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Plus

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by Becki Ross

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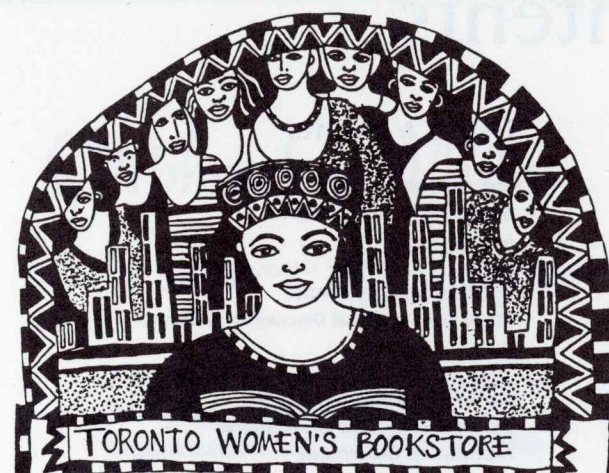
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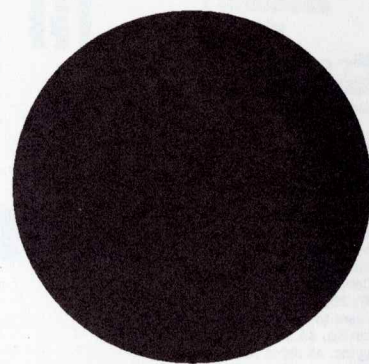
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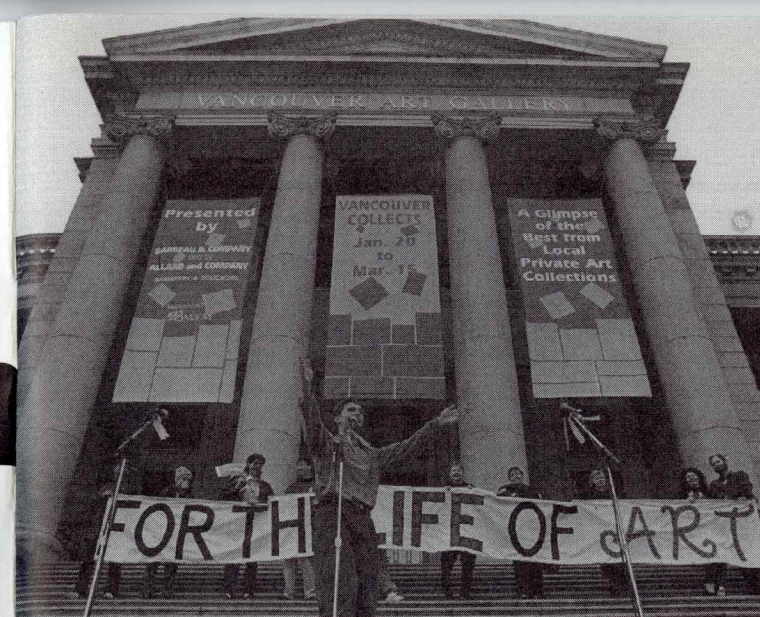


Photo Doug Shanks, Westender newspaper, 1993

tie an orange ribbon

Vancouver—On March 11, lower mainland artists and their supporters staged a march and rally to recognize and celebrate the critical importance of art and artists in our society. The rally was initiated in response to the crisis in arts funding in this country.

Throughout British Columbia artists proclaimed the day "Arts Awareness Day." Foot-long strips of orange ribbons were distributed to symbolically acknowledge the impact that artists have on the life of our communities. This province wide event came a time when the future of our country's cultural life is endangered by the erosion of government investment in this vital component of our national well-being. The event was the first in a series of ongoing public demonstrations organized by the Vancouver Cultural Alliance to generate public awareness of the arts.

The Alliance is also organizing focus group meetings to address long-term strategies for the survival of the arts. Some of the strategies which will be under discussion are:

a) Educating government and the public about the scope,

size, range and impact that artistic activities have in our society, through a variety of means.

b) Communicating the continued need for government funding to remain the cornerstone for supporting cultural activity in Canada.

c) Reaching out as a community and as individual artists to solicit support and involvement for the cultural sector and cultural endeavours so that the arts are no longer perceived by government as self-serving and peripheral.

d) Having the cultural sector recognized by government financial departments and agencies as a concrete, definable, and vital economic sector worthy of the same consideration as all other industries that contribute to the Canadian economy.

e) Finding ways to work together and assist each other—resource sharing.

f) The need to unify all sectors of the Canadian cultural community through the development of a Canadian Cultural Policy.

To contact the Vancouver Cultural Alliance call: (604) 681 3535

—Andrea Fatona

Hyphens & Hybrids

Special Challenges to the Black Writer

A panel organized by Sister Vision Press and CAN:BAIA

for Black History Month

Harbourfront, Toronto

Sunday, February 21, 1993

Toronto—What is a Black writer? What special challenges does this writer face in a predominantly white society? In a racially oppressive environment what is appropriate subject matter for the Black writer? Who does the Black writer write for? None of these questions is new. They have all been posed in different parts of the African diaspora at critical junctures in the history of Black cultural expression: Harlem in the 1920s, the Negritude movement of the 1940s, Britain during the 1950s. These seemingly perennial questions have begun to acquire a new-found urgency for Black writers living in Canada during the 1990s. Much like Harlem in the twenties the African Canadian community now comprises diverse elements and experiences each clamouring for expression.

"Special Challenges to the Black Writer," a panel discussion organized by Sister Vision Press and CAN:BAIA, Canadian Artists Network: Black Artists in Action, as part of Black History Month, gave the audience a glimpse of some of the issues with which Black Canadian writers are now grappling. The five writers who participated in the panel discussion provided a fair representation of the diversity of Black literary expression in Canada.

They included: Cecil Foster, a journalist with the Financial Post and author of the novel *No Man in the House*; Djanet Sears, the author of the acclaimed play *Africa Solo*; Ayanna Black, the author of several collections of poetry (*No Contingencies*, *Linked Alive*) and editor of the ground-breaking *Voices*, an anthology of writing by African Canadians; Althea Trotman, the author of six children's books; and finally, the moderator, dub-poet and television host, Clifton Joseph.

In his discussion, Cecil Foster stressed the need for Black writers to be open to all manners of self-expression and not to be pigeon-holed. "Are we writers who happen to be Black or Black writers?" He asked rhetorically. Foster said he is neither, yet both: he is black, but he is also a writer who happens to be Black. He is not, he insisted, restricted to supposedly "Black issues" such as racism. While he feels as free as a writer of any other ethnicity to take on any issue and theme in his writing, he said his identity as a Black writer gives him a unique perspective on these different issues and themes.

That the peculiar tensions between the Black writer and the mainstream white audience contributes in large measure to

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Sculptors Talk
Prenovault, Streicher, Greer, Werden
Sundays, 3:00pm 2-9-16-23 May

PUBLICATIONS

Michael Fernandes: *Sensible*
56pp; exhibition catalogue

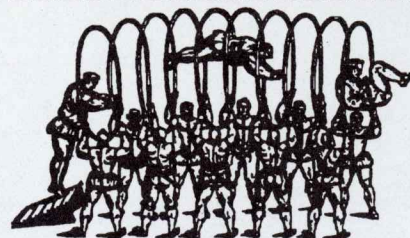
Robert Houle: *Hochelaga*
20pp; exhibition catalogue

Nicole Jolicoeur: *Aura Hysterica /*
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the Black writer's unique perspective was borne out by Djanet Sears' discussion. "One of the most distracting things about living in a racist society," she said, "is that I find myself constantly reacting instead of paying attention to myself." *Africa Solo* (which she dubbed an "autobio-mythography"), was written in order to address her (mis)education through school and the media. The audience cackled in recognition when she read a segment of her award-winning play, which presents a witty deconstruction of the Tarzan myth. What gave her humour its cruel poignance was that for Sears, as for many members in the audience, this was her first image of Africa. Part of the reason she wrote the play (which depicts her first journey to Africa), she said, was to address the racism she had internalized as a Black woman growing up in England and in Canada. Addressing herself to the unique perspective of Black women writers on issues of race and gender, Sears stressed the need for Black women writers to determine their own issues and agendas: "We should not define ourselves against the mainstream, but by our own values."

Poet Ayanna Black addressed some of the more concrete challenges facing the African Canadian writer. She prefaced her discussion by alluding to her hybrid identity as a Black woman writer living on this continent: "I am African Canadian but I am also of the Caribbean, which is connected to British and Spanish traditions. I am trying to eliminate the hyphens." One of the biggest challenges facing Black writers in this country, she implied, was the articulation of their personal landscape as African Canadians. She stressed a commitment to this distinctly

African yet Canadian internal vision: "As Africans become the subjects of their own gaze and speech they become capable of influencing Western tradition." She characterized the challenges facing Black writers as "invisibility" (the relative absence of Black publishers and forums for Black writing), and lack of distribution.

Black saw the *Voices* anthology as a forum in which African Canadian writers could combat invisibility. While the challenges of invisibility and inadequate distribution remain, Black pointed to the presence of Black publishers such as Liz Cromwell, Toronto Women's Writers, and Sister Vision Press, as well as to the fact that works by African Canadian writers are now beginning to show up on university curricula, as encouraging signs. These are important steps in what she described as the necessary process of moving from the edge to the Canadian mainstream: "I am not advocating that we change our voice but to move ahead we have got to get our books into universities and bookstores. This way we combat invisibility. This is the way our work may be integrated into the system. Canadian white patriarchy has to realize we're going to be here for a long time."

Althea Trotman cited the invisibility of people of colour in much of Canadian children's literature as one the motivations for her decision to write children's books: "This was disturbing to me as a mother of children in Canadian schools. The fact that there is no exposure to the backgrounds of Caribbean Canadians, and that people of colour are included only insofar as they are featured as objects of oppression, affects children of colour, but it's a double lack — it affects white children also." That Trotman has sought to address

this challenge by setting her six books for children during the time of plantation slavery in the Caribbean may be seen as a highly controversial move, but this is part of Trotman's political intention. Her objective is to address a particularly painful epoch of Black history from a radically fresh perspective: "In the neophyte expressions of Blackness during the '60s stress was always laid on the negative image of Blacks during slavery as victims. The books' focus is on the children's joys, hopes, the things they learned in order to survive, and not on slavery per se." Trotman also spoke of the challenge of confronting stereotyped representations of Black masculinity: "In spite of documentary reports which emphasize Black males as absent or failed fathers, I thought it was important to portray my reality, which was the experience of nurturing masculinity."

Regardless of how they characterized the challenges facing the African Canadian writer and how they chose to address these challenges, it was clear that for each of the panelists politics was a consideration that informed all of their actions. As one audience member put it: "The Black writer can't just sit on the fence; he or she has a responsibility to contribute to the Black community!" Cecil Foster cautioned against offering prescriptions for, and thereby limiting, the Black writer, however: "Black writers don't just have to write about anger and oppression. We can't be one-dimensional. The ultimate question is how do we get published? Do we want to just write for a minority within a minority?" There's an onus, he said, on Black writers to knock on doors and alert publishers to their existence, and a corresponding onus on publishers to increase their

ISSUES & EVENTS

sensitivity to ideas derived from the Black literary tradition. Clifton Joseph's subtle reminder, however, that often a work's artistry and acceptance by publishers depends less on that work's elision of politics than on whether those politics are recognized as "literary" by publishers gave some indication of the complexity of the politics surrounding Black writing in Canada.

It was Djanet Sears, finally, who offered the most persuasive metaphor for the diverse ways African Canadian writers are choosing to respond to the challenges which face them. Rejecting the perception of the community of Black writers as an homogeneous group, she compared it to a patchwork: "Everyone must be allowed space on the patchwork, allowing each of us to be who we are at a given moment. We must stress acceptance of our differences."

—Dennis Lewis

No More Multiculturalism!

Desh Pardesh

Third Intra-national Festival and Conference

Exploring the Politics of South Asian Cultures in the West

Euclid Theatre and Art Metropole, Toronto

March 24–28, 1993

Toronto—The Third Annual *Desh Pardesh*—Home Without Home—brought together a broad cross-section of artists, activists, writers and community organizers under the mandate of "exploring the politics of South Asian cultures in the west." Since the first two-day festival in 1990, the format has expanded into a five-day smorgasbord of cultural events, political dialogue and lively debate which continues to raise difficult and necessary questions about notions such as "community," "feminism" and "post-colonialism." Once again this year inter/intranational participants, who reflect a vast range of experiences, locations and geographies, came together in order to participate in an ongoing process of mapping a "South Asian continuum" within which questions of identity prove to be complex and often double-edged.

Fortunately, the diverse realities in everything from nationality to sexuality prevent the conference from creating a monolithic "South Asianess," and provide a welcome change from the "hit and myth" politics of identity sweeping the post-Cold War globe. Rather, what the conference highlights are the differences that mark us out from each other, and the significance of the fragmentation of our histories through colonial dispersion as reflected in our hyphenated claiming of citizenship through reconstructive

engagements with culture, politics, gender and nation.

The festival's opening night was a multi-media event which paid informal homage to the slogan "we are everywhere." Writer Ian Iqbal Rashid, author of the collection of poems entitled *Black Markets, White Boyfriends and Other Acts of Elision*, offered a powerful completion of his mother's story of the uncertainties and adventures of migration and desire, in a prose piece entitled "Muscular Bridges." In it he foregrounded a number of disturbing links between issues of race, gender, power and desire as they move across a range of sexualities, while simultaneously maintaining a sense of the tender yet painful solidarities created through and within moments of choice. Choice as a political gesture also appeared to give cohesion to questions of identity in U.S.-based Odissi dancer Ratna Roy's *Justice?*, and reemerged as an integral component of "human" experience in Michael Ondaatje's selections of poetry and passages from his Booker Prize-winning novel *The English Patient*. By envisioning "choice" as the underlying theme of the opening night programme, "identifying" moved away from a mere reactive posturing toward an elaboration of fluid and positive selves which help bring us together within those conjectures of memory, rage and desire that we call "community."



still from *Wild Woman in The Woods*, Shani Mootoo, video, Canada, 1993

The inclusion of a labour programme at this year's *Desh* was an important acknowledgment of the class nature of identity and solidarity. This was one of the prime factors distinguishing *Desh* from the "multiculturalist" heritage of racially/culturally-specific organizing in Ontario. It moved the focus away from the consumption of culture to its production, and toward its relation to the social reproduction of colonized labour.

