of China by Japanese imperial forces in the early part of this century, relations between the two nations (and their peoples) have been at an historic low. It is only in the last few years that mutual economic interests have brought the respective governments into formal negotiation. In 1985 the official thaw was celebrated with a Chinese-Japanese co-production titled *The Go Masters*. As might be expected, this film wallowed in a self-conscious excess of sentimental benevolence.

This year, British-trained Hong Kong director Ann Hui has again taken up the theme of Sino-Japanese relations in a film that is entirely different in tone and entirely interesting. *Song of the Exile* covers a broad historical and geographical sweep. From the Second World War to the mid-'70s, the film's action moves from Britain to Japan, the two imperial powers which most impacted on modern China. The middle section takes place in Macao, Hong Kong, and Manchuria, three wounds on the body of China, before finally closing in the People's Republic. However, despite the Chinese penchant for long, complicated plot lines, and unlike most epics, *Song of the Exile* effectively personalizes the legacy of one of history's tragic events.

The film opens in London during the early '70s. Hueyin has just finished university. Her attempt at job hunting is

interrupted by a pressing request to return to Hong Kong for her sister's wedding. Hueyin's truncated independence is visually underlined by her submission to having her long, mod hair cut and permed to match her mother's hairstyle for the wedding. With her sister married and in Canada, Hueyin is left to live alone with her widowed mother. Their relationship is full of tension, suspicion and rebuke. As Hueyin defends herself from her mother's accusations of uncaring, a series of flashbacks reveals her mother's history.

Hueyin's parents met in Manchuria at the end of the Japanese occupation of China. Her father was a soldier with the Guomindong and her mother a Japanese civilian. Hueyin was brought up in Macao in the house of her paternal grandparents, who disapproved of her mother and did everything that they could to steal the child's affection, pitting her against her own mother. It is only when the family moved to Hong Kong to rejoin the father that Hueyin's mother apparently learned to speak Chinese. Hueyin only realized that her mother was not Chinese when, as a teenager, it was pointed out to her by her sister.

As a journalist for Hong Kong television, Hueyin works with footage of the waning of the Cultural Revolution. Her desire to visit her grandparents in China is counterposed to her mother's sudden determination to visit her own homeland. Finally, Hueyin accompanies her to Japan. Hueyin's mother, who seems so Chinese throughout the first part of the film, switches into perfect Japanese as she temporarily resumes her life as Aiko.

Song of the Exile cleverly plays off Japanese and Chinese chauvinisms, steering clear of simplistic dichotomies of victim and villain. Aiko's character is delineated with great complexity. Her petty manipulations, her delight in the failings of her Japanese contemporaries, ward against a representation which

is purely symbolic or strategic. At the humorous point of climax, after having been in Japan for some time, Aiko decides it is time to "go home." Unconsciously mouthing the same stereotypes her in-laws held of her, she complains to Hueyin that Japanese food is always served cold and that she longs for good, hot Cantonese food which doesn't "leave the stomach empty."

Wu Nien-Jen's screenplay offers great insight into the complicated structure of emotions which characterizes familial bonds. The rendering of the mother-daughter tensions seemed totally familiar. It also struck me as recognizably Chinese. Discussing the movie afterwards with a group of Chinese and Japanese friends, we couldn't decide whether this represented the cultural bias of the scriptwriter or whether my perception arises simply because it is the mother-son rather than the mother-daughter relationship which is generally represented in Japanese cinema.

As a work by a seasoned director, *Song of the Exile* is surprisingly awkward at times. In London, Hueyin and her friends are shown to do nothing but giggle. And the film asks much of its audience to believe that the young Hueyin would not have noticed that her mother spoke funny or, as the script suggests, said nothing at all for years. Yet just when the film threatens to devolve into sentimentality or travelogue, especially in Japan, disaster is averted with a perceptive observation, which re-engages attention.

Song of the Exile displays a willingness to forgive the wrongs of the past. *Senso Daughters* unburies the past so that the wrongs are not forgotten or, hopefully, repeated. Both processes are necessary for healing. Through interviews with old soldiers, army doctors and nurses, and New Guinean people whose country was occupied by the invading forces, Japanese director Noriko Sekiguchi explores the taboo area of sex during the Japanese expansion into the

Pacific. Hundreds of Korean women were conscripted as "comfort women"—forced prostitutes—to satisfy the sexual needs of overseas Japanese soldiers. In addition, young Papuan girls were often taken from their parents or their husbands under threat of violence. Through first person voice-over narration, Sekiguchi leads the viewer through a determined and courageous investigation. Her Japanese interview subjects are polite, but, one senses, not wholly forthcoming with what they know. Their studied ignorance is strikingly similar to the German townspeople in Michael Verhoeven's fiction film *The Nasty Girl*, also screened at the Festival. In it, a young woman decides to write an essay on how her town resisted—the Nazis during the Third Reich and finds her neighbours less than cooperative.

In contrast to the reserved responses of the Japanese interviewees, the Papuans once talking, are completely candid about their experiences. Interspersed between the interviews, three potent images recur: photographs of the Korean women getting ready to be transported overseas; a Papuan man who is proud to show off his ability to speak Japanese, surrealistically chanting old nationalist songs on a beach; contemporary footage of old people bowing in reverence to the emperor outside the palace walls in Japan. *Senso Daughters* is a powerful tool for progressive Japanese forces whose aim is to counter the revision of history as a prelude to possible re-militarization.

In Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, after the angry crowd has demolished Sal's Pizzeria, they turn to the other symbol of external exploitation, the Korean grocery store. In the heat of confrontation, the owner anxiously defends his business by sputtering something to the effect of "I Black too!" In a world divided into black and white, the Asian is asked to choose on which side of the fence he sits. In this film the Korean shop owner's espousal of Black

identity seems fuelled solely by questions of expediency and immediate self interest. Yet it (enigmatically) works and the crowd reluctantly moves on—for the time being.

With the ingenious use of a mole, New York-based Canadian filmmaker Helen Lee similarly phrases the question in *Sally's Beauty Spot*. In this short, experimental film, an Asian woman's obsessive attempt to erase a mark from her breast is framed as a struggle with identity and racialized notions of beauty. This narrative is juxtaposed with a brilliant meditation on spectatorship, as the off-screen voices of Asian women (and quotes from theorist Homi K. Bhabha) interrogate the 1960 Hollywood film *The World of Suzy Wong*, unleashing a multiplicity of readings and positionalities in relation to the film as text. As Sally rethinks her mole from blemish to beauty mark, the metaphor is literalized on-screen as an embrace with a Black man. Her cover-all make-up spills onto the floor as the words "black is" are typed onto a sheet.

From the '60s we know that the missing word is "beautiful." But what about yellow? *Sally's Beauty Spot* is densely packed and does not lend itself to a literal reading. Yet it leaves itself open to an interpretation which suggests that our struggle as Asians involves locating ourselves within a Black politics? The white/Black binarism is underlined by the same framing being used as Sally kisses a white man in the early part of the film. For what it's worth, Sally never kisses an Asian.

In Britain, many Asian political activists are questioning their use of "Black" as self-description. There the term has come to be used in the same way as the euphemism "people of colour" is in North America. But as both Pratibha Parmar and Sunil Gupta have stated in recent lectures in Toronto, Asians in Britain have felt increasingly excluded by the specificity the word also carries from its origins in the American Civil



STILL FROM ANN HUI'S *SONG OF EXILE*.

Rights Movement. At the same time, this is paralleled by the increasing tendency among North Americans to eschew the word "Black" in favour of "African." For sure, the struggle over naming can degenerate into silliness and political distraction. (It is worth noting that both people of the Indian subcontinent and yellow people lay claim to the word "Asian.") Yet the power of the word and the right to name oneself are undeniable. What lies behind these discussions is an attempt by diasporic peoples to situate ourselves in relation to the dominant powers and to each other.

It is not necessary to claim Blackness for Asians to be in solidarity with people of African descent. In fact, I would argue that we can do so only through speaking from where we are—which is neither Black nor white. In Michelle Mohabeer's *Exposure*, from the *Five Feminist Minutes* series produced by the National Film Board's Studio D, two people form a conversation. They are both lesbian but one is a Canadian of Japanese descent, the other with roots in Africa and the Caribbean. Though the context is

somewhat stilted and self-conscious, the film represents a significant move away from a fixation with the master to talk to each other face up. There is engagement with black and yellow, not as metaphors, but as people.

The struggle against racism is not one of finding a convenient (or seemingly politically correct) drawer to sit in. It first of all involves the traumatic but ultimately liberating task of seeing that the boundaries of race are not natural but socially constructed. It also entails working with race not simply as one autonomous piece of the mantra "race, class and gender." The racism I experience as a middle class, gay, Chinese man is articulated differently from that of a middle class, heterosexual, Chinese man or a working class, Chinese lesbian. Questions of class, gender and sexuality must be raised within the politics of race and vice versa. It is significant that all of the films that I have written about are made by women. What have the boys been doing? ●

Richard Fung is a Toronto-based video producer.

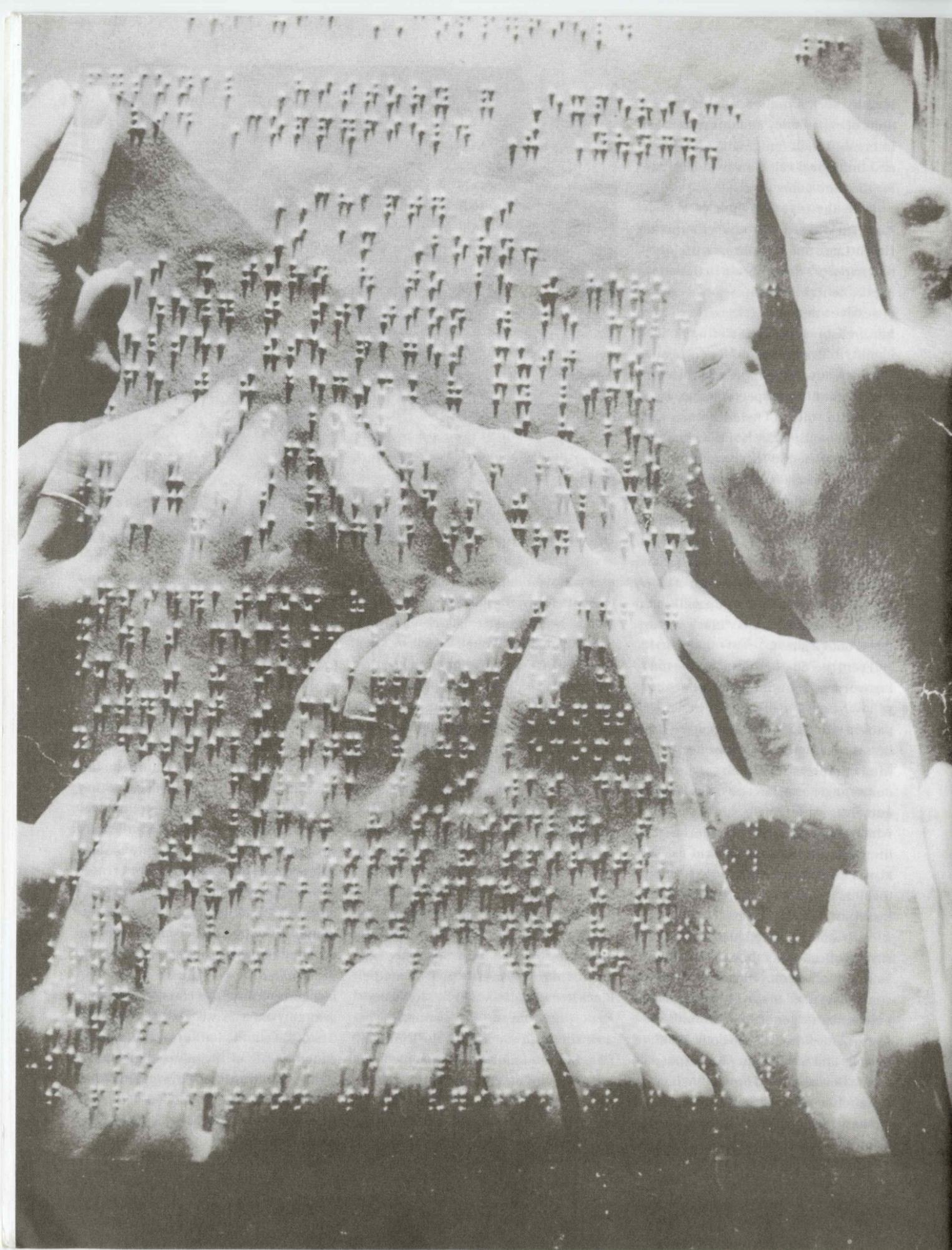


Photo: Dick Walters

DISABILITY: towards the transparent

by Sandra Carpenter

Hope

I met Bob Hope once.

I was 11 years old and I had just moved to Toronto from Ottawa. My new home was a residence for disabled children. In those days there were 48 of us living there and, as I was soon to discover, mass "outings" were a common occurrence.

In those days I was generally a very trusting and honest child who still believed in most of what I had been taught by my parents. Moreover I was under the impression that the reason I was taught these things was because they were part of a package for rules for living that all people subscribed to. In short, I was still way up there on the naive scale.

This is a story of descent from naivety. First off, they rolled us all up a big wooden plank into the back of a transport truck—usually a beer truck—probably donated, but I never asked about that. It was all quite safe. Staff rode in the back with us and there were three or four police escorts. It must have looked strange from the outside. People must have wondered why beer suddenly became important enough to warrant assignment for the men in blue.

We ended up at the O'Keefe Centre. There was an air of excitement. We were going to watch Bob Hope emcee the Easter Seals show. I mean—this was great! Something you only got to see on television! Disappointment soon followed, however, as we were ushered into a lobby with hundreds of other people and placed in front of large television monitors. We felt as though we'd been conned. My keep-your-eyes-open-for-anything radar was fully activated.