Canadian Auto Worker's National Representative Hassan Yussuf (the lone Guyanese South Asian worker in the Canadian Labour Congress) brought a plea for anti-racist and anti-imperialist workers' collaboration without neglecting to address the presence of feminists and gays within Canada's working-class.

This was a first in my experience of an anti-racist labour politic, and I can only hope that such an inclusive class consciousness is not sacrificed to heterosexist expediency in the face of NAFTA and the recession.

The politicization of home worker Regina Fernando gave a sense of hope to the programme's largely educational slant as she addressed the struggles of non-unionized workers with an awareness of how the social relations of gender, race and migration are exploited in the making of the Canadian working class. Vancouver-based author Sadhu Binning similarly struck home with his portrayal of a middle-aged Punjabi woman who cleans airport toilets and, using the washroom mirrors, reflects on self, family and work, provoking moments

of heightened awareness of cross-gender memory and alienation. Both Binning and Fernando's presentations imparted a face to the category "working class" thereby embodying issues of representation directly rather than abstractly—something which has not tended to be the case in much cultural organizing.

Relatedly, the global dimensions of the new economic order were dissected thoroughly if drily, in Chrissie Stansfield's *Bringing It All Back Home*. In fact, the scholastic tone of this British documentary neither encouraged discussion nor captured the spirit of the live performances in spite of a few exhilarating glimpses of women's resistance in Free Trade Zones within Sri Lanka and India. U.S. born filmmaker Vivek Bald's *Taxi/vala Auto/Biography* was a more exciting attempt to interrogate class, migration and voice through 'docobiographical' techniques; interspersing interviews with recent migrants, New York's South Asian taxi drivers, with the film-maker's own queries as to the relational nature of identity.

Two independent films from India were also screened: Reena Mohan's *Kamlabai* and Deepa Dhanraj's *Something Like a War*. By allowing *Kamlabai*, India's first major 20th century stage and screen actress to reminisce, scold and perform, Mohan deconstructs the myths and silences about sexuality, aging and widowhood contained within the notion of the Indian "feminine." For the *Desh* audience, the film's depiction of the protagonist as a lifelong cultural worker who broke social, religious and gender taboos from necessity rather than vanguardism was received as a humorous and warm indictment of the racist concept of Asian female passivity and provided a challenge

to our own orientalist notions which would identify the possibilities of living a feminist life with a post-1970 Western phenomena.

Deepa Dhanraj's *Something Like a War* broadened our own take on choice in the struggle for sexual and reproductive rights, by examining the adoption of Malthusian population control policies in the Indian context. Through footage of a women's discussion group, we watch as non-academic women break the links between choice, pleasure and procreation, and expose the economic motivations behind both child-rearing and sterilization in dependent as well as advanced capitalist societies. As well, this documentary connects the plight of Third World women to that of their Asian, Latina, Black and First Nations counterparts in the North. British Columbia's Sonera Thobani followed up on Friday night with a presentation that examined the intersection of race, religion, capital and patriarchy in the development of gender selection and eugenics technology.

Ramabai Espinet's opening night performance *Indian Rubber Talk*, drew on Indo-Caribbean history and myth. Through poetry, music and traditional Bharat Natyam dance by Toronto's Sudarshan, she examined the divisions and points of connection between Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean identities, effectively insisting on the significance of historical context for the development of national and cultural identity. (Unfortunately, however, technical difficulties made the reading of this piece intensely difficult.) Some of these themes were deftly re-raised in the poetry/prose of New York's Meena Alexander who also addressed the Persian Gulf War and its consequences for both Islamic and non-Islamic populations. Alexander is a skillful

and evocative writer and a thoughtful commentator on the pitfalls of nationalisms—within and without the American context.

Other highlights of *Desh* included a reading by Indo-Caribbean author Sam Selvon whose fame as an immigrant Canadian writer seems, sadly, to have developed only outside this country. Selvon is one of the many "post-colonial" voices of Caribbean and Third-World literature which have grappled with the experiences of race, colonization and dislocation. This tradition has drawn on narrative, "community" and history as weapons of literature and liberation.

The ideological implications of "community" and "nation" underlay many of the conference's panel discussions of fundamentalism, secularism, and democracy, and proved particularly relevant in the discussions that followed the screening of Anand Patwardhau's prize-winning investigative film *In The Name Of God*, a complex and searing indictment of the organized Hindu fundamentalist project which takes shape within an increasingly communalist India.

As *Desh Pardesh* looks to be a long-term fixture on the "diasporic South Asian" stage, we must hope that equally challenging issues emerge at future festivals. After Sunday night's closing performances, "Exit Page Left," I was reminded of a hard-hitting quote from African American musician Gil Scott-Heron:

History, that's his story
Mystery, that's my story
What's your story?

—Kausalya Bannerji

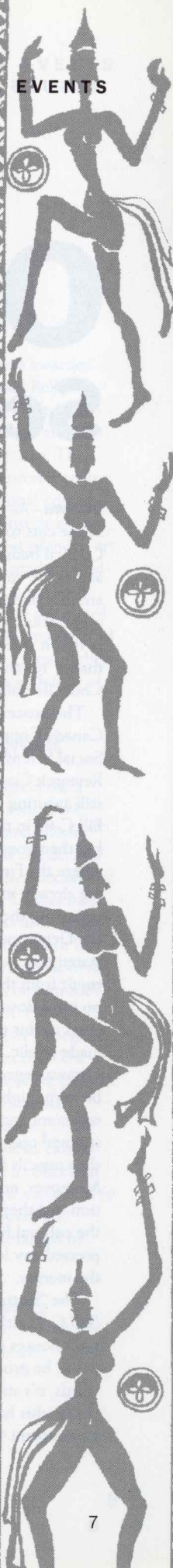


Illustration Kyo Maclear

Ottawa Schmottawa

Ottawa—As I write, the impact of the cuts to the Canada Council budget are being felt across the country. Although another budget speech is in preparation, it is highly unlikely that it will restore any more than a "token" amount to the Council's budget.

The process of merging the Canada Council with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) is still awaiting third reading of Bill C-93 in the Commons. The bill then goes to the Senate where the Finance Committee are already in the process of preparing their inquiry. While the Department of Finance has stated that no cost savings will result from the merger, to date no breakdown of the actual costs of this merger have been made public. Observers in Ottawa expect the expense to be fairly high and worry that it will come out of the already strained operating budgets of the councils themselves. Moreover, not one organization in either the academic or the cultural field have expressed any level of support for the merger.

The "Status of the Artist Act" (Bill C-7) although passed by both houses in June 1992 has yet to be proclaimed; in other words, it's still not law. (Of course this hasn't prevented the government from indulging in a

few premature self-congratulations.)

While Phase II of the Copyright Revision is still on the order paper, the process is slow; the Department of Communications is currently pouring over eleven thousand pages of submissions made in response to its first "secret" draft. One seriously doubts that legislation will be forthcoming any time soon.

The Minister's response to the recommendations of the "Ties that Bind" report of the Commons Committee on Communication and Culture has the force and flavour of tepid tea. If anyone was expecting clarification of direction or commitment in terms of cultural policy, this document entitled "Unique Among Nations" will certainly prove disappointing.

As the Tory leadership convention and the end of the government's mandate approach, however, the focus must move away from Ottawa to the ridings. For only if it becomes clear to incumbents and candidates that their own constituents are concerned about cultural policy will we see any increased level of seriousness about the arts and culture on the part of the government.

—Greg Graham

The Government claims that the Bill C-93 merger will save money. ✂

Artists wonder: how could the Treasury Board's estimate of \$1.5 million dollars over five years—1/5 of 1% per year—represent any significant savings?

The Government claims that the Bill C-93 merger will result in a more efficient bureaucracy. ✂

Artists wonder: since when have bigger bureaucracies become the epitome of efficiency?

The Government seems to believe that corporatization and so-called professionalization will secure for the arts "an enhanced public profile." ✂

Artists wonder how corroding the arms-length policy for arts funding (and possibly the peer-jury system as well) will facilitate the emergence of new artists and new media.

Film & Video News

by Susan Kealey

Full Screen

Full Screen, the Toronto-based coalition of film and video producers of colour, is experiencing severe financial difficulties. Since its inception, Full Screen has subsisted on project grants, volunteer labour, donations and the drive and commitment of its membership. Although the present climate of cutbacks is causing hardship for all arts organizations, for a fledgling group that has never benefited from operating funds, keeping afloat is especially difficult.

The latest blow came from the Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat (OARS), where Full Screen had applied for project funds to undertake pro-active anti-racism work and to develop a resource base for such work in the alternative arts community. Initially, Full Screen was told their project had been positively recommended, however, following the NDP cabinet shuffle in February, a new minister became responsible for the OARS and the decision was rescinded.

Since January, Full Screen has been engaged in a letter writing campaign to inform other arts organizations about their situation and money has been trickling in allowing them to maintain a bare-bones operation while awaiting the results of its core funding requests. The crucial role Full Screen plays for emerging film and video makers of colour cannot be overstated. Since its inaugural 1990 conference "Shooting the System," they



still from *The Crux of the Gist of the Biscuit*, Nadia Sistonen, Super 8, 1993. Courtesy of YYZ Artist's Outlet

have held workshops, seminars and screenings bringing aspiring producers of colour together with more established members of their communities. Beyond providing a forum for support and dialogue, Full Screen is committed to encouraging the development of positive, realistic images of people of colour and to eradicating the systemic racism that impedes equal access to funding and resources. Any support you can muster would be greatly appreciated and wisely used.

Full Screen
394 Euclid Ave., Bsm.
Toronto, Ontario
M6G 2S9

YYZ TV

Since September 1992, YYZ Artists' Outlet has been broadcasting its time-based programming on Maclean Hunter Cable 10, which serves the Parkdale Trinity area in Toronto. Each hour long programme airs four times a month during prime time (9 pm). Recently, a short film by Nadia Sistonen, *The Crux of the Gist of the Biscuit* was pulled off the air after three viewers

called Maclean Hunter to object to its depictions of female genitalia. Filmmaker Kika Thorne, who had put the programme of three works together for YYZ, responded by running a text piece outlining Maclean Hunters' actions in the film's place, and disseminating information at YYZ, where the film that was too hot for Channel 10, remained available to viewers through April 17.

Trinity Square Video launches ATV

On April 5, Trinity Square Video launched "Artists' Tele Vision" (ATV) a compilation featuring excerpts and artists' statements from 17 Toronto video art producers targeted for television. While inspired by the success of Paper Tiger TV (NYC), Alive TV (Minneapolis) and Channel 4 (Britain), ATV has not yet formalized any plans for broadcast.

Bell Canada Award in Video Art

Congratulations to Toronto artists Lisa Steele and Kim

Tomczak, who were awarded the Canada Council Bell Canada Award in Video Art in an April 22 ceremony at the Art Gallery of Ontario. The \$10,000 award is presented annually for exceptional contribution by a video artist or artists to the advancement of video art in Canada. Bell Canada provided the Canada Council with the monies to create the award in 1990. Past recipients are Paul Wong of Vancouver and Robert Morin and Lorraine Dufour of Montreal.

Black on Screen

Black on Screen, Images of Black Canadians 1950's-1990's is the National Film Board-Studio D's new catalogue of film and videos spanning five decades of work around Black Canadian experience. A first of its kind, the project includes work by men and women from both inside and outside communities of African descent. Ginny Stikeman, Executive Producer of Studio D writes that "the philosophy behind the project has been one of inclusion rather than exclusion[...] the aim was to provide as exhaustive and as broad a collection as possible and for audiences to make their own analyses." Copies may be obtained by writing to:

Studio D Marketing
P.O. Box 6100, Station A
Montreal, Quebec
H3C 3H5

LUCINDA JOHNSTON

Censorshipping and Receiving

IN THIS ISSUE

- Multiple Pleasures
- Carrots & Sticks
- The Korean Body Modification
- Off From the Streets
- Cutting & Enslavement
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- Resource Directory
- Eye Group Change

One year has passed since the Supreme Court upheld what is now referred to as the *Butler* decision. In the case of Donald Butler, a Winnipeg video store owner, the Supreme Court maintained that this decision was a necessary response to "a growing recognition...that material which may be said to exploit sex in a degrading or dehumanizing manner... is perceived by public opinion to be harmful to society, particularly to women." Harm, in this context, means that some materials "predispose persons to act in a manner which society recognizes as incompatible with its proper functioning."¹ The pursuit of this "properly functioning" society has led, however, to a situation which may itself be defined as harmful. For not only has there been an alarming increase in the targeting, seizing and excise of a wide spectrum of books destined for Canada in the past year, it would also appear that the words "degrading" and "dehumanizing" remain as nebulous and open to interpretation as the outdated Obscenity Code terms "immoral" and "indecent" were.²

While the *Butler* decision fortifies the illusion that surveillance and intervention can benefit the public's vital needs, the initiatives and decisions of customs officers are, within the present system, exempt from public scrutiny. Shipments of books may, on a whim, be intercepted at the border by employees of the Prohibited Imports Directorate, ostensibly following detailed (yet frustratingly vague) guidelines set out in Canada

Customs departmental Memorandum D 9-1-1. Customs officers are therefore free to decide what violates the code and seize these materials: in effect, acting as sole witness, council, judge and jury.³

Currently, the list of detained or impounded books and periodicals, many of which cannot unequivocally or even reasonably be said to cause harm, is growing steadily. Poetry and prose anthologies *Drunken Boat* and *Version 90*; body-piercing and tattooing magazines *Piercing Fans International Quarterly* and *Body Art*; well established literature such as *Querelle* by Jean Genet; works by critically acclaimed feminist novelist Kathy Acker; scholarly texts including *Erotic Power* by Gini G. Scott; lesbian anthologies and comic books like *Macho Sluts* and *Hothead Paisan*; mainstream publications such as *The Advocate*; and believe this or not, Betty Page trading cards, are only a small selection of seized or indefinitely held publications. Nonetheless, they are an accurate indication of shocking degrees of illiteracy, homophobia, misogyny and narrow-mindedness on the part of customs officials.

There is no training available to border guards on issues concerning either pornography or free speech. They undertake a fourteen week course at a Customs and Excise college where they study the approximately sixty acts of Parliament which they will have to enforce. If they feel that they cannot make a qualified judgment, they may shift the responsibility to a "commodity specialist" at the closest

regional outlet. These higher ranking officials are, as their title suggests, chiefly concerned with the practical aspects of revenue; questions of market value, duty, and the G.S.T. occupy the bulk of their time. With regard to their license to censor, their training consists of "being made aware of the law, internal regulations, precedent and a list of prohibited books," the newly available public version of which seems to have been radically edited.⁴

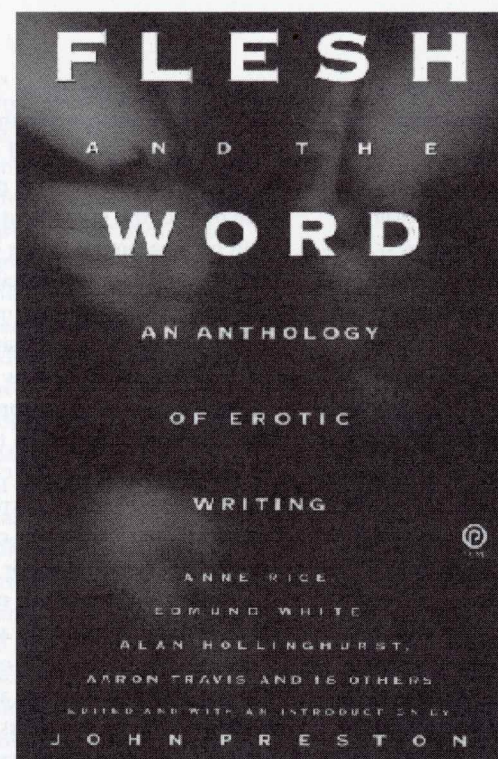
It is worth noting that those who are responsible for safeguarding and preserving justice at the nation's borders are often indifferent to or hostile toward the interests or tastes of people who have traditionally been driven to the margins of society. The gay bookstores Glad Day and L'Androgyne, as well as alternative bookstores such as Pages and Le Dernier Mot—bookstores which are attuned to the sensibilities of contemporary subcultures and social critics—have frequently been targeted for censorship, while the large chains such as Coles or W.H. Smith have not. In addition, one quarter of all the women's bookstores in Canada have now been affected by recent censorship campaigns. The materials that have been impounded instead of being sent to Womansline, Everywoman's Bookstore and Toronto Women's Bookstore, point to disproportionately high levels of surveillance and seem to suggest discriminatory practices.

One needs to ask why border guards and commodity specialists have

so much critical and legal power when their methods have proven to be both arbitrary and unmonitored. There is evidence of

widespread inconsistency and hypocrisy within the accepted framework of censorship when some stores are repeatedly denied books and periodicals which are freely available at other stores—across the street or across the country.

Materials which are recorded in the master list of the Prohibited Imports Unit are considered banned unless appeal procedures are initiated. Some of these books, however, are placed under umbrellas of protection by established publishers. Penguin Books prints *Flesh and the Word: an Anthology of Erotic Writing*, by or about gay men, which includes works by literati Edmund White and Alan Hollinghurst, as well as the immensely popular Anne Rice. Books that are either printed in Canada or imported in bulk from a publisher's U.S. warehouse to a Canadian one are not curtailed or even suspect. But when Robin Metcalfe, a contributor to *Flesh and the Word*, tried to import a few copies of the book from New York to take advantage of an author's discount, they were seized by the Halifax customs office on the basis of "anal penetration,



bondage and degradation."⁵ Because it was stopped once, this book might therefore be detained again and again, even though it presently enjoys wide distribution within Canada.

Certain other works move freely across the national borders which, for some, also serve as moral boundaries. The corporation Time-Warner, which published Madonna's *Sex*, had one of the largest law firms in Canada, Osler, Hoskin and Harcourt draft a letter which was sent to the Customs and Excise head office in Ottawa stating that, in their opinion, the book was not obscene. Despite numerous images of piercings—usually seen by customs officials as "mutilation"—as well as various other poses which might have been construed by some arbiters of morality as "degrading" and "dehumanizing," thousands of copies effortlessly entered this country unaffected by the Obscenity Code. The book, of course, became a huge bestseller.

American Psycho by Bret Easton Ellis and *Mapplethorpe*, (a \$160 coffee-table book providing a retrospective of the photographer's work) are both published by Random House. Protection of the themes and images contained in these books seems to have, upon their release, been guaranteed by their projected status as bestsellers. While *American Psycho* is a worthwhile critique of capitalist culture, evoking



the extremes of power through frightening metaphors, and while Mapplethorpe compiles a rich and comprehensive body of work, one cannot fail to see

that their easy promotion and availability in Canada are made possible by a set of double standards.

The so-called "mutilation" that is documented in the seized body-piercing and tattooing periodicals *Piercing Fans International Quarterly* and *Body Art*, pales by comparison to the sex-oriented mutilation in *American Psycho*. It is also interesting that a sharper, more graphic image of "fisting" appears in Mapplethorpe than that which appears in the issue of *Bad Attitude* that was purchased by an undercover officer prior to the charging of Glad Day Books last year. After a lengthy court case, store owner John Scythes and former manager Tom Ivison were acquitted of individual charges although the Glad Day Corporation was charged and legal fees were reported to be \$15,000.

The classification of a wide variety of non-mainstream materials, which are neither explicitly nor exclusively sexual in content, as unfit for Canadian consumers by the very aptly named commodity specialists, situates them at the bottom of a class system of products. Lacking a sufficient degree of value as commodities they are, in relation to an hierarchy of goods, a hindrance to ambitious fiscal growth. Many impounded books and periodicals are produced by smaller presses. In contrast to those bestsellers which can achieve a sort of automatic brand-name status and sense of legitimacy, it seems that some materials are not just being censored for their content but also for their humble commodity value: only credit has credibility.

While contemporary capitalist culture "feeds off the dissident energies of marginal...cultural forms," it "codi-

fies and simplifies" them "for the marketplace," transforming them into "more sedate versions" of themselves.⁶ In deciding what will be palatable to the public, the consideration of what will be meaningful in the context of the marketplace is inevitable. Human sensuality is relentlessly moulded and exploited by the advertising industry,⁷ and even those among us who are acutely aware of the trappings of the dominant culture can, in turn, be utterly seduced by hype, the clean slickness and designed look of current marketing aesthetics.⁸ Customs officials cannot fail to, unwittingly or not, apply the weight of prevailing standards to their judgment of books and periodicals; materials which co-opt the aesthetics of contemporary advertising will pass the censors' tests while those which transgress these standards will not. Issues of class are thus central to the problem of interpretation of the Obscenity Code. An aura of impoverishment which may, in fact, render works provocative rather than sensational, is almost certainly doomed at border crossings. Grainy photographs, blurred or asymmetrical typeface, indecipherable cover imagery, jarring colours, an absence of airbrushing, stocky or overweight bodies, the outlaw or biker stereotypes of tattooing and the primitive nature of body-piercing may all, quite naively, be thought to elicit harm.

The advent of state censorship, as we know it, occurred at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution when "labour capacity was being systematically exploited" and when pleasure was stifled except in those pursuits where the labour source was able to reproduce itself.⁹ Then as now, things relating to sex were not merely to be judged; they were things one "administered" and called for management strategies.¹⁰ It would be unrealistic, however, to imagine that all forms of sex are currently being repressed. Where they bolster the economy and generate revenues, they are encour-

aged. The areas of psychiatry and plastic surgery, moderate pornography and well-monitored prostitution,¹¹ the relatively new, technology-oriented fields of phone-sex and computer-dating and, of course, the fashion and advertising industries are thriving.

Capitalism has come to endorse the values of upwardly mobile, property-owning, child-rearing citizens and it is unlikely that this cultural interpretation is lost on censors in their viewing of materials that explore the identities of gays, lesbians and single or childless heterosexual women. Acts that call into question these values are deemed contrary to nature and have traditionally been perceived as abominable.¹²

It is hard not to speculate about the deeply personal and political motivations of customs officers, and it seems that commodity specialists have in their cultural viewfinders virtually no role models of women who are expressing their autonomous identities and desires, sexual or otherwise. Like most Canadians, they are inundated with stereotypes and probably take for granted that women are nearly always depicted as "on the market," in varying degrees of alluring packaging.¹³ If they see images of women that show self-determined sexual experience—representations that are not thin or glossy-surfaced¹⁴—how can they understand that these are portrayals of women who are not having their lives lived for them but who are living their own lives? In their zeal to protect what might be interpreted as "properly" unsexual women from harm, they are alienating many other women from types of empowerment that derive from knowledge about who they are and what they want.¹⁵

It is no secret that statistically, the nuclear family is declining. Women adopt poverty not power when they shoulder the full responsibility of their children and strike out on their own.¹⁶ If the harms-based Butler Decision seeks to alleviate or ultimately

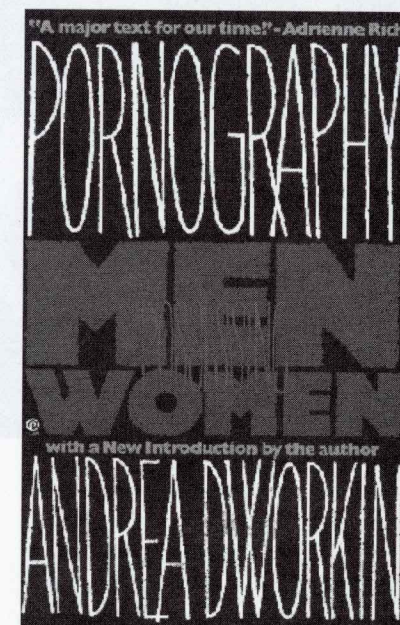
halt violence against women, legislators should consider the fact that the vast majority of violent acts, including rape and murder, occur within what is presently regarded as the sacred confines of the family.¹⁷ Familial patriarchy does not deliver promised protection and, by the same token, commodity specialists—almost exclusively male figures of authority in a patriarchal system—cannot begin to solve the problem of violence against women. They have, thus far, only succeeded in thwarting women's ambitions and silencing their voices. A main objective of patriarchy is, in fact, to "discipline...bodies made subjects through inscriptions of sexual differences [and] represented by the rhetoric of gender and preference."¹⁸

A Notice of Detention from the regional Importations Unit is the precursor to a daunting series of procedures, a labyrinth for the Canadian bookseller. Although the customs officer is required to attach a list of seized materials, this is frequently not done. An illegible signature, unaccompanied by a typed or printed name, ensures that the censor will never be tracked down, never be held personally accountable for the decision. A considerable amount of time, weeks or months, can pass before a notification of the seizure even arrives at the store. At that point, payment to the distributor may be past due, encouraging the bookseller to immediately arrange for the books to be taken out of limbo and sent back to the United States. American distributors such as Inland and Last Gasp routinely have their shipments opened for inspection and these shipments may be temporarily misplaced or even lost.¹⁹ Distributors pack cartons of books very carefully and guarantee that they will arrive at stores in excellent condition. Books can only be damaged at the borders either when they are withdrawn from their cartons for inspection or when they are crammed back into them to be sent on to their destination or back to their

point of origin. These damages, not to mention extra shipping costs, constitute blatant and ongoing financial harassment. Some American distributors are now compiling their own lists of seized titles and are, if not refusing to send the entries to the most persecuted stores, at least demanding prepayment.²⁰ One distributor even specifies in writing that it cannot accept responsibility for goods "shipped to prisons or to Canada."

The right to appeal is offered by both censors and bureaucrats as the democratic solution to escalating misinterpretations and misapplications of the law by Canada Customs. Yet booksellers have to pay significant storage fees for the estimated two years that it will take to complete such a process. Janine Fuller of Little Sisters in Vancouver, recounted that in one recent challenge to customs, copies of *The Advocate* which had been impounded for two and a half years were finally cleared by the federal government only, as it turned out, to have long since been destroyed at the border. The store also successfully appealed the seizure of the lesbian fiction anthology *Macho Sluts*. Since then, the book has repeatedly been seized; in one ship-

ment, it was held up for more than eight months, even though permission "from the highest levels of Canada Customs" was granted for its importation.²¹ Following experiences such as these, the prospect of even a triumphant appeal is less than heartening. The projected lengths and costs are enough to persuade booksellers to exercise caution and, in most cases, self-censorship.



The Supreme Court's ruling in the *Butler* decision was made at the assiduous urging of the Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF). The fact that public and expert witnesses believe that the various materials that can conceivably be interpreted as pornography cause harm "is due to the past decade's anti-porn propaganda campaign, carried out by the dubious alliance of right-wing Christians" and such anti-porn crusaders as "Andrea Dworkin and Catherine McKinnon, who helped develop LEAF's strategy in the *Butler* case."²² Dworkin and McKinnon are working to include in a proposed United Nations declaration on violence against women, the term "degrading representation."²³ One might wonder what Andrea Dworkin would have to say, however, about the recent detentions of two of her books of non-fiction—*Woman Hating* and *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*—at the Champlain border-crossing. The Notice of Detention which arrived at the texts' destination indicated that they had been held on the basis of section 6a of Memorandum D9-1-1. In an absurd spin of justice, this application of a section which deals specifically with the issues pertaining to "degradation" and "dehumanization," offers a sound demonstration of how ill-prepared law enforcers are in dealing with such legislation. Although the books were subsequently released after prominent media criticism, the point of surveillance and the point of seizure must continue to be rendered suspect when images, ideas, and ultimately lives are subject to the highly reactive and unregulated readings of customs officers.

Lucinda Johnston lives and writes in Toronto. She works at Pages Bookstore and is a member of Censorstop and the Book and Periodical Council's Freedom of Expression Committee.

NOTES

¹Chris Bearchell, "In Harm's Way," *Xtra*, issue no. 37, November 1992, p. 1.

²*Ibid.*, p. 3.

³"Reading between the borderlines," *The Globe and Mail*, June 1992, Editorial.

⁴Dan Robins, "Canada Customs, Andrea Dworkin and You" *McGill Daily Culture*, February 4, 1993, p. 9.

⁵H.J. Kirchhoff "Customs seizes anthology of gay erotica," *The Globe and Mail*, 27 June, 1992.

⁶Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 193.

⁷W.H. Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 87.

⁸Haug, p. 50.

⁹Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1, (New York: Vintage Books), p. 6.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹³Linda Singer, *Erotic Welfare*, (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1993), p. 50.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁹Editorial.

²⁰Robins.

²¹Deborah Wilson, "Bookstore's seizure challenge going ahead," *The Globe and Mail*, 17 November 1992, column.

²²Bearchell, p. 1.