Something was wrong here. They had cameras on us. One minute we'd see the show on the monitor and the next minute, we'd see ourselves laughing after something Bob Hope said, or looking mesmerized while dancers leaped across the stage. Slowly it dawned on me that we were seeing the same thing on the monitors that people at home were. And they would have been thinking that we were sitting right up there, in the front row, within kissing distance of Bob. It was all planned, I realized. Calculated manipulation of the situation which achieved the desired effect. This was turning out to be a real education for me, but the main event was yet to come.

Intermission...

I saw these people talking to the kids way down the row. They gave the kid something and moved on to the next one. When they got to me they started saying how lucky I was because I was going to meet Bob Hope. And when I met him I was going to give him this present. They shoved a blue cardboard box with tissue paper in it cradling one of those tacky maple leaf ashtrays and said, "On behalf of all the crippled children of Saskatchewan, I would like to present you with this gift." Could I remember that? "But I'm not from Saskatchewan," I meekly protested. "That doesn't matter," they told me with authority, laughing their isn't-she-just-precious laugh and moved on. I felt totally stupid. I would have thought a representative from Saskatchewan should be from Saskatchewan or at least appointed or selected by people from Saskatchewan. Feeling stupid soon dissolved into feeling guilty. I was lying to Bob. I had never even seen a prairie or wheat field. And yet... Adults had given me my assignment and I had been taught to respect adults. (Faulty childhood lesson number 102.) I swallowed my ethics and prepared to meet Bob.

My performance was impeccable. I gave Bob the ashtray, even though I would have been embarrassed to give it to a dog, and I let poor Bob think I was Sandy from Saskatchewan. He must have felt honoured thinking that kids had been flown from all over Canada to present his gifts. Yes, indeed. It must have made old Bob think it was all worthwhile.

As the years went by, the memory faded and threatened to erode into fantasy. I became less and less sure that I had ever actually met Mr. Hope. But on my grandmother's wall is a framed photograph of Bob and me and the blue box. In the picture Mr. Hope is bent over a little girl in a wheelchair. His hand is outstretched almost touching the box. The girl has her hair pulled back in a braid tied at the top and bottom by bows. She wears a white blouse, a dare jumper, and white knee socks. The two faces are in profile and the more you look at them, the more similarities emerge. Hairline, chin, ski-jump noses. They both gaze intently into the box as though the object inside it were a living thing. Her mouth is open as though she is saying something. She looks happy and slightly awed by the proximity of the "star." But I know what's really in her mind: What's a polite word for "bullshit"?

STILL FROM THE FILM *COMING HOME*.



In the past, life in institutions was the only option for people with disabilities who could not care for themselves or whose families could not care for them. It made it easier for society to avoid us. Even today, there are more disabled people in institutions than out of them, especially those with "untidy" disabilities. People with disabilities who could primarily care for themselves would sometimes be found in circus side shows displayed as "freaks." When I was young you could still view a "freak" at a side show. I remember once a friend of mine met the guy who played "Frog Boy" at a side show. "Frog Boy" had a form of muscular dystrophy which had caused his spine to collapse. This was a shock to me. Even I thought "freaks" were freaks. Something else—not me. But I had a form of muscular dystrophy and a collapsed spine (corrected, sort of, by surgery); otherwise that could have been me: "Frog Girl." I knew then why my mother never let me go to the side shows. Something major shifted in my thinking, then, towards myself and all my other disabled friends. At that time we lived in an institution. It was a children's hospital for chronically disabled children. We hated it there. We were treated like non-people. I realized that to the outside world we were invisible and that on the rare occasions when we were outside, we were viewed by others as oddities. When I remembered my own attitude towards circus freaks, I had my first hint of the perceptual gulf between the people who are not disabled and the people who are.

Canada has a pretty good international reputation for its human rights record and its treatment of people with disabilities. But, of course, those of us who live here know how far we still have to go. And I am not just talking about people with disabilities.

1981 was the International Year of Disabled Persons. 1992 will mark the end of the Decade of Disabled Persons. And yet, disability issues remain at a relatively low profile. Max Yalden, chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, explains the minimal progress in terms of a "lack of political will" required for the removal of barriers which keep people with disabilities out of the mainstream. Between the lines of his analysis, however, is the conclusion that, in part, it was our fault. We did not put enough pressure on the system. We did not "roar."

Additionally we find that disability rights do not fit neatly into human rights or social policy agendas. They have fallen between jurisdictions. This results in a lack of profile for disability issues on the policy makers' agenda as well as difficulty for disabled people and groups to force action from them. The efforts on both sides, them and us, and on all fronts, become diffuse. Even if we were to roar, we're not sure who to roar at.

This situation is further complicated by the unidentifiable nature of the disability collective. "Disabled people" are a slippery hodgepodge of conditions, diseases, injuries, genetic disorders and malformations both visible and invisible, all validated to varying degrees by disabled individuals themselves, the cultures they come from and the times they live in. We form a disjointed, severed body, often not recognizing an injury inflicted upon one of our parts as something which belongs to ourself. People with AIDS. Are they disabled or aren't they? When defining disability, the definitions vary between disciplines. Legal definitions may vary from medical, which may vary from rehabilitation,



which may vary from private or public income assurance and compensation programs. More and more, however, we are demanding the right to define ourselves, individually and collectively. Less and less will we allow systems to carve us up as a group, based on circumstance as to how, why and when we became disabled.

The need for the "political will" to remove barriers to access for people with disabilities (PWDs) should not be understated. If politics are a system, they are a system of people, individuals within a system. The first step towards the development of the needed will to remove these barriers is to completely change thinking towards the value of a human being and even oneself. Bear in mind that concepts of perfection are almost entirely a social construct and within that social construction PWDs represent the imperfect.

Society cannot confront disability until the individuals within it effectively confront their own imperfections and mortality. Our society fails in this confrontation. We increasingly remove ourselves from the fragile, imperfect nature of our bodies. Even the emergence of the "health kick" is more preoccupied with the denial of aging and a fear of normal body breakdown than it is with simply being healthy. We are becoming a population of people who think we can exercise or special diet our way to perfect health and bodies. Injected into this scenario is a plethora of alternative medicine types who have created a "New Age" population convinced that the right "medicine" coupled with the right attitude can cure anything. Don't misunderstand me. I do recognize the merits of alternative medicine, but I think that we have to honestly examine our motives behind this almost obsessive pursuit.

People with disabilities are often living examples of how the body can betray you in life and through a fluke of genetic predisposition and circumstance, you too can end up, or give birth to, a person with a disability. We therefore grate on the consciousness of a people increasingly preoccupied with control: control of economy, control of environment, control of ourselves and our bodies. People with disabilities are reminders of how our very being is often beyond control. Rather than accept, rationally, that disability is an unavoidable fact of life, we deny the reality of disability. We deny that it can happen to us. And we somehow blame disabled people for being that way. We protect ourselves by naively perpetuating the attitude that discussions relating to disability have nothing to do with we who are not disabled. It is someone else's problem. But it is not, and because it is not, denial of disability cheats us from realizing that we owe it to ourselves, and the unforeseen contingencies of our respective futures, to develop good disability rights policy. We owe it to ourselves to support programs which ensure that all individuals can participate to the fullest extent possible in the society around them, irrespective of disability. If the mainstream does not take ownership of disability issues, they remain devalued and each day hundreds of people lose their basic civil rights because they become disabled—their right to housing and everything from living with their own family to having a job.

Although the rights of people with disabilities can primarily be lost because of access barriers particular to the disability, the end result is the same. Individuals lose their freedom to associate. Without a

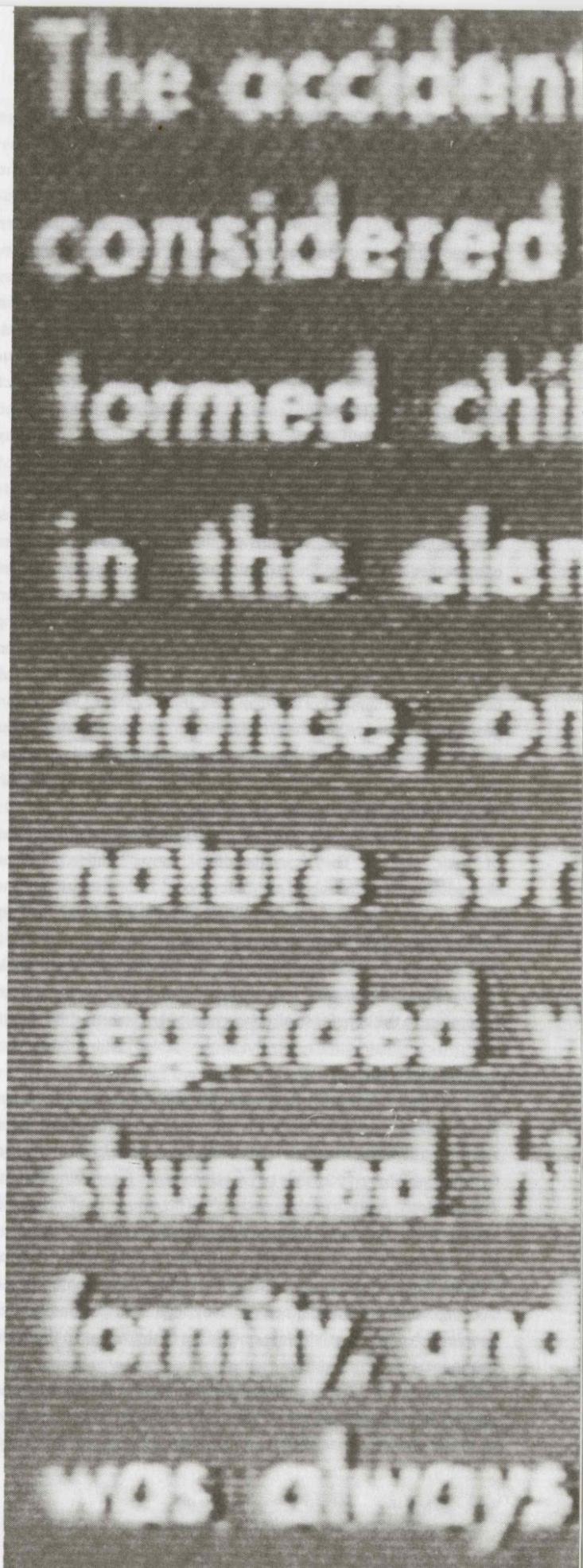
CHILDREN LEARNING SIGNING
DETAIL OF A 19TH CENTURY ENGRAVING.

right to participation, we remain invisible in society. We are restricted from being contributing members of society and cause needless drains on social programs. Unemployment, for example, is twice as high for PWDs as for others. Although that may not sound too bad, consumer advocates say that unemployment among the disabled is as high as 70 per cent. The discrepancy in figures is accounted for in two ways. One is how you define unemployment and the other is how wide a net you cast when defining disability. Of those receiving disability allowance through Ontario's long term income maintenance program (Family Benefits Allowance), 60 per cent of the recipients are on the payroll because of unemployability relating to disability. The rest are sole support parents, primarily women. Now, if "unemployability relating to disability" can be defined in terms of certain social or environmental or design barriers, we have an obligation to remove them. No one should be barred from participation, it's too expensive—financially as well as in lost human potential.

Specific concerns of specific disability groups can sometimes seem at odds or with varying and apparently contradictory agendas. This has also impeded the progress of disability rights. The Deaf Rights movement, for example, promotes itself as a distinct society because, for them, language is the access issue. For a Deaf person who communicates with sign-language, the access barrier is communication with the hearing world. Access is achieved primarily through sign-language interpreters. They advocate specialized services and educational facilities, in particular, to address the language issue. Mainstreaming of totally Deaf students, even with interpreters, does not afford the rich social interaction so important to individual development that a specialized school, such as Gallaudet College (a Washington university exclusively for Deaf and sign-language users), can. Although it may sound like a case for segregation, what they are promoting is the benefit of a community, which, for them is defined as other Deaf people. It only sounds like a contradiction of the principles of participation through integration that many other disability groups promote. But as a movement which policy makers are compelled to respond to, which on the one hand promotes integration and on the other promotes segregation, the contradiction is difficult to resolve. It can therefore justify inaction, based on an inability to make a clear decision in response to a clear demand. Within the movement these apparent contradictions are rationalized within a framework which recognizes individual choice and control as its central principles. For us, the inaction is not justified.

If you look through the words and language that various disability-specific representatives use in their struggle toward equality, you can see many other common principles and experiences. Something that is specifically evident in the lives of people with disabilities is that we all share an experience of being treated like non-persons. Women who've had babies know this feeling; in fact, anyone who has gone head to head with the medical profession knows this feeling. But for us it is multiplied. It is multiplied because our disabilities are chronic. In fact one way to determine where to draw the line

IMAGE FROM THE FILM *FREAKS*
FRAGMENT OF INTRODUCTORY TITLES.



between a health problem and a disability is when it becomes chronic—something you adjust to and live with everyday.

It is not the common practice it once was to perpetuate the invisibility of people with disabilities by shutting them away in institutions, although it is still far more common than you may think. There are three times as many disabled people in institutions as out of them. They are invisible to the extent that it is only in recent years that they obtained the right to vote. Surveys which attempt to collect data on disability, historically have not surveyed those that lived in institutions. People in institutions are dangerously vulnerable although the institution itself was supposedly created as a means to care for and protect disabled persons. There are scores of stories known among disabled people of abuse, misdiagnosis and maltreatment. But the move away from institutions has been slow and fraught with problems.

Many communities aren't ready to re-integrate the ex-inmates of these institutions. Many communities don't have the capacity, or think they don't have the capacity, to provide the support that some of these people need to become active participants in community life. Unfortunately these opinions are most often based on assumptions, not on a knowledge, of the real needs. In addition we find society moving further and further away from values of mutual cooperation and support. People tend to be isolated, remote from family members or communities of support. They may have small circles of friends, but generally nothing has replaced the larger personal support networks that were common in the days of the extended family or congregations of worship. And communities generally don't want people with disabilities to be visible in their neighbourhoods.

Parents of able-bodied children fight to keep disabled children out of "their" schools. They fear that their "normal" children will be slowed down to the disabled child's level or that the attention of the teacher will be disproportionately allocated to the disabled child. They never stop to think how they would feel, and what they would do, if their own children were prevented from attending school with their friends. This is all the more ironic when the evidence points, without exception, to the benefits to all concerned when disabled children are included in mainstream schools. And non-disabled children learn how to value difference.

Sometimes individuals who are not living in institutions are just as invisible as their counterparts inside. People with disabilities are not a common sight on the street. Because I use a wheelchair, I only go to places which are accessible to wheelchairs. An interesting "catch-22" develops. A place is not accessible. The owner does not think he/she needs to install a ramp because people in wheelchairs never go there. People in wheelchairs never go there because there is not a ramp. There is no mean-spirited conspiracy, just some limited thinking, but it is a way of keeping us invisible. The less one sees of people with disabilities, the less one thinks of them, and so the cycle continues.

Our mainstream political process is very bad for access. Many all candidates meetings are held in places with no ramp access (a barrier to those who use wheelchairs) and are typically advertised through

the cheapest medium, print (a barrier to those who are Blind). Sign-language interpreters are rarely seen at all candidates meetings (a barrier to those who are Deaf); however, I'm sure the organizers would all say they would obtain one if they were asked. The trouble is that sign language interpreters have to be booked about two weeks ahead of an event and even then you can't be sure of getting one. We have had no visibility in the mainstream political arena. It should not be surprising then to see that we are not thought of on mainstream political agendas. However, history was made in the recent Ontario election when Gary Malkowski, a Deaf man who communicates through sign-language, was elected Member of Provincial Parliament—the first sign-language speaking M.P.P. ever in Ontario. When Bob Rae, leader of the winning New Democratic Party, made his acceptance speech, a sign-language interpreter was on the stage behind him.

As invisible as we are in the mainstream political process, we remain so in the alternative or more marginal communities such as the arts. Although on many fronts one can look to the arts communities to offer counterpoints to the mainstream culture, there is no support for art or artists to counterpoint mainstream treatment of people with disabilities. Although largely through the sin of omission, again because we are not visible within that community, access, or the lack of it, is the primary culprit. Alternative galleries due to budget constraints tend to be in older buildings which are not accessible. Promotion is through print, which of course is a problem for those with visual impairments. And although in Toronto, there are one or two of the smaller galleries that have some degree of wheelchair access, most do not. The reason, most certainly, is the shoestring budget most exist on but the end result is the same. Out of sight, out of mind. And someone with a disability who is an artist would be largely excluded from his/her community of peers on both an informal and formal level due to a lack of access.

Historically, people with disabilities have been steered into more traditional occupations. This is largely because the professionals charged with the mission of rehabilitating people with disabilities, and the systems they work in, tend to be very conservative. There are not many disabled artists. The few that there are do not primarily discuss disability through their work. On the other hand, I have seen work which struggles with issues of mortality and decay, or more generally, with the body. And although they do not profess to, they say a lot to me about being disabled. In a recent show at the Art Gallery of Ontario including Doug Walker and Lee Dickson, one of Dickson's pieces had text which read, "This boy's heart runs on batteries." It was an ad for some high tech company, but I found this one line very amusing. And although many others may have too, I think that there was a dimension in it for me that was unique because I thought about how "running on batteries" relates to being disabled. There is a growing dependence for more severely disabled people on newer and more complex technologies.

Artist Gerard Pas discusses disability very effectively through his work, although to categorize him as a "disabled artist" betrays the value placed on discussion of the imperfect when that imperfection deals with

disability. To categorize his work as "disabled art" is an equal betrayal. The label immediately relegates the discussion and those participating in it to a secondary status in comparison to "loftier" topics. By contrast the work of artists like John Brown, whose work discusses issues of physicality and mortality through representations of the body, its movements, characteristics and decay, is not defined in a disability framework and is therefore not so readily dismissed. And yet, the varied states of being disabled are nothing more, nor less, than the manifestations of the physical and mortal realities that we, as human beings, all live with. So although I may see the work of John Brown and Gerard Pas sharing a theme, others may not. Others may not look at Pas' work beyond its disability imagery.

Mainstream media is notorious for its uninformed portrayal of people with disabilities and our issues. With a growing awareness of the importance and power media has as a force to educate and alter social consciousness, disability groups have made inroads in the world of broadcast media. What began as a weekly radio program called *Radio Connection* aired on CIUT (University of Toronto's station), evolved into a television program aired weekly on the CBC and the World News channel. The Centre for Independent Living in Toronto, a community-based information resource centre run by people with disabilities, began the radio program as a means to reach and educate broader audiences about the people behind the disabilities. It was also hoped that it would be effective as a consciousness-raising tool for PWDs themselves who were isolated and out of touch with the disability movement. The project with CBC began shortly thereafter. The weekly current affairs show, *Disability Network*, is the first ever for a major North American television network. These programs, produced and hosted by people with disabilities, are a major step forward for the community.

People are afraid of people with disabilities. They are afraid for two reasons. The first being a basic human fear of mortality and physical (including mental) decay. There is not much you can do to help people deal with that fundamental fear. This is something that, through the course of life, a person either learns to deal with or they don't. The second is, more simply, a fear of the unknown. People with disabilities are still largely unknown in the mainstream because we are still largely excluded from the mainstream. Sometimes that exclusion can be as simple as a question of architectural design, yet because of this, many people go through life without ever really knowing someone with a disability. They never went to high school or college or worked with someone with a disability. Ironically, there is hardly a single person who will go through life without experiencing disability in their own family: brother-in-law Bob off work with a back injury; 80-year-old Grama whose arthritis put her in a wheelchair last year. And chances are, when it happens, you will not recognize it as a disability. We automatically have different ways of thinking about those disabilities because we knew the people first. The disabilities, although they are visible to us, are essentially transparent. This has to be the goal of the successful integration of people with disabilities. The end result of the desire to

participate to the fullest extent possible in the world in which we live must be that the disability becomes, not invisible, but transparent.

Various disability types have more difficulty being accommodated in the mainstream than others, not the least of which are the large number of people who have disabilities which are not visible. To be very simplistic about it, you can group disabilities into functional factions: mobility, sensory, intellectual, emotional, learning and invisible. Although "invisible disabilities" rate a category all their own, all the other disability groups have people within them whose disabilities are essentially invisible. And what people with invisible disabilities have is a credibility problem. Because they are not recognized as disabled, they have a harder time than the obviously disabled people do when it comes to getting the specialized services that they may need. They do not get recognition on a social level, which is a mixed blessing, because although they may be able to "pass" when they want to as non-disabled people, they are not afforded the consideration or accommodation they may need to compensate for the disability. The Blind person who doesn't "look blind" nearly gets run down at a street corner; the Deaf person who copes generally well in the hearing world is thought of as a snob because they did not answer when you called hello across the street. People with the not-so-obvious physical disabilities appear lazy because they don't help out when someone moves. The problem is compounded by a social structure that does not support admissions of weakness. Our social structure promotes perfection, preferably the instant variety. The invisibly disabled will continue to face this difficulty until we have a society which will make it O.K. to reveal that you are less than perfect, and once you have done so, won't have additional and false assumptions made about your remaining and often invisible capabilities.

The issue of where to draw the line between a condition which should be more correctly thought of as a health problem than a disability, is another very revealing area to explore. Many people who aren't disabled have health problems. The proportion among the disabled is about the same. The difference is that among people with disabilities sometimes the health problem relates to the disability and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes the disability led to the health problem and sometimes the health problem led to the disability. The types of concessions individuals may need or want as a result of the health problem may not be the same as what they want for the disability. Take me, for example. I've always used a wheelchair, never been able to stand or walk, but when I was 22 I had a brain tumour removed which resulted in a partial paralysis of my face (now, for me, considered a secondary disability). I was totally devastated by this loss at the time, although compared to my primary disability, it was very minor, and found the adjustment to this no easier than an able-bodied counterpart may have had. It's important to remember the individuality we all bring to bear in relating to ourselves and to all of the facets of ourselves, as well as to each other. Avoiding assumptions about others and trying to maintain a genuine way of relating to each other and our world is the only way access issues can be resolved for those with invisible disabilities.

People are less comfortable with people with certain disabilities than others. They find one of the most frightening of all disabilities, next to those like AIDS where your critical health and lifespan are called into question, is to be Blind. Being Blind or in total darkness is a very scary thing to think about to those who are not Blind. Most of us as children go through at least a short phase of being afraid of the dark. But remember how we got over it? You get used to it. You adjust to a different way of seeing in the dark. Think about how, now, it is much more restful to fall asleep in very dark rooms; how we close our eyes to minimize frivolous distraction when we want to listen to music. Being Blind is only scary to people who can see or to those who, until a short time ago, could. For those who have always been Blind, or who have gone Blind slowly, there is simply a different way of seeing. And if you ever find yourself among a group of Blind people, you might end up being the one feeling "impaired." The first time I was at a social gathering predominated by Blind people, I found I did not know the rules. I sat quietly in a corner with no one to talk to until I realized that unless I announced, verbally, my presence, no one would know I was there. I was not used to this. I felt at a distinct disadvantage. I envied my Blind friends who casually sauntered into the room, bumping against each other announcing "Hi! It's me, Sheila" or demanding "Who's this standing between me and the food?!" The party sure warmed up a lot faster than most of the others I'd been to. The key to getting over the fear of any disability is simply to get used to it, to the people. As with any disabilities, when the adjustments are made the disability itself is not the problem.

It's "normal" to be uncomfortable if you are dealing with a disabled person for the first time. It's common to be uncomfortable in any new situation, but it's not good to always avoid them. The only way a new situation becomes a familiar one is through exposure, and then, like eyes adjusting to the dark, the situation becomes assimilated into everyday life. So the exclusion of people with disabilities through the continued failure to remove all possible barriers to their participation will just perpetuate our failure to gain true equality for people with disabilities.

By and large, people still think of the kinds of accommodations that the mainstream world may have to make for the disabled as costly or burdensome or simply beyond reason. History has shown us, though, that when accommodations are made well and in a systemically integrated fashion, everyone benefits. Removing barriers through accommodating disabilities is a way of equalizing our environments. Being Blind, for example, is not the problem; it's the resultant lack of access as a result of being Blind which is. This increasingly information-laden society, and the fact that so much of it is in print, is a Blind person's primary disability. Incorporating a Blind person's need for print alternative communication, audio tapes in particular, would also benefit people who are illiterate and the high mileage commuter who would like to spend time in the car a little more productively.

When they started modifying buildings with stairs, they often put the ramps in right beside the staircase. You may observe when you come across a ramp beside a staircase that many more people will use the ramp than the staircase. People like ramps better, unless they are icy. Ramps in fact, although they may take up more room, are cheaper

to make than a staircase. Less engineering. Ask an architect. So, why keep building staircases? It is a bias towards design. It is what we are most used to. Electric door openers also benefit more than just the disabled. People with their arms full appreciate electric door openers, as do parents with strollers. Even some major hotels use electric door openers now, and they didn't do it for us. It cheaper than hiring someone to hold the door open for you while you carry in your suitcase. So why do these things take so long to appear? It's a bias towards the way we typically think about how to design things.

My disability is not the first thing on my mind. I think about many other things first. Today I am more preoccupied with the crises between Canada and the First Nations, or the war in the Middle East. On an everyday basis I am more preoccupied with thinking about my work, family, friends or even the weather than I am about my disability. The disability was assimilated into my life long ago. I have sought out and found appropriate living quarters and support services. My social and recreational activities evolved into the frequenting of places I can get into with my wheelchair. It is only when I am confronted with something new that I have to stop and think about it. Someone may suggest going somewhere for dinner. If it is a place I haven't been before I have to ask if it is accessible to people in wheelchairs. If it is not, we go somewhere else. The gallery my husband shows at is no longer accessible since it moved. With some planning and innovating, I still attend his openings. This is an inconvenience which we have assimilated. There is not a lot of conscious thought on my part as to the barriers I face as a result of using a wheelchair. I do not expect, ask for or even want an "easy" life. I don't expect my disability to go away. There will always be things I cannot do. I just don't want to be prevented from doing the things I can. Social workers call it self-determination. We call it choice and control. And First Nations call it self-rule. I think, perhaps, that as a disabled person, I can more readily identify with their struggles than with anything else.

Disability rights tend to be the last on the human rights list and the slowest to implement when they are on the list at all. Last on the list because disability issues are perceived to be of concern to minority or specialized groups only. When the policy makers decide on strategic plans to deal with public issues, those on the top of the list are those which are perceived to be of concern to the greatest number of people. Economic issues always dominate. Currently there seems to be a toss up between human rights and environmental issues for second place. Social policy ranks last and disability issues are still largely grouped within a social policy framework. Even when human rights takes second place within the agenda, because disability rights do not fit squarely into human rights, disability issues don't get much profile. They wait their turn on social policy agendas. The invisible among us remain invisible and the rest of us continue on the slow journey towards the transparent. ●

Sandra Carpenter started her career as a disabled spokesperson when she was 11 years old. She was appointed to present a gift to Bob Hope, celebrity host for the 1965 Easter Seals Show, on behalf of "all the crippled children in Saskatchewan." "But I'm not from Saskatchewan," she said. "That doesn't matter," they replied. Five minutes later, she met Bob and since then she has taken her role as representative very seriously. She has never been to Saskatchewan.