²³Bearchell, p. 3.

Censorship Update

At press time, two massive detentions of small press titles were made by Canada Customs. A consolidated shipment of books distributed by the Inland Book Co., destined for thirty-six Canadian bookstores, was detained for "possible obscenity." The Inland Book Co. distributes the publications of thousands of American small presses. On April 23, two skids of books were held, followed by one more skid May 3. This detention of hundreds of titles, includes Suzie Bright's *Sexual Reality*, the political journal *Lies of Our Times*, and *Gay Ideas*, a philosophical dissertation on democracy. The shipments have an estimated value of \$8,200. The anti-censorship group Censorstop has formed new chapters in Halifax, Ottawa, and Vancouver, while another group, SansCensure, has recently formed in Montreal.

IAN RASHID

Blasted Categories

Observations on Desh Pardesh and Recent South Asian Film and Video

In 1990, when the inaugural *Desh Pardesh* was presented, "South Asian" didn't really exist as a category except as a kind of governmental, bureaucratic term. People born in places as diverse as Manchester, Colombo, Lahore, Vancouver, Mombasa, and Port-of-Spain identified themselves—or were identified—as East Indian, or sometimes as "paki." Part of the purpose behind the initial event was, quite naively perhaps, to try and connect many different communities to a collective sense of source, or origin. The festival organizers proposed to examine "how we not only presume community and identity but also create it" by presenting and engaging with politically charged cultural work and issues—particularly racism.¹ In the words of Cameron Bailey, *Desh Pardesh* was conceived in an attempt to bypass "both multiethnic minstrelsy and fossil nostalgia for something more rewarding."²

As *Desh Pardesh* has continued to grow and expand, it has become clear that although the festival's emphasis on identity politics emerges "from an awareness of difference, articulating an identity can also serve to mask differences."³ One begins to fear that the assertion of identity becomes the sole project—the project of empowerment an end unto itself. And there is also a fear that this identity might itself become too heavily characterized, narrow and prescriptive—a yoke that can no longer be seen as liberating. "South Asian" has become, for some, a rigid and alienating category that eclipses,

even disallows, individual differences.

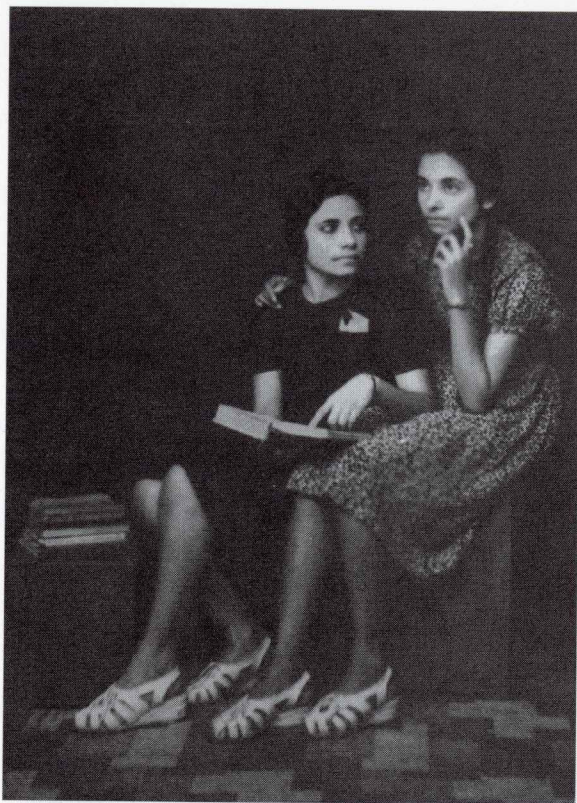
When I was asked by the organizers of this year's *Desh Pardesh* to both scout around for new South Asian films and videos, and to bring over a programme of work from Britain, I was a bit nervous about what I would find. My fears dictated, in fact, that all I would find would be a perpetuation of this project of identity. The tendency among artists who are dependent on public funding to organize their work around 'Multi-cultural' themes—themes such as: *identity, home, migration, family, and exile*, which have become institutionalized—led me to expect the worst, since a number of the artists whose work I was looking at were on the funding circuit. But as I was previewing, I found that, in contrast to my expectations, there was actually a widening of the spectrum of genres and themes that were represented in the work. I was impressed by the sophistication of formal strategies and the complexity and variety of the relationships between form and content (terminology that is a bit tired, I know, but still useful). In particular, I was struck by the refusal of the film and video producers to continue to predictably engage themselves with those themes that have historically been married to work by "minority" artists. As organizers and participants of the festival look to the future—a future



still from *Voices of the Morning*, Meena Nanji, video, USA, 1992

that will include establishing *Desh Pardesh* as a permanent organization—it is reassuring to think that the *Desh* collective can organize itself around cultural work that really is looking and moving forward, and not stuck in some petrified political moment contracting under a pin light.

Shani Mootoo's *Wild Woman in the Woods*, for example, is interested in exploring issues of "identity," but in ways we've never seen before. She out-Masalas Srinivas Krishna by messing around with Hindi films and by playing with butch-femme lesbian role constructs. Her short experimental narrative blasts expectations by placing South Asian women against a rural Western Canada backdrop—people of colour are usually represented as somewhat urban. Meena Nanji's exquisite *Voices of the Morning* defies expectations as well. The oppressive nature of patriarchal family structures has been explored before, particularly in literature (Nanji's tape is inspired by the



still from *Latifah and Himli's Nomadic Uncle*, Alnoor Dewshi, 1992. Courtesy of CFMC

work of Nawal El Saadawi), but never conceptualized in this way: seen through the filter of Islamic architecture. At times the text and voice-over have an uncomfortable familiarity about them, but Nanji has imbued the oral and textual narrative with new meaning by coupling it with images in fresh and exciting ways. Khaled Hakim's *When I Was Just A Little Girl* offers the flip-side of Nanji's project. The tape overlays images of the women in Hakim's family attending a wedding with Doris Day's rendition of *Que Sera Sera* and some nasty sound distortions. This minimalist yet vivid tape foils our expectations by subverting the enterprise of celebratory and positive South Asian family stock images. Hakim reveals an edge of menace under the sunny home movie surface.

These videos and films foreground the changes that have taken place in our understanding of "South Asian-ness." The festival has debunked the double-deckered myth of a pure South Asian culture piggy-backing a watered down diasporic South Asian

culture. But there are other myths to debunk. One of the questions that was informally posited at the conference interrogated the existence of a South Asian cinema in the West: does it exist? It seems clear that the answer within the confines of an event like *Desh Pardesh* is a very qualified yes. But in other contexts the question has been answered by the presence or absence of a South Asian audience. There is a women's cinema, for example, if it's one that women watch. (But then who makes up a South Asian audience?) While a South Asian cinema may exist, the possibility of a homogeneous South Asian aesthetic, sensibility, or politic does not, nor should there be any expectation that it might.

The guidelines for the festival take it for granted that the work chosen will, in some sense, be South Asian—produced by South Asians or relevant to South Asian audiences. But there is a danger that this remit might slip into a kind of narrow nationalism. The whole concept of a "national" cinema is one rooted in a historically specific way of thinking, which reflects the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century and its promulgation in the twentieth. The reality is, that with the globalization of capital, communication, trade, lifestyles and people, nations are no longer the imaginary bounded entities that they were once proposed to be. Increasingly, peoples' lives are cast as unpredictable itineraries, rather than as static, fixed experiences.⁴

We can see this quandary taken on in Alnoor Dewshi's film *Latifah and Himli's Nomadic Uncle*. In this picaresque narrative, Dewshi offers a somewhat cryptic but nevertheless delightful solution to that diabolical and confounding question: Where do you come

from? He introduces us to two identically dressed, sharp-tongued nomads: Latifah and Himli. They take us on a miniature epic journey across many landscapes—all of which exist in a fabled and often beautifully shot London of ambiguous time and place. We follow Latifah and Himli through their many contexts and conversations. They are concerned, if only for a moment, with the problem of their identity. At one point, they take their concerns to their savvy and sexy uncle, who, over a game of ping-pong, offers them a couple of clever conundrums—and a few wicked backhands. Satisfied, the two women continue on their travels, content to just hang out from time to time and to use the tools of whatever culture is available to serve their purposes. The problem of their identity, the essential question of belonging, has not been solved. The women are not able to fix it—to pin their identity to the bulletin board of history. They just continue on against an ever shifting backdrop, exchanging breezy wisdoms and checking out the territory.

New View, New Eyes shares some of the same concerns. With splatter-gun inventiveness and a landscape painter's eye, Gitanjali [Gita Saxena] has taken on the problem of how to be South Asian in the East, yet of the West. While travelling through India, she recognizes that she will never be Indian but she also refuses to be a tourist in search of "some kind of experience": she has never been so homeless as when she is searching for home—"home" being another "Multicultural" Thematic Category that gets a new twist here. Gitanjali embraces journeying without expecting the comforts of arrival. She valorizes placelessness, finding that the imaginary homeland of art practice is perhaps the only home that is possible. The tape is finally a bit too long: large sections of it might have been condensed or collapsed into one another. But even the most dispensable bits of the tape have a naive and rather loony clumsiness

that makes them endearing. At its best, *New View, New Eyes* has a thoughtfulness that recalls the personal documentary work of Richard Fung.

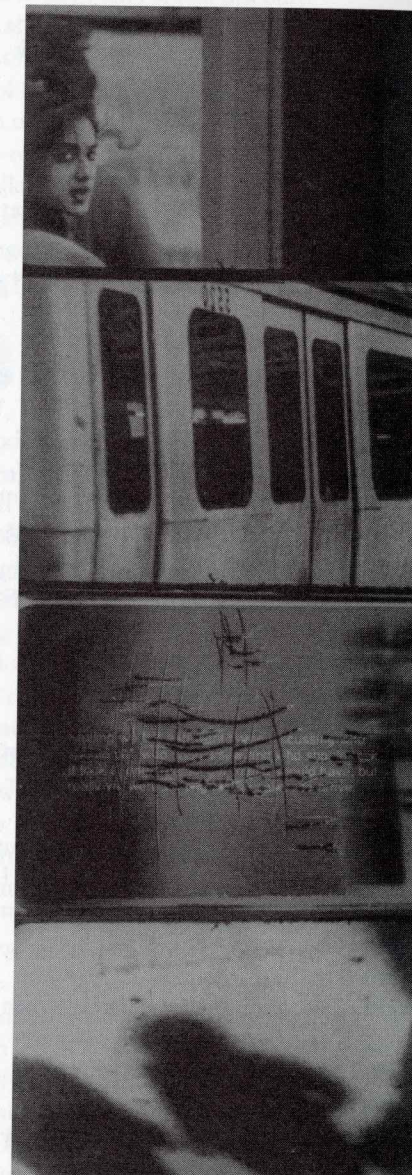
These films and videos, while formally innovative in many different ways, all confront issues of content which are fundamental, vibrant and contemporary. The work flies by convention, rarely sticking to a formula or approach that is strictly documentary, reductively "formalist," or issue-based. Even some of the more conventional narrative films offer something new: Sonali Fernando's *Shakti* and Devika Ponnambalam's *Azaadi* tread on familiar terrain—oppression and radical self-renewal through spirituality—but what is more interesting about them is the way that their stories are strung together. Fernando frames the fantastic in simple compositions and steers clear of invoking a Hindu concept of reincarnation while keeping the notion of re-invention active in her film. (She also keeps out of the way of her leading actress, Indian photographer Sheba Chhachhi who gives one of those rare performances that are reminiscent of the silent era of film: she evokes pity and terror, and triumph and joy, holding them all within a kind of boneless, frail posture.) *Azaadi*, on the other hand, relies on a lyrical poetic voice-over, written and read by the filmmaker, which consciously avoids references to the mythical Hindu images on screen. These films give religion an up-to-date inflection without becoming opportunistic, ahistorical, or exploitative (neither are they—thankfully—New Age). They're about how South Asian women live their lives—how they survive.

In the two previous festivals, the highlight of events was the work of Pratibha Parmar. Her activist-oriented stylish documentaries were lynch-pin moments of *Desh Pardesh*—setting the tone for the rest of the event. The other programming, and the issues raised during panel discussions, seemed to evolve from Parmar's pioneering work.

(And for very good reason: Parmar was the first visible South Asian producer who was interested in producing films and videos featuring South Asian subjects living and working in the West—the conceptual backbone of the festival. Parmar's work is about many things, but it is particularly engaged in documenting—or more accurately, heralding—the emergence of a South Asian lesbian and gay subjectivity. Her vision of representing the range of subjective experiences in the South Asian Diaspora, and her commitment to overcoming homophobia in our communities, have been shared by the organizing committee of *Desh Pardesh*, the core of which has always included a strong and active group of lesbians and gay men.) There was no such focal point at this year's festival, but events were enriched, rather than impoverished, by being somewhat decentred. Work that might have been dismissed or overlooked found its own context and its own audience. A film such as Alia Syed's *Fatima's Letter*, while visually reminiscent of Stan Brakhage's *The Wonder Ring*, shares little in common with any work produced by Parmar or Gurinder Chadha—and that's okay.

Fatima's Letter revolves around the perceptions and recollections of a woman who feels as if she has always been travelling on the London Underground. While writing a letter on the tube to her friend Fatima, she becomes disoriented and begins to people the incident she is writing about with the strangers that surround her on the train. England collides with Pakistan and creates, almost imperceptibly, a confused and abstract setting of shifting light and shadow, recalling treacherous memories; a bewildering landscape in which even language fails us. Syed presents all the dialogue in Urdu and follows, after long delays, with English sub-titles that don't necessarily correlate with either the image on screen or the voice-over. The film is shot entirely at White Chapel tube station in London, an area which over

centuries has become home to wave after wave of immigrant populations, and is currently settled by various South Asian communities. Beautifully shot and edited to the hypnotic rhythm of passing trains, many sequences are reminiscent of film passing through a gate.⁵ As with the



still from *Fatima's Letter*, Alia Syed, 16 mm, UK, 1993.



still from *Azaadi*, Devika Ponnambalam, film, UK, 1992.
Courtesy of Cinenova London.

screenings of Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon*, Tanya Syed's *Chameleon* and Vivek Bald's unfinished *Taxi/vala Auto/biography*, the screening of *Fatima's Letter* at *Desh Pardesh* marks a new moment in oppositional South Asian film and video, and poses, in its wake, a new set of challenges.