REVIEWS

Still courtesy the filmmaker.



STILL FROM AGE 12: LOVE WITH A LITTLE L BY JENNIFER MONTGOMERY.

FILM

4th New York Lesbian & Gay Experimental Film Festival September 10 - 16, 1990

by Susan Kealey

While Toronto will hold its first lesbian and gay film and video festival in the coming year and Montreal has hosted *Image and Nation* since 1988, New York boasts no less than three on-going venues for lesbian and gay work. Given the presence of both a film (*The New Festival*) and a video festival (*Lookout*), an additional "experimental" film festival might seem like a needless splitting of hairs. However, the *New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival*, now in its fourth year, fills a gap in terms of a commitment to and representation of genres and formats that fall

outside that of most lesbian and gay film festivals (super-8 work being a case in point).

Curated since its inception by writer Sarah Schulman and filmmaker Jim Hubbard, the festival does not set thematic programs in advance which, as some might argue, translates into a lack of focus. On the other hand, this degree of openness to what the submissions will bring ensures a program that both resists the formalist canon associated with experimental work and the hardline dogma of choices made to fit a prescribed theme. Thus, when a

particular focus ensues (this year on films by and/or about Black gay men—see review by Jody A. Benjamin, p. 33-36), it reflects themes revealed by the work itself and not imposed by the curators.

Another commendable effort is the festival's commitment to building a history for gay and lesbian experimental film through the screening of older works. This year offerings included the 1922 silent version of *Salome* by Alla Nazimova and early works by Chantal Ackerman, Andy Warhol and John Waters and a 1990 reworking of historical footage from the first gay pride marches in New York (Marguerite Paris' *1970 and 1971 Gay Pride Marches*). While this attempt at establishing a history is commendable, the decision to open the festival with *Portrait of Jason* (Shirley Clarke, 1967), a *cinéma vérité* depiction of Jason Holiday, an out Black gay man, was questionable. A long, problematic work by a white filmmaker, Holiday is manipulated by the filmmaker and, towards the latter half of the film, increasingly humiliated. The curators elected to show only a portion of the film—but neglected to inform the audience, an oversight which both informally and formally (i.e., at a public discussion facilitated by filmmakers Barbara Hammer and Jerry Tartaglia) became the hot discussion topic of the week, with some levying charges of censorship. The (white) curators' decision as to how much of this film was "acceptable" to the audience, whether in terms of content or length, displayed an ambivalence that made this viewer question why they chose to screen *Portrait of Jason* at all since, even in abbreviated form as a stand-alone example of early work, the film did little to set a context for the work by or concerning Black gay men that followed.

All together 51 films from eight countries were presented, 33 of which originated in the U.S. Citing the recent attention given to those American art-

ists denied funding by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the curators aptly point out, "There is much more interesting and important work being made that is never even considered for government funding because it unabashedly concerns itself with the lives of lesbians and gay men and people of colour."

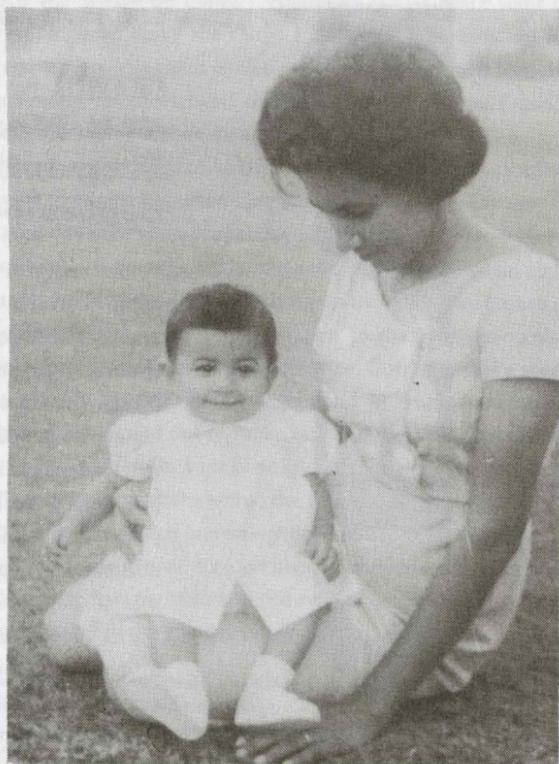
After seven (entertaining) evenings of consecutive viewing, the films that stood out were those that managed to both formally and conceptually reject or subvert dominant (heterosexual) values all the while proposing an interesting contribution to the discourse around sexuality, representation and gender.

While many of the films dealt with the loss of friends and lovers to AIDS, they were not elegiac in nature.

In terms of the lesbian work, which included everything from essentialist woman-in-nature films and the over-produced, histrionic *Way of the Wicked* (Christine Vachon) to *Between* (Claudia Schillinger), lesbian dildo fantasies from

Germany, three films distinguished themselves in their unique treatment of lesbian lives, fantasy and desire. In *Exposure* by Michelle Mohabeer, a discussion takes place between a Black lesbian and an Asian lesbian that deals with issues of identity, difference, family and community. Playing with a variety of narrative and cinematic conventions and idioms, from pulp fiction, butch/femme role playing and the mythology of the Canadian wilderness, *Butch/Femme in Paradise* (Lorna Boschman) spins the tale of a sullen butch meeting a mysterious sex goddess in the wilds of British Columbia. The most enigmatic and challenging of any of the narrative work presented, *Age 12: Love with a Little L* (Jennifer Montgomery) questions the authority of theory, memory and narrative conventions and makes a persuasive case for the sexuality of young women. ●

Susan Kealey, formerly a FUSE editor, is currently trying to sort out the difference between Worter and Fußnote.



STILL FROM *EXPOSURE* BY MICHELLE MOHABEER.

Still courtesy the filmmaker.



Still courtesy Frameline.

STILL FROM *TONGUES UNTIED* BY MARLON RIGGS.

4th New York Lesbian & Gay Experimental Film Festival Focus on Black Gay Men

by Jody A. Benjamin

The 10 presentations in this year's *New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival* which portray Black gay men and lesbians are part of a growing body of work which attempts to critically disrupt dominant notions of us rooted in racism, gender bias and homophobia. Despite their attractive billing, however, there is a gap between those films which attempt complex portraits of Black subjects and those that objectify and tokenize. Contributions such as Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied* and Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* thoughtfully explore constructions of Black gay life, while others such as Shirley Clarke's *A Portrait of Jason* and Isabel Hegner's *Eye to Eye* deny or obscure their (unavoidably) political agendas, presenting a bohemian (though still problematically white) look at Black subjects.

The week-long festival advertised a "focus" (eight films) on work by and/or about Black gay men. Of the 51 total screenings, there were no works by other people of colour and only two shorts by Black lesbians. In a context where the hegemony of white gays and the notion of a singular gay experience are being increasingly challenged, it is important to look at the response, as demonstrated in public gay gatherings such as this festival. The positioning of these eight films lends a progressive "ambiance" to the festival which, if one takes the number of people colour attending as one simple measure, is void of substance. Since there was little connection between the eight films which featured Black gays and other festival films, it is likely that the meaning of this year's "focus" went unappreciated by many festival goers. For the predominantly white audience, business as usual—where the best of Black art is on display without a concomitant examination of racism—was the order of the day.

Shown at the festival in its entirety for the first time was Jenny Livingston's *Paris is Burning: A documentary on New York's Black and Latin gay street*

culture the film takes its name from a Black drag ball. Of the four films by white filmmakers which feature Black gays, Livingston's is perhaps the most politicized and empathetic, though it is ultimately limited by its outside-in, liberalized perspective.

In the film, she portrays a diverse group of subjects who give personal accounts of an urbanized, impoverished gay life of which homelessness and hustling are often a part. The "balls," as the film illustrates, are at least three generations old and are celebratory events—a combination fashion show and dance contest—where Black and Latin "queens" can affirm otherwise despised and embattled existences.

At various moments, Livingston cuts from interviews with "the family" (queens and their "children") to scenes of the privileged white worlds of New York's Madison and Fifth Avenues upon which desire for the ultimate in economic and personal freedom is focused. Whites are shown traipsing in and out of expensive boutiques, casually evincing the kind of self-assured indifference that comes with wealth and power. Film subjects like Venus Extravaganza (who

was murdered by a client in a Times Square hotel room before completion of the film) speak longingly of such material luxury and security.

The intended irony in this film is that this culture of talented folks and undeniably "grand" personalities is, in fact, a part of an oppressed underclass. Yet Livingston's looking glass perspective is sympathetic to a fault; it fails to critically examine the power relations which have always produced a racialized underclass. By focusing on affluent white folks, it becomes difficult to understand the position of liberal, gay, or otherwise sympathetic whites in structures of power. *Paris is Burning* is hip, seductive and pleasurable to watch. However, since we know that the appropriation of Black culture is as American as apple pie, it becomes important to question who this film is really for and why it should be acclaimed at this historical moment.

Two festival films portrayed Black men who posed nude for gay white photographers: Jack Walls in Hegner's *Eye to Eye*, and Jack Waters' *The Male Gayze*. The latter is a reflection on the power struggle which existed in a friendship between Waters and a Dutch choreographer and "amateur" photographer. Waters posed for pictures which he was told were solely for private use. He discovered sometime later that a photo of his body (everything above his shoulders had been cropped) had been exhibited in a museum show and was also being sold as a postcard. In a conversation I had with Waters, he commented on his reaction to the photo: "The big shock was to see the way the picture had been cropped, just to see the figure which I knew was myself without my head was just really strange. It's like seeing yourself decapitated, is the only way I can describe it. It's very degrading in a sense for what the head represents, you know, the mind and the identity. For it to be so easily expended with was really the biggest shock."

Though the racism which characterizes Water's experience may seem apparent, he explains it differently: "[The situation was exploitive] not so much because he's white and I'm Black, but he was older than I was, considerably older, considerably more experienced. In the dance milieu we were both in, [he] was considerably more superior."

In his film, Waters narrates his experience over an unrelated sequence of images which show a white family relaxing at home in the summer. No shot of his face ever appears in the film which underscores the point that Waters is not the *object* of *The Male Gayze*, but rather its subject and filmmaker. "It is a comment on my face missing from his photograph and also to reiterate the point that I'm the one that's viewing, it's my point of view."

The appearance of Jack Walls in Isabel Hegner's *Eye to Eye* raises related questions about control and subjectivity, although here they are secondary to the film's actual intent and purpose. During opening moments, Walls narrates his experience of moving to New York after completing military service and meeting Mapplethorpe. "I was just a kid," he says, "and he was well into his adult life."

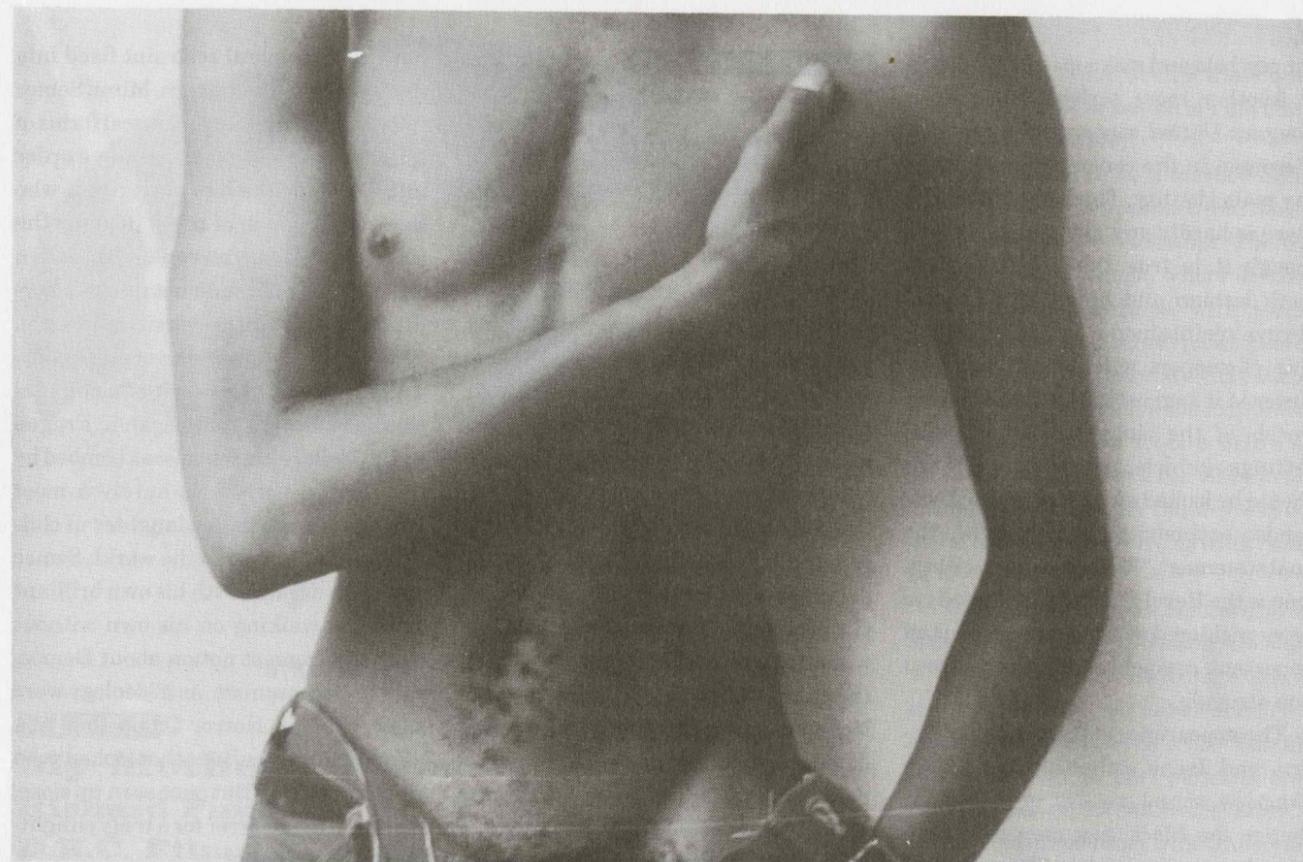
Walls was raised in Chicago and entered the Navy as a way to get out and see the world before moving to New York to pursue an acting career. I asked him about his life before meeting Mapplethorpe. "I came out pretty early, when I was 17, but it was no big deal. It was like, growing up on the South side of Chicago, you know, just like in Black life in general, everything was right up on the table. [If] you like boys, you like boys. There's no reason to pretend. It's not like you're going to damage your family's name because everybody's basically in the same boat: poor. So you ain't got nothing to lose."