Throughout the eighties, an argument existed that prescribed experimental film and video to be an elitist practice.⁶ The artists in question weren't thinking, it was argued, in terms of the widest possible audience in the public of their imaginations. Unfortunately, a lot of these important concerns have been reduced and translated into a politics of excommunication. Cultural work that doesn't explicitly represent working class peoples and issues is seen as work that is not "dealing with class" or as work that is "classist," and is inevitably dismissed.

These charges were levelled most memorably at the last *Desh Pardesh* during a panel discussion, which was set up to interrogate notions of 'home' but which spiralled downward into what I thought was a simple-minded criticism about how the work in the festival failed to "deal with class." This criticism was repeated again after a screening of Indu Krishnan's extraordinary, experimental documentary video *Knowing Her Place*, which was, for me, the most outstanding work at that festival. Members of the audience attacked Krishnan and the tape on many grounds: including the choice of a professional South Asian woman as the subject of the project, and the scripting of portions of the dialogue—par-

ticularly the featured woman's comments about working women in India, which they read as being "classist" and misogynist. Presumably, "dealing with class" in film and video means only to represent working class people on a screen or monitor, and excludes the possibility of employing any other strategy. But even within the confines of an approach that invokes representation as the key to challenging classism and elitism in film and video practice there are problems: for example, what criteria do we use to determine whether a person is working class or middle class? (Particularly in Canada where uses of the term "class" as a modifier are often inadequate; the definitions are ever shifting, the traditional paradigms don't quite work.)

These reductive arguments seem stuck in an economic, nineteenth century understanding of class. They also tend to conceptualize audiences as little more than a passive, uncritical mass that is incapable of coping with complex meanings and ideas. And finally they fail to challenge programmers, publicists and distributors to present useful possibilities for different audiences, and to encourage different kinds of cultural work. If formally experimental work is to be dismissed by a criteria of class-consciousness, it is important to recognize other problematics in the how-and-why of the production of moving images: the commercial history of narrative film traditions; who has owned them; the traps inherent within the problems of representation, on the one hand; and the treacherous veneer of objective truth through which documentary is often cast, on the other. In other words, we shouldn't throw out the experimental film baby with the class-consciousness bath water. Experimental film can, and

does, offer a political project: it offers us other ways of seeing. It is to the credit of the organizers of *Desh Pardesh* that they allowed that offer to be made.

These films and videos are compatible not only with *Desh Pardesh*'s political project but also with a commitment to a new vision of South Asian subjectivities. A vision that allows for investigative examinations of history, critiques of how power can operate, and which challenges traditional ideas and institutions. A vision that acknowledges the power of the personal revelation, the spiritual, and the fantastic; one that recognizes the desire for formal, aesthetic and, hopefully, even technological innovations. And most importantly, a vision that refuses to be constrained by the oppressive myths of "South Asian-ness"; and that denies a simplistic, archaic construction of class as the measure of a cruelly unproblematic logic of inclusion and exclusion.

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NOTES

¹Nayan Shah, "Sexuality, Identity and the Uses of History" *A Lotus of a Different Colour*, Rakesh Ratti, ed. (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1993) p. 125.

²NOW, March 18-24 1993, p. 49.

³Nayan Shah, p. 125.

⁴Peter Wollen, *Arrows of Desire* (London: ICA Documents, 1993) p. 9.

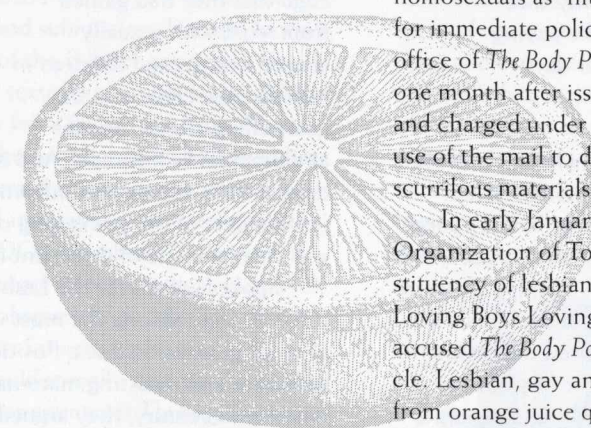
⁵Ibid., p. 47.

⁶Judith Williamson, "Two Kinds of Otherness," *Black Film, British Cinema*, Kobena Mercer, ed. (London: ICA Documents, 1988), p. 36.

BECKI ROSS

like apples & oranges

Lesbian Feminist Responses to the Politics of *The Body Politic*.



A number of historians and theorists have recently remarked on the embattled relations that have persisted between post-Stonewall lesbian feminists and gay male activists.¹ This is a revisitation of one site of contestation: the 1977 police raid on *The Body Politic* (a now defunct radical gay liberation monthly with an international readership) by Project P—a joint Metropolitan Toronto/Ontario Provincial Police anti-pornography squad. A replaying of the debates that swirled around the article "Men Loving Boys Loving Men" focusing on the sharpening of lesbian feminist sexual discourse against and in contradistinction to gay men's sexual discourse. Indeed, the raid served as a lightning rod for the articulation of competing discourses on issues of sexual practice, representation and the role of the state in legislating matters of sex and morality. The focus on dominant lesbian feminist responses allows one to recapture one moment in the consolidation of a white, middle class Lesbian Nationalist identity and community. It also allows a contextualization of the subsequent fracturing of hegemonic lesbian feminism in the 1980s and the emergent possibility for new queer alliances in the 1990s.

Lesbian Feminists Enter the Maelstrom

On November 21, 1977, *The Body Politic* mailed out issue no. 39 to subscribers and bookstores. The issue contained "Men Loving Boys Loving Men" by Gerald Hannon—the third in a series of three articles on consent and youth sexuality.² Written from the standpoint of a boy-lover, the tone and content of the article suggested competing desires to confess, to educate and to provoke. And provoke it did. In five consecutive columns leading up to and following the publication of issue no. 39, Claire Hoy of *The Toronto Sun* vilified "radical homosexuals" and their "rag," *The Body Politic*.³ Referring to homosexuals as "filthy garbage" and "child rapers," he called for immediate police action against the newspaper. The office of *The Body Politic* was raided on December 30, 1977, one month after issue no. 39 had appeared on newsstands.⁴ and charged under Section 164 of the Criminal Code—use of the mail to distribute immoral, indecent and scurrilous materials.⁵

In early January 1978, a formal meeting of the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT—the city's largest constituency of lesbian feminists) was held to discuss the "Men Loving Boys Loving Men" crisis. Most LOOT members accused *The Body Politic* of bad timing in publishing the article. Lesbian, gay and feminist communities were still reeling from orange juice queen Anita Bryant's anti-homosexual "Save Our Children" crusade launched in July 1977, and the reported "homosexual orgy slaying" of twelve-year old Emanuel Jaques in a Yonge Street establishment in August 1977.⁶ The ensuing moral panic organized through the media not only focused hostility against the entire gay community, it provided rationale for an escalation of the "Clean

Up Yonge Street" campaign (similar to the Times Square and Tenderloin clean-ups in New York and San Francisco) orchestrated by police, politicians and downtown real estate developers.⁷

By being published when it was, many lesbian feminists argued, "Men Loving Boys Loving Men" endangered the gay civil rights campaign which at that time seemed to be gaining momentum.⁸ Bluntly told, void of nuance, the article worked to feed and reinforce the myth of the homosexual child molester; and thus some lesbian feminists claimed, provided right-wing organizers—Renaissance International, the Catholic church, Positive Parents, the Western Front (later the League Against Homosexuals)—with fuel for their backlash and served to grease the wheels of Anita Bryant's powerful anti-gay, anti-feminist and "pro-family" machine.

More importantly, though, on a deep emotional level, the article evoked shock and disgust among most lesbian (and straight) feminists. At several public forums, lesbian feminist speakers denounced cross-generational sex as abusive and nonconsensual, and they condemned its exploitive portrayal in *The Body Politic*. Refusing the libertarian defense of the magazine by high-profile writers like Margaret Atwood and June Callwood, a number of lesbian feminists spoke out against the sexual, economic, physical and emotional inequalities between gay men and young boys. In interviews they remember being furious with the romanticization of adult/child love. Former psychiatric nurse and youth counsellor Pat Murphy was a vocal critic:

[Gay men] didn't see the relationship between power and sexuality...they'd have sexual relationships with a young kid that they'd taken to McDonald's for a hamburger and they'd say he's all willing and he likes it... It was all romantic sexuality that was to their own advantage. It's like paying five bucks at McDonald's for an all-day blow job.⁹

Disallowing the "Men Loving Boys" article as a "celebration of sex," members of LOOT railed against the lack of power and privilege of the young boys.¹⁰ Not only, they argued, did Gerald Hannon's standpoint assure a foregrounding of adult male sexual desire; it secured the erasure of meaning/s that the boys themselves attached to cross-generational sexual encounters. In the aftermath of the raid, the state-

ment formulated by a number of activist lesbians during anti-Bryant organizing—"pedophilia is neither a lesbian nor a feminist issue"—was recapitulated with a renewed, steely confidence. Feelings of rage cut across ideological differences

that were beginning to fragment LOOT lesbians into socialist and radical feminist camps. A long-time member of the Revolutionary Marxist Group (later the Revolutionary Workers League), Amy Gottlieb recalls that:

...there was a general feeling that [the article] was awful and terrible and how could men do this to boys and there must be something wrong with these men and they're really beyond the pale, and no wonder we didn't want to have anything to do with them. I know for myself, I was pretty outraged at the time.¹¹

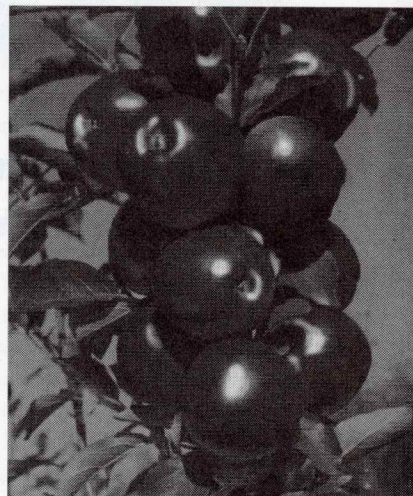
Former collective member of *The Body Politic*, Ed Jackson remembers his shock and dismay at the intensely negative criticism of "Men Loving Boys" voiced by many lesbian feminists (and, not insignificantly, some gay men).¹² However, he is quick to note the absence of any gender-mixed infrastructure within lesbian and gay political organizing during this period which may have furnished a context for productive dialogue.

Re-Aligning Memory

Asked to recall their feelings about the "Men Loving Boys" debacle, a number of former LOOT members told of their girlhood experiences of unwanted, forced sexual pain and humiliation at the hands of straight adult men. In addition, a number of lesbian feminist leaders added the knowledge that they had gained from work with sexually abused women and children in hostels, rape crisis centres, counselling clinics, prisons

and psychiatric hospitals. And it was, it seems, to a large degree these stories that influenced the reaction to the article (an example of the privileging of first person narrative that was characteristic of dominant feminist ideology.)

Spokeswomen for the Lesbian Mothers Defense Fund (LMDF) were among the most vigorous and persuasive critics of cross-generational sex. Positioning themselves as moral guardians and recasting maternal feminist rhetoric of the nineteenth century, they argued for the "innocence" of children. Adult lesbian feminists, members of LOOT contended, were not child molesters, nor did they sexually desire children. As Amy Gottlieb recalls, "There was a need to say we were really different [from gay men] and by implication, we wouldn't do this with young girls."¹³ In interviews for this piece only one narrator mentioned having had sex with an



older woman, while two women mentioned the sex they had experienced with underage female partners. Perhaps a compulsion to disengage from the messiness of one's past in the service of a politically consistent present, prevented others from disclosing similar acts.¹⁴ Even the lesbian 'crush' popularized by singer/songwriter Meg Christian's "Ode to a Gym Teacher" (Olive Records, 1974) was eulogized in language reminiscent of nineteenth century ennobling of same-sex romantic friendships. Ultimately, notwithstanding Jane Rule's heretical wish "to make adults easier to seduce," breaking the cross-generational taboo was incongruent with 1970s right-on, reciprocal, relational love between adult, women-identified women.¹⁵

In light of their own personal and increasingly political awareness of male sexual violence, many lesbian and straight feminists were suspicious of claims to consensual sex, whether straight or gay.¹⁶ As stated by Susan Cole, "Gay men were interested in eliminating age of consent laws so that they could find many, many dozen more holes into which they could plug their penises."¹⁷ Cole and others were not encouraged by the stories that some gay men, as teenagers, delighted in the sexual education they sought and received from older men, or that virtually all boys, as males, are taught to view themselves as sexual subjects. That intergenerational sex among males often entailed a positive and genuinely different experience from intergenerational heterosex was not something with which women, lesbian or straight, identified.¹⁸

However, while most activist lesbians were scornful of what they understood to be "anonymous," "penis-fixated," "recreational" and "public" gay sex-at-any-cost,¹⁹ gay liberationists Chris Bearchell and Konnie Reich remember the envy they felt (and still feel) toward the richness of gay male sexual possibilities.²⁰ Comprising a tiny minority in the late 1970s, Bearchell, Reich and others were drawn to the complex dynamics of dominance and submission, lust and fantasy played out in some segments of the (white) gay male community, and made vivid in the sexually anarchic work of filmmaker Kenneth Anger, writers John Rechy and John Preston, and artist Tom of Finland.²¹ The majority of LOOT members felt, though, that the worst forms of heterosexual power imbalance, objectification and insensitivity were intrinsic to gay male sexual activity. To LOOT members, the pursuit of young boys exemplified the vulgar opportunism already present in a gay male world that obsessively sought new, increasingly commercial outlets for sexual pleasure.²² As Darlene Lawson quipped, "Would it really destroy the lesbian movement in this community or country if *The Body Politic* was not operating?"²³

The Conundrum of the State

Against that hegemonic feminist current, a small collection of lesbian activists, many of whom had participated in the Stop Anita Bryant Coalition in the summer of 1977, argued

that *The Body Politic* and the freedom to publish, more generally, must be defended. In particular, the five women who joined The Body Politic Free the Press Fund insisted that lesbian feminists needed to take a strong, principled stand against the danger of state control in the form of sexual censorship as well as bath and bar raids, police intimidation and entrapment. The lines, though, were not clearly drawn.