"But I was in a gang and all of that. You know, I was gay and in a gang and they knew it. I mean like beating up people. And

they all knew my sexual preference. You know? Can you understand that?"

Walls' unpretentious candor and charisma come across well in Hegner's film which is also hypnotic because of its fine photographic quality and its rhythmic pacing. Early on we see a Mapplethorpe photograph of Walls (head cropped from view), an erection sticking out of his pants, pointing a pistol. With a dismissive flip of the hand he says: "I could never be embarrassed about something like that. I just divorced myself from the image. It's just a picture—just a picture of a dick and a gun. And that's it." In another moment, Walls is shown paging through a book of Mapplethorpe photographs telling stories about the models featured. He displays a casual misogyny (in the guise of bohemian art aesthetic) commenting that one subject looked "more beautiful" when photographed right after being beat up by her boyfriend than she did when pictured minus the black eye and bruises. *Eye to Eye* gives no real critique of the aesthetic which governs Mapplethorpe's work, informed as it was by conventions of male sexuality, power and racial privilege. Instead the film is characterized by its reverent tone; by its desire to canonize Mapplethorpe as an artistic genius.

During the period of the late '70s through the early '80s (when Walls and Mapplethorpe met), urban gay culture reached a high point of visibility and "acceptance." It was the time of disco (Donna Summer and The Village People) and the sexual revolution was still relevant. It was also a time when the successes of the Civil Rights movement were being steadily de-emphasized and dismantled. A more meaningful appraisal of Mapplethorpe's work would have explored issues around the meeting of white and Black gay men as lovers and companions on such an embattled social terrain. *Eye to Eye* begs such a film, one that would show more empa-



Still courtesy the filmmaker.

STILL FROM JACK WATERS' *THE MALE GAYZE*.

thy and solidarity with men such as Jack Walls.

In *Tongues Untied* by Marlon Riggs, the slogan "Black men loving Black men is the revolutionary act!" marks it as a document of a politically different era than that in which Mapplethorpe's largest body of work was produced. Riggs recounts living as a Black gay man during the '70s in the "vanilla" gay world of San Francisco's Castro district. It is a world in which he moved as an "Invisible Man" with regard to race—just as during other moments of his life when alienated by homophobia.

Tongues Untied is strung together by Riggs' personal narrative of development from a precocious child to an adult with HIV. The film also uses the voices, images and poetry of other Black gay men to corroborate Riggs' singular experience and to affirm the development of community. Throughout, we hear the poetry and essays of Essex Hemphill, Craig G. Harris and the late Joseph

Beam—all of whom have been particularly instrumental as writers in the organization and development of Black gay community. *Tongues Untied* includes a number of humorous looks at Black gay culture such as the practice of snapping, the boom in phone sex and, in a total repositioning of the male falsetto singer, an all male doo wop group singing, "Hey boy, can you come out tonight?" The film traces personal and group development through the gay culture of the '70s and '80s, when white men were the dominant force, to the present, when Black men have begun to organize and support one another.

One of the strong points of Riggs' work is that it is clear that Black gay men were envisioned as a principle audience. Riggs raises questions of relevance and importance to the community he has chosen to represent, opening a space (and providing a framework) for dialogue which had not before taken place. Not surprisingly, many Black gay

men I know have spoken of relief and catharsis upon seeing the work.

There is, however, a seamlessness to the narrative which is problematic because of a cursory handling of a large number of topics presented. For example, in one scene Riggs discusses a crush he had on a college friend during a time when, having internalized many racist and homophobic norms, he was especially vulnerable and needy. "A white boy came to my rescue," he says. "What a blessing. What a curse." Although the film goes on to comment further on Black invisibility in white gay settings, important questions are left behind with regard to sex and love between white and Black men and the process of overcoming internalized oppression. As with the cases of Jack Walls and Jack Waters, questions of power and transgressive desire between Black and white men are important, partly because, in them, we find connections between social domination as experienced on a group level, and that which has been deeply internalized and become a part of

our psychological makeup.

Another more serious "silence" in *Tongues Untied* concerns the function of women in the construction of Black gay male identity. Throughout the film there is hardly any mention of women though it is true that Black women (both lesbian and heterosexual) have always maintained a special relationship of support with Black gay men. Never is it suggested that the all-male worlds of the clubs and other social settings—which are evoked often—should be looked at with regard to their gender exclusivity. In this light, the final statement, "Black men loving Black men is the Revolutionary Act!" needs to be reconsidered where anti-sexism is an important component of Black liberation struggle.

The appearance of both *Tongues Untied* and Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* signal an era of important change for Black gay men as a consciously organized group. The growth in the number of films which concern themselves with Black gay and lesbian subjects is concurrent with both the development of a stronger movement of these folks and a greater desire on the part of Blacks and whites to see these works. Unfortunately, the danger for liberal whites is that the desire to "see" (consume) these works can become a surrogate for anti-racist practice and self-examination. In this case, the zeal of festival organizers in designating a "focus on Black gay men" supports the illusion that change is occurring in the gay community more rapidly than it is, that race is being considered differently than it has in the past. For Black lesbian and gay filmmakers, the familiar issues of funding, access to the medium (in terms of information and support), distribution and critical feedback remain important. ●

Jody A. Benjamin is a freelance writer living in New York City concerned with documenting and promoting the voices and artistry of gay people of colour.

EXHIBITION

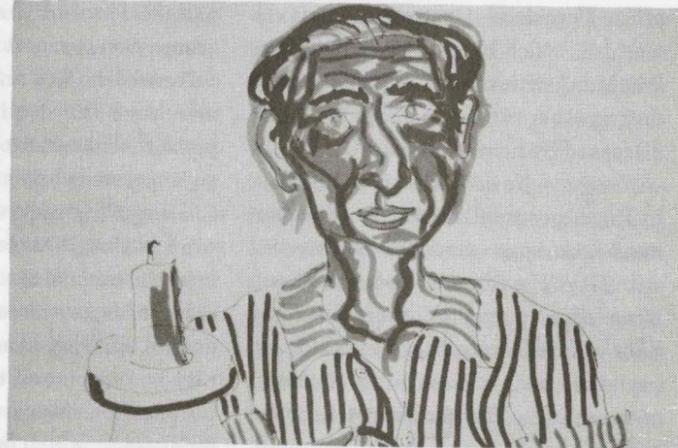
Miron Semec Show Gallery, Toronto September 4 - 29, 1990

by Ron Gili

I asked for a lobotomy. As recent as 1972 it was possible to ask and receive a lobotomy, as was the case for the anti-political artist, Miron Semec. Miron Semec, whose work was on view at the Show Gallery, belongs to a family whose father was a former prisoner of the Stalinist Camps of the '50s. This remarkable father also happened to be a Doctor who treated patients in the Concentration Camps of Siberia and was an active dissident in Prague when the tanks rolled into Prague in 1968. Not undone by the politics of art and democracy, Miron Semec is the anti-political artist of first rank who paints with total and complete honesty due in part to the psychic face he has to use in order to survive in the Psychiatric Camps around Toronto. The Psychiatric Camps oppress the natural human being in a completely legal way as if the psychiatric person were a freak within the dominant ordered Democracy, which then maintains the moral code for all Art and Political acts of will. The brilliant works of Miron Semec undermine the authoritarian Democratic state by his virtual play of images without a



PHOTO OF
SEMEC'S FATHER.



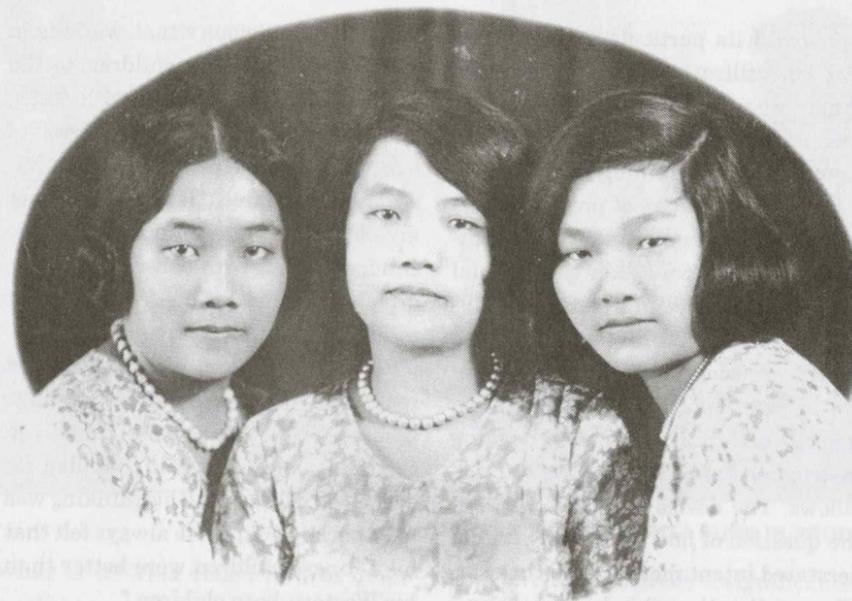
"OLD MAN READING," PAINTING BY MIRON SEMEC.

fixed code or moral restraint fixed into the canvas. In other words, Miron Semec freezes out the social and moral forms of art and breathes his own unique order into his canvases like a magician who knows every inch of the way along the journey to his own nirvana, rather than a Democratic Nirvana not unlike a horror story for ultra-sensitive people. These remarkable works of anti-political feelings are the result of a cumulative body of work that began in Prague in 1967 before his school was bombed by the Russians which is hardly a moot point in today's daily slaughter of children on the streets of the world. Semec paves his dreams with his own brilliant sunshine walking on his own without even the vaguest notion about Democracy or Communism, as if ideology were some Utopian Horror Camp that was all a great hoax culture that looked good from a distance. But once seen up close, it all became a horror for a truly enlightened human being.

These works at the Show Gallery are not a representation or in any way fashionable and they will not make your will to power come true. Rather these works are for truly sensitive people who may hear the violin colours emerging from the chaos of the social and the political mutants running this ART Dictatorship. ●

Ron Gili is a writer and artist living in Toronto.

Still courtesy D.E.C. Films.



STILL FROM MY MOTHER'S PLACE.

VIDEO

My Mother's Place Richard Fung D.E.C. Films, Toronto

by Ramabai Espinet

Not very much is known about the inner life of the Chinese person in Trinidad and Tobago, nor in the rest of the Caribbean for that matter. This is so in spite of the fact that there are notable artists in the Chinese community such as painters Carlisle Chang and the late Sybil Atteck in Trinidad and Tobago, and more recently, writers Willi Chen in Trinidad, and Jan Shinebourne and Meiling Jin, both originally from Guyana and now British-based. Shinebourne, whose ancestry is Indo-Chinese, and Chen delve more into the socio-cultural reality of Indo-Caribbean peoples, while Meiling Jin's poetry breaks set by diving headlong into an exploration of her Chinese identity, and what it means in a Caribbean (and now British) context. On the whole, though, the literature and art of the region has not yet begun to probe significantly the questions of context and place for the Chinese-Caribbean community either at home or in the ever widening diaspora.

With this in mind, Richard Fung's videotape *My Mother's Place*, which follows his earlier inquiry into his father's life, *The Way to my Father's Village*, is a most welcome incursion into the life of a Chinese woman, his mother, in the society of Trinidad and Tobago. My commenting on this tape, while I also appear in it as one of the interviewees, may seem like a rather curious view from the inside. However, since the interview was done as a separate segment of the production process, I feel myself to be only marginally involved in the process of construction. My other, more tangible insider's claim, is that I share the artist's Trinidadian background.

Fung's definition of the "place" his mother inhabits is approached tentatively, with something of respect for the tacit boundaries of ancestral life in which an intrusive "Western" attitude has no claim. At the very beginning he states: "I know which questions I am not sup-

posed to ask. . . I'm asking these questions of my mother but all my life I have known the answers."

There seems to be a marked difference between this approach and the one taken in his earlier videotape, *The Way to my Father's Village*, where distance was tempered, perhaps, with gender identification and subsequent possession. One might speculate that such a distance is inevitable in the mother/son dialogue as distinct from a man's exploration of his father's life. At any rate, the question of gender inquiry was one of the first issues which this work raised in my mind.

This is a video where images of great lyrical beauty are orchestrated along with voice, home-movie footage, and an individual's uncorroborated memory, in order to tell the story of a life. The life, though, is only in part personal biography. This is, as well, the story of "place" told in a manner which transcends the island boundaries of Trinidad and Tobago. There has been an expansion of the notion of "place" into a dimension which integrates the personal account (derived from specific questions posed by Fung himself), a detached primary sense of place as geographical location, and an attempt to create several parallel perspectives of its history and geography.

The video begins with an invitational drumming upon one's childhood consciousness by the evocation of a patois lullaby, "Doh, doh pretty popo" (translated as "Sleep, sleep, pretty baby"). The song, sung by Rita Fung herself, creates an aura of nostalgia which is further underlined by the intersection of an array of photographs in varying stages of yellowness. The artist himself states, at this point, the tentative nature of his exploration of his mother's place. One is provoked by this to wonder about the degree to which the parameters of inquiry will be cast by the artist's own prior knowledge of his mother's life. But the opposite view is also

suggested: since the artist himself is already a part of the biographical framework, both mother and son, beginning in this pre-formulated mode, might well find themselves breaking through their own frames of self into areas of discovery for which they are unprepared. And, in fact, there does occur a spontaneous critique of this nature by Rita Fung, when she discusses her colonial education. She reminisces about her school days and in doing so, remembers that at one point she knew all the ports and bays in Scotland and all the cities in Europe. She repeats this eclectic fact, almost to herself, and then exclaims in wonderment, "When you think about it, it didn't make sense." Rita Fung's comment is a striking echo of the same sentiment uttered by the radical poet Merle Collins in her post-Grenada collection *Because the dawn breaks* (London: Karia, 1985). In "The Lesson" (pp. 17-18), Collins writes:

Grannie
Din remember
No Carib Chief
No Asante king...
Her geography
Was
Of de Arctic Ocean
An' de Mediterranean
She spoke of
Novasembla
Francis-Joseph Land
And Spitbergin
In de Arctic Ocean
Of Ireland
And de
pharaoh islands
belong to Denmark
Spoke
Parrot-like
Of
Corsica
Sardinia
Sicily
Malta
de Lomen islands
An' de islands
Of de Archipelago
In de
Mediterranean

To his credit, however, Fung is not tempted to validate his mother's record of her time and place by other, parallel interpretations. His chosen method is to allow her picture of her "place," with all of its gaps, blank spaces and unfinished sentences, to surface as a docu-

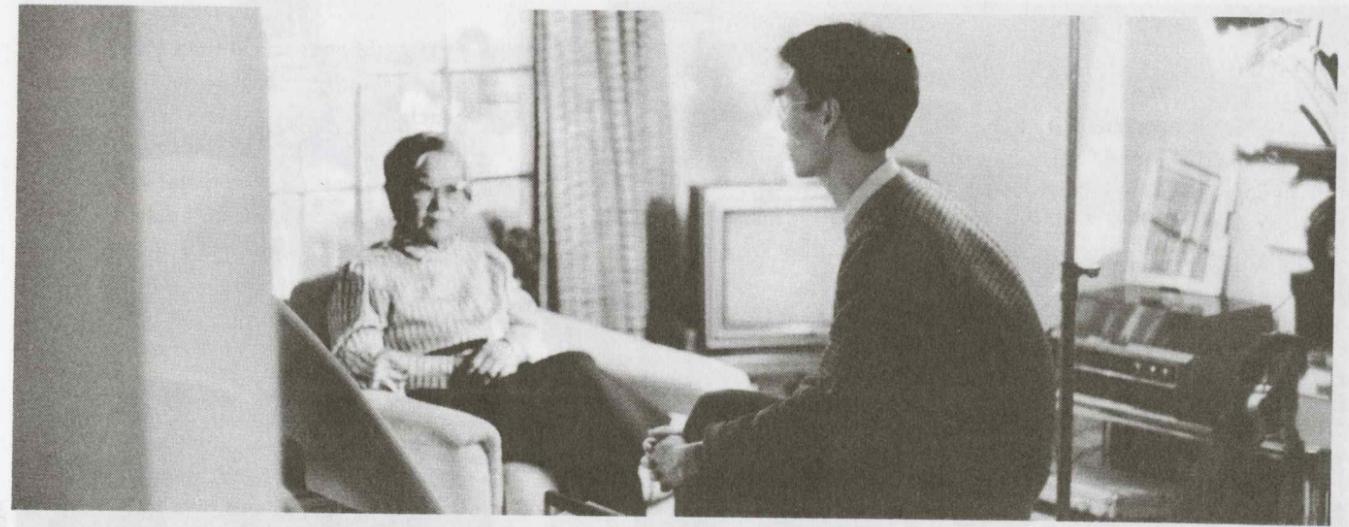
ment with its particular integrity intact. His utilization of the perspectives of four other women (two of Caribbean descent, one from India and one British), almost at the beginning of the video, achieves its objective of providing contrapuntal versions of reality from differing vantage points on the colonial continuum. Each woman brings a different vision, unlike his mother's, to the shared experiences of gender and colonial history. The artist's stated intention is to utilize these comments as "Reading Instructions" for the material which follows. The device is interesting, but the question of how seamlessly its understated intent merges with the overall narrative thread is by no means a settled one. On the other hand, if a dislocation of the viewer's sensibility is desired, the effectiveness of such a device to achieve this end is equally questionable. The movement from these spliced interviews to that of points of view known and shared by people who knew his mother, is signalled by the title "Friends." In fact, titles and headings are employed with great effect throughout the videotape.

For the viewer with some knowledge of Trinidad and Tobago, tantalizing tidbits are offered, almost as part of the overall backdrop, without being taken further. We are told that Rita Fung is a descendant of the Atteck family, and her cousin, Mona Sinkia, remarks that "[her] mother was first cousin to Sybil Atteck." But the Trinidadian's ardent interest in connection (artistic ones in this instance) awakened by this remark, is neither acknowledged nor indulged. Many other episodes like this remind us of the use of Rita Fung's eye, true to its own notion of form, to shape her own sense of her "place."

The account of the daily life of Chinese children, born into a shopkeeping family in the tiny village of Moruga in the southern part of the island, is rendered in vivid detail. Rita Fung recalls lighting joss sticks as part of her fa-

ther's daily religious ritual, walking in a line with the other children to the outhouse at night all armed with sticks, and observing her mother's horror of lizards. The verbal portrait of her father as a rigid patriarch ("He trained us, not my mother"), who would not allow his children to mix with non-Chinese children is splendid. Needless to say, in the fluid amalgam of cultures which forms part of the Trinidad picture, it was a restriction which she and her siblings ignored. Rita also recalls that even though her father was in Trinidad for over 60 or 70 years, "all his thinking was to go back to China. He always felt that his Chinese children were better than his Western-born children."

The section of the video "Word of Mouth: Four Heirlooms" is beautifully conceived and framed. Here the storytelling tradition takes over the narrative, and the truth of what resides in memory unfolds. The two segments "Ah Pak and the Opium" and "Play Mas" are complete little vignettes on their own. Orality is the clear intention of "Word of Mouth," yet I found myself groping for more actual explanation and historical detail in "The Curse of the Warahuns" and "Soucouyant will get you." The Warahuns are not placed, either by Richard or Rita Fung, into an appropriate context for the benefit of the uninitiated viewer. In actual fact, they were well known in South Trinidad as Amerindians who traded in parrots, hammocks and other such goods during the early part of this century. The accompanying visual essay does not sufficiently elucidate this piece. We are allowed to rest in the knowledge that a policeman in Moruga drove the Warahuns away and their curse then drove him to ruin. Similarly, Richard himself tells us that it was only recently that he first heard a feminist interpretation of the soucouyant—the female blood-sucker with supernatural powers. Is this interpretation part of the changing dynamic of his mother's place?



RICHARD FUNG AND RITA FUNG IN PRODUCTION STILL FROM *MY MOTHER'S PLACE*.

What is it? This veiled hint of other existing perspectives on these phenomena must suffice though, since they do not impinge upon his mother's conception of her "place."

Rita Fung's journey from the Moruga of her childhood and the Cedros village of her young married life to the well-to-do suburbs of Port-of-Spain is encapsulated in the brief and very powerful sentence: "Nobody knows you when you're poor." The home-movie footage interjected here, when the artist himself is a young boy, reveals lavish manicured gardens, beautiful homes and treed surroundings. The artist's observation that this is more how his parents would have liked to live than how they actually lived, is substantiated by his mother's halting account of her daily double chores of running the family business as well as her own household. One imagines that it is an immigrant story of thrift, hard work, long hours and sheer grit. But this is one of the blanks not really filled in. And the anguish and loneliness of her account of childbirth while her husband was in hospital in Suriname, together with the death of two family members in rapid succession, are also sketched only in outline. One concludes that perhaps these are some of the questions that the artist/son must not probe. The hidden life of the woman,

however, in these areas of significance for other women, remains hidden.

Then there are charming patches, such as Dorothy Smith's discussion of the construction of housewifely attitudes in remote parts of the world, by means of magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, juxtaposed with her own private musings: "There's this way in which femininity has an almost textual construct." Another effective passage is the one entitled "Shifting Ground." Here Rita Fung begins her reminiscence by asserting that, in the Trinidad she knew, everyone knew his place and everyone was happy: the whites in their Country club, the Chinese in their Chinese Association and other races in their own social and recreational organizations. Yet, as in her memory of her own education, her comment on politics invokes the race question in a head-on confrontation. In speaking about Eric Williams, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago for the greater part of its period of self-government, she remembers: "...[H]e had a grudge too, because he was Black. . . he hated the whites. . . he went to a hotel in Bermuda and they wouldn't give him a pillow." After Rita gives several potent examples of injustice, Richard asks, "How could you say then that everybody was happy?" But the uncomplicated rejoinder is brief and assured: "They were happy because they couldn't do better."

At the end of this video, the artist constructs, through the medium of his own voice as well as through visual detail, a brief essay of generational difference and mutual tolerance which never explodes into conflict. For my part, he has not really asked the questions which he feels to be indiscreet or improper and so, there are many, many unanswered ones. But this rare picture of a Chinese woman's life in the Protean mirage that is contemporary Trinidad, is a generous addition to the unfocused picture which both Trinidadians and others discover, as they try to fix in static forms, the shifting and compulsively unfixed nature of the "place." And it is in this respect, more than any other, that the sensitivity of the artist to the non-monolithic quality of his mother's place is so acute. In the end, celebration becomes resolution as Richard Fung himself catalogues his constant reference to his mother for everyday clues:

"[H]ow to burn sugar, how to stir a callaloo. . . . In this sea of whiteness, of friends, enemies, and strangers, I look at her and know who I am." ●

Ramabai Espinet is a writer and researcher in Caribbean Studies. She is editor of *Creation Fire*, an anthology of Caribbean women's poetry published by Sister Vision Press (Toronto, 1990).



Photo courtesy York Quay Gallery.

ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPH FROM *AFRICVILLE: A SPIRIT THAT LIVES ON*.

EXHIBITION

**Africville:
A Spirit That Lives On
York Quay Gallery, Toronto
July 29 - August 19, 1990**

by Daria Essop

Every July, hundreds of former Africville residents journey to the shores of the Bedford Basin, Nova Scotia to pay homage, reminisce and re-establish themselves as a community. With their children, they come from all parts of Canada and the U.S. for the annual reunion.

Africville: A Spirit That Lives On attempts to revive the spirit of this lost community. The exhibit, which is touring Canada from July 1990 until December 1992, is a visual, verbal and spiritual scrapbook documenting the lives of the mainly Black population who created a thriving community for themselves in an unwelcoming province. The exhibit documents the tragedy of the relocation of Africville citizens from the Halifax end of Bedford

Basin, the demolition of their homes, and the levelling of the 150-year-old Nova Scotia town. While Africville no longer exists, the show examines the past as a lesson for the future. Artifacts, consisting of audio-visual material, photographs, memorabilia and historical documentation, re-create the drama of a beleaguered community which made a diverse and self-sufficient life for itself, virtually out of nothing.

Mary Sparling, exhibit co-founder and director at the Mount St. Vincent Art Gallery in Nova Scotia, stresses that one of the exhibit's most significant features is the input by members of the Africville community.

During the late '60s, terms such as "urban renewal," "slum clearance" and "integration" became fashionable. They

also led to the demise of Africville. "Clean up. What do you think when you see something like that? Tidying up? Spring cleaning? We knew this 'clean up' really meant clean out. They wanted us 'clean out' of their minds; the houses would be comin' down, the people would be moved out." Charles R. Saunders, a Halifax writer sums up the situation that caused the devastation of Africville.

Racial hatred provoked the decision to displace the Blacks of Africville. The motive was veiled behind the terms "urban renewal" and "desegregation," as if segregation was a choice, as if one chose to live in a neighbourhood that lacked sewers and running water. Should we believe the people desired to live in a village that accommodated a prison, a T.B. hospital, a dump and a slaughterhouse (all of which were built by the city after Blacks had established Africville)? The racism involved in the decision is further underscored by the fact that moving companies refused to take the residents' belongings, leaving them no choice but to use garbage trucks instead.

"It had to have been the saddest day in Africville's history when that church [Seaview African United Baptist Church] got torn down. It was like havin' your heart taken out while you're still alive," writes Saunders. "Some people still haven't forgotten that day." A battered pulpit taken from the Seaview African Baptist Church just before it was bulldozed in the night is probably the most powerful symbol in the exhibition. The church was the centre of activity in the community; one of the most common complaints by ex-Africvillers is that no equivalent influence can be found in the new housing projects which have been erected to replace the lost village. With nowhere else to turn, ex-Africvillers have been "integrated" into these "projects" over the past 25 years.

Themes such as church, home, school, work and culture are highlighted in the Africville exhibit—much of it brought to life in realistic settings created by theatre designer Stephen Osler. The viewer takes a reconstructed walk through the history of Africville accompanied by a soundtrack of children playing, the minister preaching, school teachers, a train whistling as it chugs by and the murmurs of waves on the Atlantic shore. This, along with a series of old photographs, gives one a sense of reliving the days of Africville, capturing the daily existence of the people of Africville.