Lesbian feminists of all political stripes condemned the police seizure of twelve shipping cartons full of materials from *The Body Politic* office and the laying of charges against Pink Triangle Press. They were shaken by the blatant incursion—the depth and severity of which were then unknown to lesbian feminist institutions. And yet at the same time, in another context, many of these activists were exerting pressure on state agents to forbid the public screening and distribution of what they deemed "offensive" sexual materials. One month prior to *The Body Politic* raid, a band of radical feminists from LOOT and the newly formed "Snuff Out Snuff" (SOS) contingent descended upon mayor Crombie's office demanding the closure of the film "Snuff" at Cinema 2000. In a letter to *The Body Politic* in 1978, Pat Leslie cautioned against support for state censorship laws which "could conceivably be used against us."²⁴ And yet, at the same time, Eve Zaremba, Susan Cole and others began to argue for the necessary involvement of the state (via the Criminal Code, Customs regulations and censor boards) to legislate against "pornographic material" that, according to Cole, not only "taught the hatred of women," but also "promoted child abuse."²⁵ In concert with feminist anti-porn organizations in the United States which also formed in late 1977, Zaremba, Cole and others began a call for state-administered penalties against the owners of the commercial pornography industry—"the purveyors

of violence against women"—a call which foreshadowed the infamous Minneapolis Ordinance designed by anti-pornography crusaders Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin in 1983.²⁶



above
Photo Gerald Hannon. Design Mervin Walker. Published in: *The Body Politic*, no. 43 (May 1978), cover and p. 3
below
Policeman entering Romans II bath.

below

Des Moines, Iowa, 14 Oct. 1977: Anita Bryant prays after having a pie thrown in her face by Tom Higgins. Published in: *The Body Politic* no. 39 (Dec. 1977-Jan. 1978) p. 13



“As Darlene Lawson avowed during the January, 1978 debate on *The Body Politic* at the LOOT headquarters, enlisting the state to censor such “damaging” accounts as “Men Loving Boys Loving Men” was not only conceivable; it was a justified strategy.²⁷ Ironically, it was one that also appealed to right-wing lobbyists. Only weeks earlier, *Toronto Sun* columnist Claire Hoy demanded the repeal of two small Ontario Arts grants awarded to *The Body Politic* on the grounds that “our taxes are helping to promote the abuse of children” (a demand that anticipated Jesse Helms’ homophobic assault on the NEA in 1989 and *Toronto Sun* columnist Christina Blizzard’s attack on the “flagrant misuse of state funds” by the AIDS Committee of Toronto in 1992).²⁸

In effect, then, lesbian and feminist criticism of all forms of male sexuality in the ’70s led to both tacit and openly declared support (alongside moral conservatives) for state regulation of male homosexual pornography, and by extension, all gay male sexual expression. Having taken this stance, and without a pornographic tradition of their own, it is perhaps not surprising that lesbian activists did not mount a coordinated protest against the police seizure of *The Joy of Lesbian Sex* in the same raid on *The Body Politic* offices in late 1977.

Gender Loyalty

Reflecting upon the mid-to-late 1970s, the territories occupied jointly by lesbian feminists and activist gay men seem

much more troubled than the mezzanine of the King Edward Hotel, Bowles Lunch, the Melody Room after-hours club or Hanlan’s Point beach shared by semi-secret queer subcultures in the 1950s and ’60s.²⁹ Requests to join gay men on the front lines stirred fears in post-Stonewall lesbian feminists of being railroaded into positions prematurely or of having their agenda co-opted by a slick, more experienced gay male leadership. Further, political lesbians in the 70s were not overly keen on joining forces with gay men given the spotty evidence of gay men’s anti-sexism, measured in part by poor attendance at abortion rallies, anti-violence protests, International Women’s Day events, strikes by women workers, and so on (though paradoxically it was not always clear that men, gay or straight, were welcome). Faced with scarce resources, the legacy of invisibility and the goals of coming out proud and united, white lesbian leaders were consumed by the desire to construct empowered, cultural identities and “gomer-free” wanderground: a forceful and utopian lesbian feminist mythos enacted to bind women together. They grappled with inventing language not only to describe and analyse sexism and heterosexism, but to give voice to the particularities of lesbian oppression and the need for women-only space.

Throughout the seventies, immersed in campaigns to end men’s sexual violence, neither lesbian nor straight feminists battled to enshrine a politics of pleasure in arenas outside their own bedrooms.³⁰ With so many lesbians just coming out, their often hurtful memories of heterosexual sex were deep, immediate reminders of their need to “do sex” differently. In this context, gay male sexuality (and gay male life which, to cite John D’Emilio, has often taken shape in pornographic zones) appeared threateningly “other” or “alien.”³¹ As such, feminist elevation of “the personal” to creed fed the disinclination, even resistance, of lesbian feminists to move beyond the limits of their own lived experience. Under siege and inventing things as they went along, they constituted a visible, proud presence against social forces that actively disavowed or condemned their existence. However, their emphases and practices also contained strands of a congealing, identity-based politics compelling (and exclusive) to insiders who feared dissolution, co-optation and assimilation.³²

Indeed, gay men’s sexual culture was not readily “personalized” by lesbians who themselves were vying to displace medical and popular images of The Lesbian as sexual deviate, pervert and predator. Most radical lesbians—who were largely white and middle class—were embarrassed and repelled by talk and images of “dirty,” “kinky” gay male “promiscuity.”³³ Without supportive links to largely working class sex workers, lesbian feminists unwittingly aligned themselves with the “Clean Up Yonge Street” campaign against prostitutes, dancers, porn models and masseuses who worked “the strip” and who became increasingly vulnerable to arrest and police harassment in the ’70s. Thus the moral authority exercised by

some white middle class lesbian feminists vis-a-vis sex and sexual imagery in the mid-to-late ’70s not only echoed the sexual conservatism of the Daughters of Bilitis in the 1950s, but it also reworked early twentieth century temperance and social purity notions of essential, unchecked male lust from which women needed protection.³⁴

Consonant with bourgeois norms of propriety, these lesbian radicals seemed partial to century-old notions of childhood as the age of vulnerability to be guarded at all costs from adult corruption. Championing the goodness of egalitarian, nurturant adult love, most middle class lesbian activists seemed unaware of the state warehousing of minors—sexually active working class girls—in detention centres on charges of sexual immorality. Regarding man/boy love, not only did lesbian feminists tend to re-invoke the potent spectre of pedophilia (against evidence that the overwhelming majority of child molesters are heterosexual men); they applied an analysis of unequal power in adult/child heterosexual relations to adult/youth homosexual relations without considering how same-gender sex might fundamentally alter the dynamic. Had girlhood memories of lust for older women been admissible it is possible that recognition of the disjuncture between practice and ideology may have opened up space for dialogue and for the formulation of alternative strategies. Indeed, attention to the structuring of power within lesbian sexual exchanges was effectively stoppered (or at least discredited) until volcanic debates about butch/femme and SM erupted in the early 1980s.



Significantly, by the end of the ’70s, lesbian feminist attention to power and its abuses in sexual relations had raised vexing questions concerning the civil libertarian stance of *The Body Politic*. It also prefigured later criticisms of the race- and class-bound character of commercial porn, gay and straight.³⁵ However, the slide from criticism of sexual practice and representation to support for state sexual censorship was riddled with flaws, not least of all the deflection away from root causes of sexual and gender inequality in capitalist, racist and patriarchal culture.³⁶

In the end, a preoccupation with mobilizing around female rage and pain, disconnection from pre-Stonewall queer experience of state sexual regulation, a separation from gay men and the yearning of many middle class lesbian feminists for radical (yet respectable) power-free love, contributed to the dominant feminist interpretation of cross-generational sex, gay and straight, as indefensible. On the level of strategy in the mid-to-late 1970s, lesbian and straight feminists tended to support two courses of action: 1) the elimination of pornography by the state through obscenity legislation; 2) the rejection of demands made by gay and lesbian



above Club Toronto raid and arrests.
opposite Jane Rule. Photo Dan Stroud © Infinity Graphics Ltd.

youth for modification, if not abolition, of “age of consent” laws. Importantly, the reluctance of the left to engage in the politics of sexuality, compounded by the long-standing anti-left hostility of radical (and liberal) feminists, accounted in part for feminist faith in the state’s role as a facilitating force in social justice.³⁷ Over the past year, the short-sightedness of this approach has become crystal clear given the retooled obscenity legislation enshrined by the Supreme Court (i.e., the *Butler* decision) and recent interpretations of *Butler* that have criminalized sexually explicit matters, both lesbian/gay and straight.

The 1990s: The Promise of Queer

Between 1977 and when *The Body Politic* closed down in 1987, discussion of the content of the “Men Loving Boys” article was ostensibly squelched. Undoubtedly, the immeasurable amounts of community time, energy and money expended in defense of the paper chilled the collective’s desire to encourage further debate on the subject. Today, as one consequence of this chill, nagging issues persist: If an imbalance of gender power relations is not relevant when we consider sex between men and boys (or women and girls), do unequal power relations based on age remain? In other words, what age limits (if any) are appropriate in determining when the impermissible becomes permissible? How do gay (and lesbian) youth who seek sex from adults make sense of this desire and the sexual activity that may ensue? And how can print and visual resources designed to foster sexual agency in young people (ideally produced by youth themselves) be made widely available?

To date, gay and lesbian movements have not mounted a successful defense of “man/boy love.” Clearly, the stigmatization of gay men as lecherous child molesters is long-standing and resilient; however, the current lesbian/gay moratorium on cross-generational sex cedes authority to the already pow-

erful emotional (and moral) force of a right wing sexual agenda. Christina Blizzard of *The Toronto Sun*, the architects and supporters of Measure 9 in Oregon and Initiative 2 in Colorado during the 1992 United States' presidential campaign, have been successful in deploying the demonizing discourse of homosexual pedophilia in the service of a broad offensive against all lesbians and gay men.³⁸ In addition, the intense focus on the spectre of the perverts is being used to galvanize neo-conservative and fundamentalist activity on broader issues of welfare, unemployment, immigration, the family, people of colour and women.

In looking for allies to challenge the dominant ideology of young people's sexuality (and the control adults exert over children/youth), gay men will not readily discover friends among lesbian feminists. Still, factors that include the AIDS/HIV crisis, the efflorescence of queer discourses inspired in part by man/boy lovers, sex workers, bisexuals, SM dykes and lesbians and gay men of colour, as well as the state confiscation of lesbian-explicit materials (e.g., *Bad Attitude*), have converged to herald new possibilities of conscious coalition, of political and social kinship.³⁹ Unlike (white, middle class) lesbian feminist ideology of the 1970s, the distinction made between male and female sexualities no longer operates as the primary political cleavage. Moreover, there seems to be a growing awareness among feminists that radical issues are often transformed by the state into legal (as well as administrative and medical) categories which may bear little resemblance to original feminist (and anti-racist) demands or intents.⁴⁰ Whether queer-as-identity will operate as a set of rallying points, or yet another regulatory regime riven by inclusions and exclusions, will only become clear through the repetitive enactment of queerness in myriad private and public arenas of struggle.

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Illustration Ostrom. Originally published in *The Body Politic*, no. 39 (Dec.-Jan. 1977-78)

Notes

I want to thank the women and the few men I've interviewed (and whose actual names appear in the text) as well as Ingrid Stitt, Didi Khayatt and Gary Kinsman for their support and constructive criticism.

¹Analysis of relationships forged between activist lesbians and gay men in the post-Stonewall period remains underdeveloped. Brief references can be found in Margaret Cruikshank, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1991), pp. iii-xviii; Jeffrey Escoffier, "Can Gay Men and Lesbians Work Together?" *Out/Look*, no. 6 (Fall, 1989), p. 1; Amy Gottlieb, "The Gay Movement," in *Lesbians Against the Right* (ed.) *Lesbians Are Everywhere, Fighting the Right*, (Toronto: 1981), pp. 7-10; and, John D'Emilio, *Making Trouble: essays on gay history, politics and the university* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

²Gerald Hannon, "Men Loving Boys Loving Men," *The Body Politic* (November, 1977), pp. 30-33. The standpoint of sexually active young gays and lesbians was explored in "Seven Years to Go: the plight of gay youth," *The Body Politic* (September, 1976), pp. 1, 14, 15.

³Claire Hoy, "Stope the Bleeding Hearts," *The Toronto Sun* (October 30, 1977); "The Limp Wrist Lobby," *The Toronto Sun* (November 2, 1977); "Gay Rights, Continuing Saga," *The Toronto Sun* (November 13, 1977); "Morality vs. Perversity," *The Toronto Sun* (December 21, 1977); *The Toronto Sun* (December 22, 1977); "Kids, Not Rights, Their Craving," *The Toronto Sun* (December 25, 1977).

⁴Armed with a warrant, officers from Metropolitan Toronto Police force and the Ontario Provincial Police carted away twelve shipping cartons filled with documents and records: subscription lists dating years into the past, distribution and advertising records, corporate and financial records (even the cheque book), classified ad records and addresses, manuscripts for publication and letters to the editors. Personal and business mail was opened and the Canadian Gay Archives was ransacked. Importantly, unlike gay men, there was not the same tension between the local character of the politics and everyday lives of LOOT members and the extra-local and textual organization of gay male life instructed by the criminal code. Lesbian oppression was, and is not, primarily organized through official categories of "indecent" and "obscenity."

⁵*The Body Politic* editors were also charged under section 159 with "possession for the purpose of distribution, of obscene publications": the books *Loving Man* and *The Joy of Lesbian Sex*. On August 12, 1977, Norman Webster of *The Globe and Mail* reconsidered the value of sexual orientation legislation:

If that right is to include proselytizing or the teaching of homosexuality in the schools by homosexual instructors or swinging adult males having affairs with young boys—all things loudly demanded by militants in the movement, then forget it. It's just not on.

⁶On the Jaques murder, see Yvonne Chi-Ying Ng, "Ideology, Media

and Moral Panics: An analysis of the Jaques Murder," (Centre for Criminology, University of Toronto, M.A. thesis, 1981) and Gary Kinsman, "The Jaques Murder: an anatomy of a moral panic," in *The Regulation of Desire* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986), pp. 204-205. This was not the first "homosexual" murder in Toronto. See Sidney Katz, "The Truth about sex criminals" which appeared in *Maclean's Magazine* (July 1, 1967), pp. 46-48. Here, Katz focuses on "homosexual" sex murders. The article also associates homosexuals with the molesting of children.