The unique feature of *Africville: A Spirit That Lives On* is the participation of the community in putting together this exhibit. Through their sharing of stories and artifacts we can peer into their daily lives and struggles, and witness the history of a dislocated people reliving their past and unearthing their truth. The exhibit is the result of a collaboration between the Mount St. Vincent University Art Gallery, the Africville Genealogy Society, the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia and the National Film Board of Canada's Atlantic Centre. ●



DÔRE MICHELUT, ANNE-MARIE ALONZO, CHARLES DOUGLAS, PAUL SAVOIE, LEE MARACLE, AYANNA BLACK

LINKED ALIVE

BOOKS

Linked Alive

**Anne-Marie Alonzo, Ayanna Black,
Charles Douglas, Lee Maracle,
Dôre Michelut, Paul Savoie
Laval, Qué.: Éditions Trois, 1990**

by Roberta Morris

Magic, you say
is political:
my call makes you call.
Beauty, I say
is political:
your form makes me form. *Michelut*

Black Because patterns
you have released
inside your inner space
inviting to enter, dancing
gentle, exploring that which is
learned.

Ayanna Black exchanged these words with Dôre Michelut in Merida, Mexico to begin a poetry project based on the Japanese renga form. More a process than a form as it has been adapted, the writers remained together exchanging words, each writer taking some essential image or idea from the other's offered verse to create the next.

Writing in English is not politically neutral if it isn't one's first language, and perhaps even if it is. In *Linked Alive* writers from various language backgrounds produced a text primarily in Canadian English. Michelut's mother tongue is Furlan, an Italian dialect; Black's, a West Indian Patois. Black chose to create other rengas with Lee Maracle, who is Cree, and Paul Savoie, a Franco-Manitoban. Michelut invited Anne-Marie Alonzo, whose first language is Arabic and now writes and lives primarily in French, and an Anglo-Canadian, Charles Douglas. Joy Kogawa contributed the preface and Paul Zumthor, the preface to the French Edition. The entire text was translated and published simultaneously in French by Editions Trois.

There are deeper layers of translation within the text: of oral experience into written form; of women's experience into words; of first language experience into second language words; of minority people's languages translated into the dominant culture's language. This is what I wanted to explore with the rengaists involved in *Linked Alive*.

I ask Dôre Michelut about the choice of rengaists in *Linked Alive*. I am surprised to learn that it wasn't a conscious decision to involve writers, several writers, whose first language is other than Canadian English. Michelut explains: "Translation here isn't between language and language, but between oral and written languages. What is translated here is the space, what is happening between the people."

She points out: "The goal of the renga is not to produce a text. . . It's the

experience that's at stake. It's about presence. In Western culture we don't have this between reader and writer. There's a moment in the renga when you construct a reality between you. . . It's as if the authority of your whole reading and writing is given back to you, and this is the central freedom of renga given to our literate world."

A larger conversation about a writer's voice, and questions of misappropriation of cultures by some English writers, is enfolded within these sentences. I think of my own resistance to the appellation of author with its trainload of connotations: authority; pretensions of an objective truth. I prefer the designation of writer, connoting an activity, a process of writing.

The renga experience produces change. After Michelut and Black finished in Merida, Michelut expressed how she'd not only entered a new space with Ayanna but a space within herself. From this, she came to take back her name. "It was a decision about how I was going to relate to language for the rest of my life. I write in Furlan and Italian and I bring English to the Furlan, but what happened on the beach. . ." She recounts the story of waking up on the beach to find a man standing over her masturbating. "I spoke in Furlan. I went to Furlan because that was what was needed. I wasn't defending myself; I was returning the insult. I'd entered Furlan space. That was how I wanted to live my life, so when I returned to Toronto I changed my name." Domina Micheluta became Dôre Michelut.

Ayanna Black seems to concur; the renga offered her an opportunity to regain a language that was not simply lost but taken away from her. "Coming from Africa or West Indian culture, the oral tradition I identified with as a kid was always communal. Especially watching the women. . . It was more than oral; it's also the body expressions. It was like theatre. I always remembered it and wanted to capture it on paper. How do

you do that? It's stuck in my head since I was a kid. Also, watching the deaf people on the subway, wanting to incorporate the sign language. . . This was a way of doing it. Telling a story, sharing a relationship, a life together. The renga provided that sense of community, a way of putting it down on paper. It extended the African oral tradition. The Japanese used it [renga] when they invited people for dinner, a way to share their lives. . . I learned so much about the Italian culture and Dôre's lost language. . . With Lee it showed us things we were interested in, what we shared, how we allow our ancestral language to come through."

I ask Black about the drum, a prominent image in hers and Lee Maracle's renga. "The drum represented the language, kept the language alive. In Congo Square in New Orleans they celebrated with the drum on Sundays and the slave owners thought it was their recreation, a religious thing, but they were communicating to plan their escapes. It was a code, incorporating language and the dance. From a child in Jamaica this really influenced me."

She relates this to her Black feminist perspective. "This is what feminists are trying to do; [language] comes from the body and moves through the head. I lost language, the Patois, in school. It wasn't clear to me until I got here, to Canada. . . For all Black people we are at the beginning with language, constructing something. . . I ask myself that when I look at some feminist writers who are working on deconstruction. Have we Black writers already deconstructed language? Are we working on the construction of language from the Black diaspora point of view, looking at and working on our contemporary language in terms of our lives here?"

How then, did she find working with Paul Savoie, a white male? "With Paul we experienced our differences and it was very powerful. It was so revealing. He allowed me a space and allowed me

to take it. He was very generous with it. We dealt with our fathers. Through Paul I realized that he was working on the relationship with his father, like myself; the father was coming through and I realized I had some unfinished business. It was important to work with a man, to have a man involved. The Japanese believe there has to be a balance. We didn't want to appropriate the form, but respect it, have a balance."

There are parallels in Savoie and Black's experience:

My ancestors shackled at gunpoint,
their words silenced.

The drum, their centre
the dance, the memory:

Marie Laveau. Congo square. *Black*

Savoie When they tighten the noose,
the resistant flesh
tumbles through the trap.
I am inside
my ancestors' scream.

Then there's the acknowledgment of differences. Savoie explains: "It's like a relationship in microcosm. The binding is the writing. It was quite a challenge. You don't see the whole; you're part of it. Ayanna and I did have the confidence to let the poetry guide us. The most difficult part was to respect each other's space, time, approach, differences. Ayanna's rhythm is one you don't fight off, you float into it. If you have a resistance, it's inside yourself. It's quite gentle and loving."

The big difference is their use of language. "I use language to go to the universal, scattered, and then my work is ordering. Ayanna works with the details. With me it starts with an explosion, a chaos. Ayanna always starts with the particulars. The differences weren't problems but the tension. Ayanna had to construct all the time and I had to deconstruct. It was almost as if she started at the beginning, at

There are deeper layers of translation within the text: of oral experience into written form; of women's experience into words; of first language experience into second language words; of minority people's languages translated into the dominant culture's language.

what language is, and I was always starting at the end. It relates to her roots in the Caribbean language and my roots in French.

"Ayanna has made a clear choice about language; I have a more ambiguous relationship, not just about French and English but with each language. There's a split. In English I think I can be anything and the only danger is to myself. There's more at stake when I use my French. It's fragile. That's not the same for Ayanna. And it's different for some other francophones in English environments. Suppressing their French, it becomes more of a 'hearth' thing. Do it at home, at your church; don't let others know about this thing inside yourself. Growing up as a minority, we don't want to be in a confrontation; we want to be part of the whole."

Charles Douglas is the dissenter among the rengaists. By everyone's estimation, his and Michelut's renga experience was less than a success although the text forms part of the book, as does the experience. "The record is the poems," Douglas states. "The story is whatever you want to say about how they got written." Then he laughs, "The best fish stories are about the ones that got away, eh?"

I wonder aloud if the problem he and Michelut encountered related to their different experiences with language. Douglas, after all, is the only rengaist in the group for whom Canadian English is a first language. Perhaps the oral

quality that was liberating to the others disturbed him. He disagrees: "We were all fumbling for words. I don't think it was different for me. . . I can't believe it was the case that the orality of the form was the problem. One of my problems with poetry is that it's not heard enough."

However, Michelut shares Douglas' sense of failure, for the goal of renga is not to produce a text, although they did do that. "We didn't cross the threshold. There's a space you enter and Charles and I couldn't do that. We both tried."

This is in sharp contrast with Michelut's and Ann-Marie Alonzo's experience. Alonzo describes their first encounter. "I met Dôre when she launched *Loyalty to the Hunt*. She knelt down by my wheelchair so we could look each other straight in the eye. . . It's not that I want people to kneel down before me, but if I always have to look up to see them. . ."

Alonzo, born in Egypt, speaks five languages ("We were colonized by so many people") but had never written in English before. "Dôre asked me to do the renga and I thought I'd do it in English. I love English. I'm not very close to it but I have a passion for it. . . We lived together for six days. We laughed together; we cried. I gave her all of me. I gave her my paralysed body. . . I only wrote in French when I couldn't write it in English and only in the beginning. I'd say to Dôre, 'I just can't write this in English,' and she'd tell me to use whatever words I had for it. Renga is like that; it's so intense.

With time I came to the English. Dôre gave me the greatest gift; she gave me an understanding of English poetry. In the French language and also the oriental, we go around and around. The word comes back and goes around, like a serpent biting its own tail. I learned from Dôre that English poetry is different. . . ."

I ask Alonzo if, as for Michelut, the oral quality of the renga is significant, considering her roots in an oral tradition and also her paralysis (without the use of her hands, Alonzo writes with her mouth with either pen or machine). "I come from a country where the oral tradition is very important but I like the writing more than the telling. I can't live without writing. Writing is one of the two times when I can forget about my pain. . . . It's like the ink comes out of me through my mouth. . . . It is my movement. . . . Dôre had to come to terms with my paralysis and she had to come to terms with my lesbianism. When we were done with that six days, I thought either I'd lost her forever or we would be friends forever." They have remained close friends.

As for the questions I'd framed before I began these interviews, they were by necessity set aside so I could appreciate the passions and love the writers put into words—each particular passion, each relationship, each renga requiring its own precise language. And at the end I understood what Joy Kogawa says in the beginning, in the preface of *Linked Alive*. "This project is an adventure, a journeying to a collective womb, a place of sacrifice. It's a place where the terror of being devoured meets the dread of being erased. The encounter is mediated by trust. It's a sharing of the dark where bliss and banality dance upon each other and the imperfect words are the pebbles marking the way for a safe return to daylight." ●

Roberta Morris is a Toronto writer. Her first novel, *Vigil*, was published by Williams-Wallace.



CHORUS LINE FROM THE NIGHTCLUB FORBIDDEN CITY (C. 1939)

FILM

**Forbidden City, U.S.A.
Arthur Dong
U.S.A., 1989**

by Molly Kaur Shinhat

"The nation's most outstanding Oriental Club. I'll show you how to have fun—in Chinese." Words from playbills for Forbidden City, the San Francisco nightclub that showcased talented Asian American performers, to a clientele made up, for the most part, of white GIs. Arthur Dong made *Forbidden City, U.S.A.* after being inspired by a magazine article about the club. Operating between 1938 and 1962, Forbidden City was a Chinese American equivalent of sorts to the Cotton Club.

The film takes the viewer on a circuitous journey, beginning with the opening of the club, to the changes it went through while operating, to its closing,

via archival film and photographs as well as interviews with the former owner, dancers, other performers, the white choreographers and Chinese clientele. Almost all the performers relate similar stories: Their parents were against them becoming performers; white performers did not want "Orientals" appearing on stage with them. Tired of having doors slammed in their faces or being told "We'll use you only on Chinese New Year," Forbidden City was for them a final resort.

In discussing their desire to perform, the interviewees often cited childhood experiences. As a result, a good portion of this film explores the experience of

being a Japanese or Chinese American growing up in rural America.

Most of *Forbidden City's* performers were not from San Francisco's Chinese community and those that were were often shunned. Some recall receiving letters from other Chinese Americans telling them they should be ashamed of themselves. Throughout the film, a fascinating discourse around performance as a profession within the Chinese American community is constructed, particularly as it relates to women.

Caught in a discourse centred on their sexuality, fixed as "exotic" and "mysterious," female performers were referred to as "cute little Chinese dolls" in the club's publicity material and by the (white) clientele. Much of the attraction stemmed from the possibility of changing (one of) the stereotypes of the "Oriental" woman—of "revealing" part of the "mystery." From being characterized as "passive," "non-accessible" and, in redneck America, "forbidden" and "forbidding" (because "unknown"), at this nightclub, Chinese women became "accessible" and "known" in a way previously unheard of in the U.S. Where else in America could a white male audience see Asian women in a chorus line, Asian pin-up girls on billboards, or pierce huge balloons covering an Asian woman to "reveal" her nude body? A white male audience, by the way, that included some of the biggest celebrities of the day—Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, and someone who gained notoriety after he left the world of entertainment: Ronald Reagan.

In their desire to make use of their talents and work in their chosen profession, some performers consciously played into an orientalist discourse, which owner Charlie Low ended up perpetuating. Others resisted it to the extent they could.

Performers also had to deal with supposed racially-specific cultural beliefs of white contemporary America. "Do Chinese people have 'rhythm'?" was

one of the questions asked at the time. The two white choreographers, a husband and wife team, thought not. They describe the difficulty the dancers in a chorus line had in learning to kick on the upbeat, putting it down to the women's unfamiliarity with the "American" music. The dancers, all raised in the U.S., almost all talk about their roots being more American than Chinese.

Competition from television and strip clubs coupled with the desire of GIs to settle down and raise families, led to the club's closing. *Forbidden City*

is now a Japanese tourist shop. The final sequence of the film looks at the second careers of the *Forbidden City* artists, who ended up in fields ranging from esthetics, real estate, sales to raising a family. Sadly, many have given up performing altogether.

Forbidden City, U.S.A. ensures they will not be forgotten. The archival material included stands as a celluloid testament to their creative talents in the face of often bitter and traumatic external and internal conflict. ●



STILL FROM MENG GEN.