⁷On the media, see Chris Bearchell, Rick Be'bout, Alexander Wilson, "Another Look," *The Body Politic*, no. 51 (March/April 1979), where they state: "The 'molestation tactic' was tailor-made for the compressed and unsubtle world of the mass media. It was direct, unencumbered by sophisticated analysis and could make a dramatic impact in less than ten seconds" (p. 21).

⁸A debate was scheduled in the Ontario Legislature in early February 1978 to consider the prohibition of discrimination on the basis sexual orientation. Gay Alliance Towards Equality (GATE), the John Damian Defense Committee and the Coalition of Gay Rights in Ontario had made this a priority since the early 1970s.

⁹Interview with Pat Murphy, 1986, conducted by myself and other members of the oral history collective, Lesbians Making History, Toronto.

¹⁰Editorial, *The Body Politic*, no. 39 (December/January, 1977) p. 1.

¹¹Interview with Amy Gottlieb, 1989.

¹²Interview with Ed Jackson, 1992. As Education Coordinator of the AIDS Committee of Toronto, Jackson commented on how AIDS activism and service provision has facilitated some positive, respectful relations between lesbians and gay men, though these relations are far from conflict free.

¹³Interview with Amy Gottlieb, 1989.

¹⁴In *Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), critic Bonnie Zimmerman identifies the pressure lesbians face to "shape one's personal story in accordance with the communal tale, or myth" (p. 51).

¹⁵Jane Rule's original article, "Teaching Sexuality" appeared in issue no. 53 (June, 1979) of *The Body Politic* and has been reprinted in her collection *Outlander: short stories and essays* (Tallahassee, Fla.: Naiad Press, 1982), pp. 157-162. Here, Rule adds: "[I would want] to make adults easier to seduce, less burdened with fear or guilt, less defended by hypocrisy. If we accepted sexual behaviour between children and adults, we would be far more able to protect our children from abuse and exploitation than we are now" (pp. 160-161).

¹⁶It is hypothesized in the article "Incest and Other Sexual Taboos: A Dialogue between Men and Women," *Out/Look* (Fall, 1989) that "the feminist/lesbian movements may be anti-sexual because many of the women involved may have been sexually abused. Whether they remember it or not." (p. 53) I would submit that the connec-

tions between women's (lesbian, straight and bisexual) histories of sexual abuse, feminist politics and actual sexual practice require much more rigorous investigation.

¹⁷Interview with Susan Cole, 1989.

¹⁸This is not to argue that all cross-generational sexual experiences between gay youth and men are positive and pleasurable, as testimonies at the 1991 inquiry into widespread sexual abuse of young people at the Mount Cashel, Newfoundland orphanage makes clear.

¹⁹See Adrienne Rich, "The Meaning of Our Love For Women is What We Have Constantly to Expand," in Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-1977* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1980), p. 225. In this essay, as in her oft-quoted "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), she speaks to the tensions between activist lesbians and gay men. Specifically, she criticizes gay men's "gynophobia" and points to the difficulties of finding "real 'brotherly' solidarity in the gay movement." She also points to the "prevalence of anonymous sex and the justification of pederasty among male homosexuals, the pronounced ageism in male homosexual standards of sexual attractiveness, and so forth" (p. 193).

²⁰Interview with Chris Bearchell and Konnie Reich, 1990. In 1978, responding to the "Men Loving Boys" debacle, Gayle Rubin penned a letter to *The Body Politic* cautioning against the abandon of "already vulnerable and stigmatized groups such as boy-lovers, sadomasochists and transsexuals to further attack and isolation" (p. 90).

²¹On gay male porn, see Nayland Blake, "Tom of Finland, an appreciation," *Out/Look* (Fall, 1988), pp. 36-45; and John Preston, "What Happened? An SM pioneer reflects on the leather world past and present," *Out/Look* (Winter, 1992), pp. 8-15. For a post-Stonewall piece of gay male erotic writing, see John Rechy, *City of Night* (New York: Grove, 1977).

²²By the late '70s, especially in large urban centres like Toronto, many lesbian feminists extended their distaste for gay male political and sexual culture to what they viewed as signs of a rising gay capitalism. A burgeoning commercial and residential district complete with established cruising grounds, businesses, a publishing company, local bars, baths and clubs, and a pornography industry, signified the expansion of a gay male market.

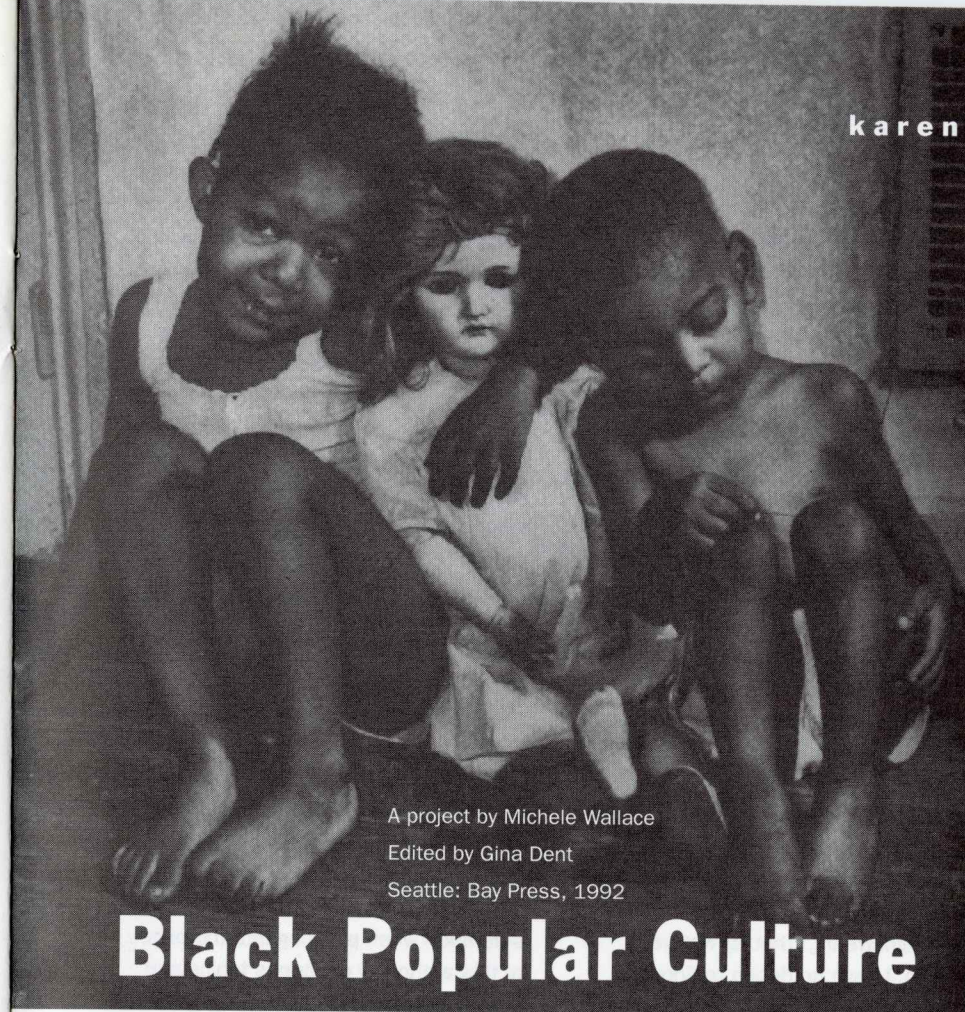
²³Darlene Lawson, three hour taped debate, "Men Loving Boys Loving Men," at LOOT, January, 1978, housed at the Canadian Women's Movement Archive (CWMA/acmf), Toronto, Ontario.

²⁴Pat Leslie, "Doing Our Own Work," *The Body Politic*, no. 46 (September, 1978), p. 2. For an early critique of the limitations of state sexual censorship legislation, see Mariana Valverde, "Freedom, Violence and Pornography," *The Body Politic*, no. 51 (March/April, 1979) p. 19.

²⁵See, Eve Zaremba, "Porn Again," *The Body Politic*, no. 47 (October, 1978), p. 4.

²⁶Ibid., Eve Zaremba, "Porn Again, p. 4.

karen augustine



A project by Michele Wallace
Edited by Gina Dent
Seattle: Bay Press, 1992

Black Popular Culture

With the resurgence of a Black nationalist movement in the late 1980s, similar to that of the 1960s, an increasingly politicized Black popular culture has emerged. In 1991, the Black Popular Culture Conference (a three-day event organized by cultural critic Michele Wallace) took place at The Studio Museum in Harlem and the DIA Centre for the Arts on December 8-10, 1991. The presentations and discussions from this symposium are now documented in the book *Black Popular Culture*, which features a who's who of African American and British intellectuals, including writers such as Hazel V. Carby, Stuart Hall, bell hooks and Coco Fusco. The end result is a collection of transcribed conference presentations spanning a wide range of topics: issues of self-representation within the various media; the construction of popular culture; multiculturalism; and critiques of various film and music genres.

Out of the twenty-eight presenters, only three stand out as being strong and

insightful. There are many reasons why most of the essays failed: authors came across as outsiders to "their own" culture; several strongly opinionated essays lacked context and clear insight; some ideas got lost under a stream of academic postmodern rhetoric; and, the number of artists discussing their own work was at a pathetic minimum.

One of the most intelligent and solid presentations documented was John Jeffries' "Toward a Redefinition of the Urban: The Collision of Culture," which would have worked as a strong starting point upon which to develop a deeper analysis of issues about Black and urban culture.

In this essay, Jeffries pulls together a number of sociological and historical reflections on the realities of African Americans during the slavery period, the emergence of an American popular culture, and the urbanization of the US. These he brings together to illuminate the social constructions of race in America and to increase a broader interpreta-

tion of urban Black culture.

Historically, Jeffries situates his arguments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, discussing the ways in which America had to prove itself as a contributor of Western culture and justify the subordination of slaves during the Enlightenment period (a period advocating notions of liberty, equality, and the inalienable rights of men). He says that "(i)mplementing the blueprints for a revolutionary nation of 'equals,' founded on liberty and the sanctity of individual freedom, required a rhetorical smoothing over of the increasingly conspicuous presence of enslaved Africans; it also laid the intellectual groundwork for the social construction of race as an analytic category in the nineteenth century." From here Jeffries exposes America's scientific development of "craniometry," (the measuring of skulls), not simply for justification of racial oppression but also as a means for acquiring recognition as a significant contributor to European scientific and intellectual traditions.

Hazel V. Carby's article "The Multicultural Wars" is also recognizable as one of the strongest contributions to this collection. Critical questions concerning the sudden emergence of Black women's texts into the white mainstay of university curricula, the contradictions of placing Black subjects at the centre of courses without having an integrated faculty or student body, as well as the invention and deconstruction of "whiteness," are all issues embraced in Carby's analytical views on academe.

At what point, Carby asks, do theories of "difference" become totally compatible with, rather than a threat to, the rigid frameworks of segregation and ghettoization at work throughout our society? In relation to the newly raised position of Black women's texts, and the idea of dealing with issues of race, class and gender at a distance, she poses the question of grappling with unspoken hidden agendas. Carby argues that "the text has been reduced to a tool. The theoretical paradigm of difference has become obsessed with the con-

²⁷Darlene Lawson, 3-hour taped debate, "Men Loving Boys Loving Men," at LOOT, January, 1978, housed at CWMA/acmf, Toronto, Ont.

²⁸Claire Hoy, "The Limp Wrist Lobby," *The Toronto Sun* (November 2, 1977). And see Christina Blizzard, "Gay Pap Appalling Tax Waste," *The Toronto Sun*, (January 25, 1992), p. 14; "Gay Flier Furor: Pamphlet Says Homosexuality 'Natural,'" *The Toronto Sun* (September 25, 1992), p. 4; "Gay Case for Fliers is Bizarre," *The Toronto Sun* (September 25, 1992), p. 14; "Personal Problem? Yes It Is," *The Toronto Sun* (October 15, 1992), p. 16.

²⁹I treat these themes in greater depth in my unpublished article, "Dance to 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon', Get 'Churched' and 'Buy the Little Lady a Drink,'" Toronto, 1993.

³⁰For a longer discussion of lesbian feminist sexual norms in the 1970s, see my article, "Sex, Lives and Archives: Pleasure/Danger Debates in 1970s Lesbian Feminism," Sandi Kirby, Michele Pujol, Kate McKenna, Michele Valiquette, Dayna Daniels (eds.) *Women Changing Academe* (Winnipeg: Sororal Publishing, 1991), pp. 74-91.

³¹John D'Emilio, *Making Trouble: essays on gay history, politics and the university* (Routledge: New York and London, 1992), p. 202.

³²This is not to deny the multiple successes achieved by political lesbians in the 1970s which have seeded virtually all contemporary lesbian social, political and cultural initiatives. I roundly dispute trendy critiques that simplistically reduce this decade of lesbian nationalism to anti-male, anti-sex pessimism or naive, gender-separatist idealism. My point is one of self-criticism, i.e., by isolating and analysing pitfalls in past thought and practice, we become better able to effect change in our historical present.

³³Laura Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Trenchler (eds.) *Cultural Studies* (Routledge: New York and London, 1991), pp. 373-391.

³⁴On the history of the English Canadian social purity movement, see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991) and in Britain, Margaret Hunt, "The De-Eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social Purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Sheila Jeffreys," *Feminist Review*, no. 34 (Spring, 1990), pp. 23-45.

³⁵There is the beginning of a critical reconsideration of the genre largely led by working-class gay men and gay men of colour. See letters from Richard Fung, Pei Lim and Alan Li in *The Body Politic*, no. 113 (April, 1983), p. 30; Gary Kinsman, "The Porn Debate," *Fuse*, (Summer, 1984), pp. 39-44, as well as Gary Kinsman, "Racism in Gay Male Porn: An interview with Pei Lim," *Rites* (February 1987), pp. 14-15; Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," *Bad Object-Choices* (eds.) *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp. 145-168. On reading the textual ambivalence in Robert Mapplethorpe's photographic representation of black male nudes, see Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial

Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," *Bad Object-Choices* (eds.) *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp. 169-222. And see Paul Leonard's review of *The Bear Cult* in *Rites*, (January/February, 1992) where he argues: "Instead of the blond-surfers-with-massive-hairless-pecs-and-big-dicks, we are presented with older men—well, twenties to fifties, anyway—men who are bearded, hairy, tattooed, men whose body types range, for the most part, from 'husky' to very fat." (p. 19)

³⁶See Varda Burstyn's edited anthology, *Women Against Censorship* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983).