**Meng Gen:
Racines Qui Poussent
Elene Tremblay and
Georgia Petropoulos
Canada, 1989, 32 min.**

by Molly Kaur Shinhat

Within Quebec a small but vocal group of nationalists is dedicating itself to maintaining a monopoly on the meaning, power and right of calling oneself "Quebecois" (and receiving "equal" status). Objections to the idea of the kind of integration being suggested are ignored, for the large part, under the auspices of that *cause célèbre*—the "protection of distinct" (Quebecois, read *pure laine*) society. Nationalists, among others, exhibit great reluctance to even acknowledge that "integration" is a two-way

street. Alone it will achieve little or nothing in the long run unless it is accompanied by an even stronger anti-racist movement.

Given the increasingly hostile situation in Quebec, *Meng Gen* can be read as a draft response to the racist discourse making headway. But, as such, its relative success is debatable. In just over half an hour the video addresses some of the issues recent immigrants from China and Vietnam face in Quebec. Adopting the traditional documentary format, the videomakers intersperse shots of Montreal's Chinatown today, archival photographs and interviews with immigrants and Chinese Canadians who have been here for a few generations. The screening, presented by one of the coproducers, the Chinese Family Service of Greater Montreal, marked the 10th anniversary of the Chinese Canadian

National Council.

As a document of specific stories and situations of discrimination and hardship faced by Sino-Quebeckers, the video works. The power—for both the viewer and the speaker—of representing people whose voices have been silenced cannot be underestimated. Stylistically and in terms of content, its resemblance to a mainstream TV item lessens its potential, however. The non-interview sections feature the “objective,” omnipotent, voice-of-God narrator. Per se within the context of the video this is not too problematic, except that the “us” and “them” dichotomy verges on the condescending. Throughout, the voice-over comes across as didactic, giving the viewer a primary school lesson in the ABCs of racism—with the requisite amount of melodrama thrown in: “Because they are a visible minority, young Chinese are often mistaken for newcomers”; “Discrimination often takes form of exploitation. Employers take advantage of the new arrival’s isolation, ignorance of the language and lack of knowledge of their civil rights.” For us—the so-called visible minorities—such “news” and analysis is more than a little stale. While *Meng Gen* may have been made specifically for Sino-Quebec audiences, the videomakers did not prioritize their points of view throughout.

This positioning receives as much challenge as is possible within the limits of the tape from interviewees, in particular those that have been in Canada for a number of generations. Their testimonies, read collectively, illustrate the historical determination of these communities to respond to racism and the extent to which racism in contemporary Quebec continues to be internalized. *Meng Gen* features a wide range of responses from “I blend [sic] in well. You can’t mistake me for an immigrant” to “My father accepted Canada as his home but felt Canada never accepted him. It’s more difficult here for

Chinese than for whites and non-Chinese.” Aside from any critique of these positions, the videomakers’ lack of sophisticated analysis of the way in which racism works and how it manifests itself draw away from the testimony. The politics around the contemporary situation have been left out entirely.

In one scene, a factory worker, originally from Hong Kong, describes her difficulties in raising her children because she speaks neither English nor French. The children’s school informed her that her kids had been forging her signature on notes and documents they were supposed to show her. When she explained her situation to them, the school sent her a social worker. The young woman is now taking French lessons herself. Yet none of these issues, particularly the latter, were given any political context.

Although the videomakers mention the initial motivations for Chinese people to immigrate here and describe the head tax, they inexplicably lose their capacity to analyze when looking at contemporary situations. A companion to the Quebec government’s dominant ideology, the overall message of *Meng Gen* is to integrate by any means. The tape puts the onus to “integrate” on the immigrant, blaming any emerging problems on the immigrant for not “integrating” properly. According to this premise, “integrated” Asians will be accepted by all and racism will miraculously die out. With regard to immigration, all Quebeckers need to be investigating the meaning and impact, political and otherwise, of the “integration” proposed by the government. This is something *Meng Gen* failed to do. ●

Molly Kaur Shinhat is a journalist living in Montreal.

***Forbidden City, U.S.A. and Meng Gen* were screened at the Festival International du Cinéma Chinois de Montréal. Molly K. Shinhat wrote on the festival in FUSE XIV: 1&2, 22-23.**



Photo by Enrique Manchón.

ART

Powell Street Festival Oppenheimer Park, Vancouver August 4 - 5, 1990

by Haruko Okano

The 14th annual *Powell Street Festival*, a celebration of *Nikkei* (Japanese Canadian) art, culture and heritage. It is the last day of this two-day event and here at the Firehall Theatre located in old Japantown, a panel discussion, “The *Nikkei* Artist and Community Culture,” is in progress. Leslie Komori, a member of Uzume Taiko, is the moderator. Guest panellists include Roy Kiyooka (poet), Linda Ohama and myself (visual artists), and Terry Watada (singer and writer). To open discussion, Komori introduces some ideas originally expressed in a paper written in 1972 by a *Sansei* (third generation Japanese Canadian), Ron Tanaka, a writer/professor presently teaching at California State University in Sacramento.

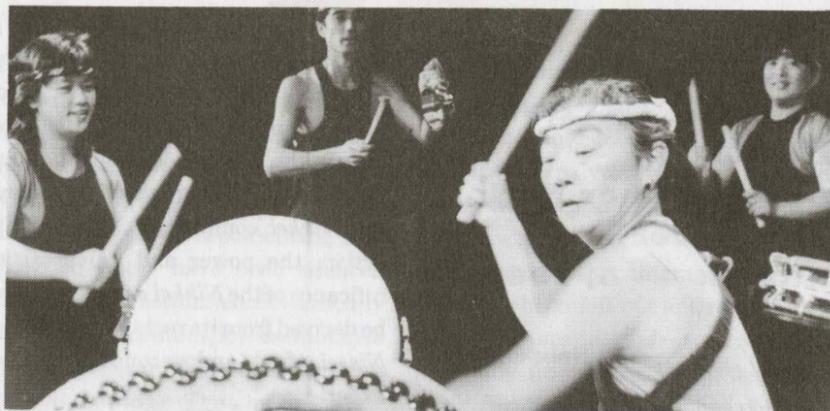
One of Tanaka’s statements remains in my mind: “[Y]oung Asian Canadians, in particular, are determined to destroy the concept of an Asian community, both as a geographical and a spiritual fact.” This comment arose from his observation that “[W]hites no longer need to overtly oppress Asians, because now they manage to oppress themselves quite well.” Pressurized assimilation into the mainstream and distancing from Japanese heritage and culture are manifestations of a fear of acknowledging oneself as different from the mainstream of society. This, Tanaka cites, is the reason for the rarity of *Nikkei* artists and of literature produced for and about the *Nikkei* community. Hence the art, the thinking and the involvement is, at best, a compromise with the artist’s deepest self and marks a loss of his/

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE, PERFORMED BY SNAKE IN THE GRASS MOVING THEATRE.

her spiritual potential. Tanaka advocates that “[A]rt should reflect an understanding of the community’s presence in the world; it is the obligation of the *Sansei* artist to regain the history of the *Nikkei* community. Through this action, the power and universal significance of the *Nikkei* artist’s work will be derived from its roots in the *Issei* and *Nissei* (first and second generation) experience.”

In the ’40s and ’50s between Toronto and Vancouver, there were only two municipal galleries and two commercial galleries for the exhibition of contemporary art-making. For the *Sansei* artist, there was no Japanese community to return to following its destruction in World War II. Common attitudes of the day were that Japanese Canadians didn’t need art or literature that specifically addressed them. British and American, even Japanese, literature would suffice. Japanese Canadian literature that did appear was criticized as being sentimental. More general was the belief that artists should address a universal point of view and rise above race and creed; that art should remain untouched by politics, local culture or history. Cultural self-determination was seen by some as radical and immoral.

For many *Sanseis* searching for their identity, Tanaka’s paper served as a manifesto that gave their art direction. Though narrow and inflexible, it offered a clear framework to work within. Roy Miki, speaking from the audience, added: “A problem arises where Tanaka’s essay sets up a whole notion of origin, the rupture of something Japanese Canadian into the conscious.” (My God, I’m Japanese Canadian!) “A whole group of writers, lots of energy and it becomes the definition of origin. I don’t think that happened in Canada. I followed Roy Kiyooka’s writing and I recognize Japanese Canadian elements in it. All I’m doing is relating his writing to my own experience and reading myself into it. Over the last 15 years, *Nikkei*



KATARI TAIKO IN PERFORMANCE.

artists have been creating a large body of work that now is starting to become very interesting. I'm not about to start saying to them, 'We want you to be more ideological; we want you to deal with the problems of racism.' Those kinds of things can kill an artist. It doesn't mean that they aren't going to subordinate the art and if they're honest the work will reflect the cultural and personal in the social framework that he/she comes from anyway. We don't have to worry about *Nikkei* artists, there's lots more of them around now. The problem is: How do we in the community or as Japanese Canadians read the work? How do we respond to the art? How do we identify ourselves in art and literature? Let go of the art; start constructing ways of evaluating the arts themselves."

Terry Watada responded: "There is a need for Japanese Canadian art. The available Anglo literature can't address our experience. Taken as a group of individual pieces, there is Japanese Canadian art but only amongst the North American taiko groups is there a strong sense that there is a distinct *Nikkei* art and a community to address."

The *Powell Street Festival* is an excellent opportunity to see works by *Nikkei* artists and to acknowledge the role they play within the community. Most of what Tanaka had hoped for has been actualized, though not in as limited a form as his essay dictated. "*Sai kai*" (coming to meet together again) is an apt description for the Japanese Cana-

dian artists collaborating with each other and for the *Nikkei* people who attend the festival year after year. "*Sai Kai*," is also the title of a community art project that documented the 14 consecutive years of the festival with an exhibit and a book. Combining narrative text and photographs, this book will be presented at the festival's 15th anniversary next year.

Katari Taiko (Talking Drums) performed at this event as it has since 1981. Established in 1979, it is Canada's first taiko group. Katari Taiko's 17 members (most of whom are women) operate as a collective whose goal is to develop a form of Asian Canadian culture that incorporates discipline, strength, grace, non-sexism and musical creativity. One of their aims is to expand beyond the limits of traditional music and to include other modes of expression by working with other artists such as Kokoro Dance. The exhilarating power and joy expressed by their pieces were reflected by the crowd's standing ovation following their 45-minute presentation.

Uzume (Goddess of Mirth) Taiko, originally The Humdrums, was established by three members of Katari Taiko in 1983. The present members are Leslie Komori, John Endo-Greenaway and Eileen Kage. They write their own work which is more experimental and improvisational than that of Katari Taiko, but similarly their performances can expand to include other musicians. Uzume Taiko has consistently been a

component of the *Powell Street Festival* since 1987 and this year their performance included Xia Yu on pipa, Amy Newman on saxophone, and Takeo Yamashiro on *shakahachi* (flute).

It's late afternoon and in the centre of the festival grounds, *Ghosts in the Machine*, a performance combining physical theatre, sculptural installations, dance, poetry, sound and music, unfolds. The piece was created by Paul Gibbons in collaboration with Tsuneko Kokubo and Geraldo Avila, all core members of Snake in the Grass Moving Theatre. As with the other groups mentioned, the cast of 14 people includes those from other artistic disciplines: Jay Hirabyashi and Barbara Bouget (Kokoro Dance), Dean Fogal (Corpreal Mime), John Endo-Greenway (Uzume Taiko) and many more. In the performance, the central characters "Dream Ghosts" and the suited grey "Doppelgangers," are metaphors for different aspects of the contemporary human psyche. The Doppelgangers are mesmerized by the miraculous and devastating possibilities of technology—the thrill of mainstream Western culture, while the Dream Ghosts remain attached to the ancient forces of the earth itself. The central concern of *Ghosts in the Machine* is to question the deification and iconization of technology. Recently, Snake in the Grass received the United Nations' Global 500 award in recognition of their contribution to environmental activism. Since 1978, the company has been the resident theatre company at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology.

It is early evening and the *omikoshi*, a portable shrine that houses the Kami (deity) and is a symbol of good fortune, has been carried about the festival grounds, rocked to the *kias* of encouragement from the crowd and the prayers and salutations of the Shinto priests. *Nikkei* art and culture has survived and is growing. ●

Haruko Okano is a Vancouver artist and writer.

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NEW CATALOGUE

Robert Morin Lorraine Dufour

*Une décennie de production vidéographique
A decade of video production
1980-1990*



NEW CATALOGUE

THIS NEW CATALOGUE was produced to accompany the retrospective exhibition of video works by Lorraine Dufour and Robert Morin which opened in January 1991 at A Space.

Dufour and Morin have been engaged in producing an impressive body of work since the mid 70s, but their videotapes have remained relatively unknown outside of Quebec. The catalogue provides a context from which to appreciate these groundbreaking works and attempts to encourage an active dialogue around the issues of representation in documentary and fictional narratives. This dialogue has been a crucial point in the development and history of Canadian video art.

The work of Dufour and Morin questions the various structures of the traditional documentary form, and, through direct intervention using fictional reconstruction and confrontation, eloquently offers a different strategy for the 'document', which allows the viewer to enter into an amplification of 'the distorted reality of their subject's experience.'

This comprehensive catalogue includes an introduction by curator/editor Brendan Cotter, and 3 essays by Peggy Gale, Jean Tourangeau and Dan Walworth dealing with different aspects and issues in Morin and Dufour's work. The catalogue also includes descriptions and images from eleven videotapes produced by Morin and Dufour between 1980 and 1990.

**Lorraine Dufour
Robert Morin
Une décennie de production
vidéographique
A decade of videotapes 1980 - 1990**

**Curated/Edited by Brendan Cotter
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