³⁷See Varda Burstyn, "The Left and the Porn Wars," in Howard Buchbinder, Diana Forbes, Varda Burstyn and Mercedes Steedman (eds.) *Who's On Top: The Politics of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987), pp. 11-46.

³⁸On the chilling developments in Oregon and Colorado during the US federal election in 1992, see Sally Chew, "Ding, Dong, Mabon Calling," *Out* (March, 1993), pp. 41-47.

³⁹In April, 1992, mostly young, in-your-face "queer girls" took to the streets to protest the police seizure of *Bad Attitude* from Glad Day bookshop (the content of which unapologetically adapted conventions of gay male porn). They were joined by others equally committed to the efflorescence of queer sexual discourses and the repudiation of newly entrenched obscenity legislation—i.e., the Butler decision, that heavily references anti-porn feminism. See Chris Bearchell, "Cut That Out," *This Magazine* (January/February, 1993), pp. 37-40; and, Clare Barclay and Elaine Carol, "Obscenity Chill: Artists in a Post-Butler Era," *Fuse* (Vol. 16, No. 2, Winter, 1992-93), pp. 18-28.

⁴⁰On the limitations of the categories "visible minority" and "multiculturalism" see Linda Carty and Dionne Brand, "Visible Minority Women—A Creation of the Canadian State," *Resources for Feminist Research* (September, 1988), pp. 39-42.



struction of identities rather than relations of power and domination and, in practice, concentrates on the effect of this difference on a (white) norm." What becomes apparent in "Multicultural Wars" are the conflicts and complexities behind this politic of "inclusion" rather than a politic of change in the academic arena.

But clearly the most creative and uncompromising presentation within *Black Popular Culture* is from gay filmmaker Marlon T. Riggs. In "Unleash the Queen" Riggs confronts the conference organizers on their homophobia. Tired of being the token Black gay artist to participate in such events (and he is one of two openly gay participants—filmmaker Isaac Julien is the other), he "reads" the organizers by exclaiming sarcastically that he has become the Race and Sexuality Resident Expert. "The assumption, it seems, is that girlfriend can talk about nothing else—that is, with authority," says Marlon T. Riggs.

What develops out of Riggs' piece is an opening for some *real* criticisms of the Black Popular Culture Conference as a whole. He poses two relevant questions: who are we writing for and where are the cultural producers? Where indeed.

Where are the new voices of Black Popular Culture: the performance artists, the rappers, the dancers, the musicians. Where was filmmaker Julie Dash? Where was female rapper Yo-Yo who founded the Intelligent Black Women's Coalition? Where was dancer Bill T. Jones? Was British dub poet Benjamin Zephaniah or controversial rapper/producer Ice Cube invited? While reading an impressive list of the most popular writers and critics of Black progressive thought, one is left to wonder why the same old people get put on a pedestal to be made the "authorities" and "experts" once again.

A related problem is the tendency to assume an authority or expertise which proves unfounded. Such is the case with Sherley Anne Williams' "Two Words on Music: Black Community"

where she fails miserably in critiquing rap music. Here is a perfect example of what happens when someone outside of the art form attempts to discuss its pitfalls, resulting in what can be viewed as mere academic or critic's gossip. Her article is reactionary, classist and has no depth. Williams clearly knows little on the subject of which she speaks.

By simply reducing rap to a nihilistic form of music one wonders what Williams is listening to. Has she listened to Prince Markie Dee or Ed O.G. and da Bulldogs—male rappers who discuss issues of family, abuse of women and male responsibility? Has she listened to the Poetess, Yo-Yo or Toronto's own Nu Black Nation—women who are vocal and adamant about the empowerment and uplifting of Black women? She confesses "...I own very few rap releases (I refuse to pay money to be insulted and offended, and if what one hears on the air is 'mainstream,' that is, watered-down rap, I have no desire to find the cutting edge)..." So I ask: why invite her to speak on this subject at all? It is precisely this form of critique that aligns itself with the white media's views on the rap music industry that is always tainted with an underlying racism anyway. The problem with Williams' statements is that she contextualizes nothing. What about a music industry that has been heavily promoting "gangsta" rap so much [and all the more so] in the last few years? What does that say about how Black youth are being represented? What about the contextual and cultural coding of rap lyrics? What type of environment are the performers coming from? How will Williams enable readers to gain a better perspective on rap, the music industry, or urban youth? Does she even want to? Or, does she want to participate in the ongoing misrepresentation of urban Black youth?

Although the rest of the contributions in *Black Popular Culture* don't fare as badly as Williams', somehow they don't work well together to form a strong collection. There are, however, a handful of noteworthy articles written by respect-

ed writers such as Stuart Hall, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Angela Y. Davis. But even so, this collection barely breaks new ground.

Interestingly enough, people who participated in the Black Popular Culture Conference have given positive accounts of several presentations that, in the written form, did not impress me. So much was obviously lost in transcription: the sacred-secular delivery commonly used by bell hooks, the use of Miles Davis' music in Greg Tate's tribute to the late performer, and the call and response interactions between audience and lecturer.

What works live falls flat on paper. And what seems to be missing from *Black Popular Culture* is that energy, substance and celebration that obviously took place in December of 1991 at The Studio Museum in Harlem. For the reader, these are all issues worth consideration when plunging into the pages of this anthology of various topics and diverse perspectives. Within the interesting developments of the Black cultural nationalist movement of the present day, the collection *Black Popular Culture* creates a space for continued critical reflection on how we create ourselves within academe, everyday life, the visual and performing arts, and the written word.

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Black Children with White Doll, Gordon Parks,
B + W photograph, 1942

CLIVE ROBERTSON

drawing by Robert Cumming, Courtesy of ANNPAC, from
Parallelism: Retrospective 1976-1977, © 1977 ANNPAC

Shuttling Subjects through Space Histories

Instabili: La question du sujet/The Question of Subject (1973-1989)

ed. Marie Fraser and Lesley Johnstone
Montreal: La Centrale (Galerie Powerhouse) and Artexte, 1990.

Photo Re-Union – processing a history (1982-1986)

ed. Anne Milne
Hamilton: Hamilton Artists Inc., 1993.

Whispered Art History: Twenty Years At The Western Front (1973-93)

ed. Keith Wallace.
Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1993.

Decalog: YYZ 1979-1989

Introductory Essay: Barbara Fischer.
Toronto: YYZ Books, 1992.

These four books which have recently appeared as special projects of artist-run centres engaged in producing self-generated and self-examining histories, satisfy a number of objectives—from the heady celebration of the first five years, to the sober and serious pause over the last twenty.¹ Depending on age and locale, the construction of such histories has often necessitated a healing or truce between past factions. According to Anne Milne, as chronologies of programming, events and personnel, they function to temporarily reposition all the past and present actors and bit-players as "inside and on side."

Given the personnel turnover at the 80-some centres existing across Canada at any one time, informal hand-me-down histories have proven to be extremely elusive. While mechanical histories are kept by funding agencies for evaluation purposes, within the artists' centres themselves such formal histories have frequently been used to efface conflict or political struggle in ways which recuperate an organization's previously "missing objectives" to its current

agenda. Thus it is always a challenge for those working at or in relation to the actual sites to establish a balance between a sense of the limits of such (mythologizing) histories and a sense of the importance of being aware of the expectations and commitments animating such histories. These concerns become paramount as each art collective amends or re-formulates what a "parallel gallery," "artist-run centre," or an "alternative/oppositional" organization means to their particular community.² For these storytellers then, the task is to critically re-represent past tensions between the authorized and the unauthorized within a context of ever-changing representational politics.

Instabili was published to coincide with the sixteenth anniversary of Montreal's Galerie Powerhouse (founded in 1973). Powerhouse (which was later rechristened La Centrale) was the first feminist gallery in Canada, "the second of its kind in North America, the only one in Quebec." In her introductory essay, Marie Fraser writes, "Powerhouse is, in a sense, a material witness to the upheavals brought about by feminist theories in the realms of visual arts and contemporary thought. It is also a sign of the various debates and transformations which occurred within the feminist discourse and milieu of the 1970s and 1980s." In addition to the illustrated chronology, there are two essays on La Centrale's history; the early years by Johanna Nash and the later years by Nell Tenhaaf. Nash, detailing the numerous early structural experimentations that Powerhouse initiated concludes that: "Powerhouse has completed the difficult task of encompassing the interests and expectations of most of its members, most of the time." For Tenhaaf, "In the 1980s, feminist artists have confronted the historical paradox (of using the language of the colonizer) head-on and have virtually dominated a field of contemporary art practice which emphasizes knowledge and theory and how they operate, breaking open representational codes and exposing the shell

games of androcentric discourses. In this context it's tempting to assume that feminism is a discourse with a status and impact equal to the official ones that it critiques. While this may hold true in the art milieu, it's hardly the case in the larger social and political context."³

Instabili includes artists' projects by Céline Baril, Lani Maestro, Céline Suprenant, Nancy Spero, and a frontispiece by Martha Fleming and Lyne La-pointe; it also includes thematic essays on the instability of the subject by Christine Ross, Mary Kelly, Thérèse St. Gelais, Liz Magor; as well as Catherine Bédard's curious "review" reading of the two anniversary projects—the exhibition *Metro d'Art* and *Portrait d'une galerie/Galerie de portraits*, an oral history on video featuring 145 artists.

Designed as a catalogue for a retrospective exhibition *Photo Re:Union—processing a history* is quite a different book. If *Instabili* functions as a prism, *Photo Re:Union* acts like a magnifying mirror, reflecting back recognisable details for all those who have worked in or for an artist-run centre: the fights and pains, and the hindsight view of some of the dry humour of a collective's shared lives. Through an examination of the archives, reprints of letters from Arts Councils, correspondence and interviews with the participants, writer and curator Ann Milne writes deftly about Hamilton's Photographers Union's brief history (1982-86), weaving together anecdotes and reprising hits from that jukebox of truths: minutes from Board meetings. There is even an end section "Notes on Participants" describing participants' current activities.

Milne searches for the Photo Union's legacy through the photo-documentation of artist Cees Van Gemerden, whose work she sees as most closely aligned with the Union's ideals and vision. With a mixture of care and candour, Milne describes the art community splits that occurred around the Union's many projects and details its community activist programming and exchanges

with other centres and cultural producers sharing similar ideals.

Driven by the administrative tenacity of Lynne Sharman (who was later involved with Definitely Superior in Thunder Bay), the Photographers' Union emerged from Hamilton Artists' Inc. and with the Union's publication *Photo Pipeline*, established for itself a serious mandate that involved community activism, cultural struggle, labour arts, high school projects, investigative eco-projects, anti-sexism and anti-racism. By 1985, the Union was hanging three to four exhibitions per month with at least one show per month at the Steelworkers' Hall, with a member of Local 1005 having final say on the exhibits. The Photo Union's most obvious legacy has been its Native Photography Program which led to the formation of NIIPA (Native Indian/Inuit Photographers Association) and to the Union's co-sponsorship of *Visions*, the first conference of Native Canadian photographers in March of 1985.

Whispered Art History is also a lively case study documenting one of Canada's most stable artist-run centres, the Western Front, with its twenty-year history of sponsoring music, literary and performance arts, video and visual art exhibitions, an artist-in-residence programme, in addition to offering in-house audio, video and computer graphic facilities. Housed in a former Masonic lodge, the Front's founding artists purchased the three-storey building in 1973 and had paid off the mortgage by the end of the '70s, a fact which, in part, accounts for the organization's relatively unusual degree of stability.

In order to produce the book the Western Front appears to have marshalled the organization's illustrious history together and then invited a few critics to reflect upon its programming and reputation. The essayists include Keith Wallace, the book's editor, who provides an introductory overview; Peter Culley, who salutes the Front for giving "institutional encouragement of such extremes of literary practice...a mantle that

throughout much of the seventies and early eighties the Western Front carried alone"; Judy Radul, who focuses upon a sampling of Front performances documented in the video archive; Alexander Varty who praises the music programming while admitting his voice emanates from "a slough of despondence" belonging to one who ultimately wishes Vancouver had a Music Gallery like Toronto; and Karen Knights who examines the Front's massive video documentation and production output. In her discussion of storing the ephemeral on unstable video materials, Knights (who also works at Vancouver's Video In) delivers some of the book's more poetic moments when she writes:

At the mercy of its environment it [videotape] can, like an emotionally wounded child, weep itself into oblivion. Atmospheric water dissolves its very foundation.... Treasures of our public and personal history may become no more than the muck and slime of misdirected chemical products.

In his essay "This is Free Money: Western Front as Facility, Institution and Image," William Wood tackles issues that have long haunted the "alternative" theology of the artist-run centre movement. Reviewing the Front's archives and public history, Wood (who engaged in a similar deconstruction of *Vanguard* magazine in *The Vancouver Anthology*) critically examines this model artist-run centre's ties to the past, in particular the mixed lessons it learned from Vancouver's Intermedia and French artist Robert Filliou's Eternal Network. As well, he engages in a critique of its present functioning and accessibility, which, in view of its Board of Directors/owners' ability to adroitly skirt the "complications of exhibition committees or open submissions," he likens to a private art production house with public presentation spaces.

Wood asserts that the Front's "neat fit with bureaucratic (funding) ob-

jectives" derives from its constant operational requirement of updating its media technologies. "The oligarchic formation is exclusive and protects, above all, the integrity of property and the symbolic capital of programme longevity in the centre by holding rein on access. This has kept the Front distant from some of the internecine battles fought at places like A Space or Women in Focus." (And, he might have added, the majority of other artist-run centres whose directors, unlike the Front's, are elected from within their membership at large). In addressing the same issue Keith Wallace is more circumspect: "Surprisingly, through the 1980s and into the 1990s, the general direction of the Western Front's programmes has seen little change."

While Wood overplays the organization's "Toronto connections" with General Idea, Art Metropole, A Space and the Music Gallery as something which have helped the Front's "image of longevity," what he constantly circles around but does not name, is a particular ideology and politics. The Western Front shouldn't be singled out in this regard, but, over the years, such a small "c" conservative politics of self-conservation has affected the potential activism of not only specific organizations but also of an umbrella group such as ANNPAC/RACA which the Front, as a senior member, has helped to shape. And so in his claim that the

Front is invincible in its "forming of contacts in the jury-rigged system of arts-funding," Wood only partially exaggerates.

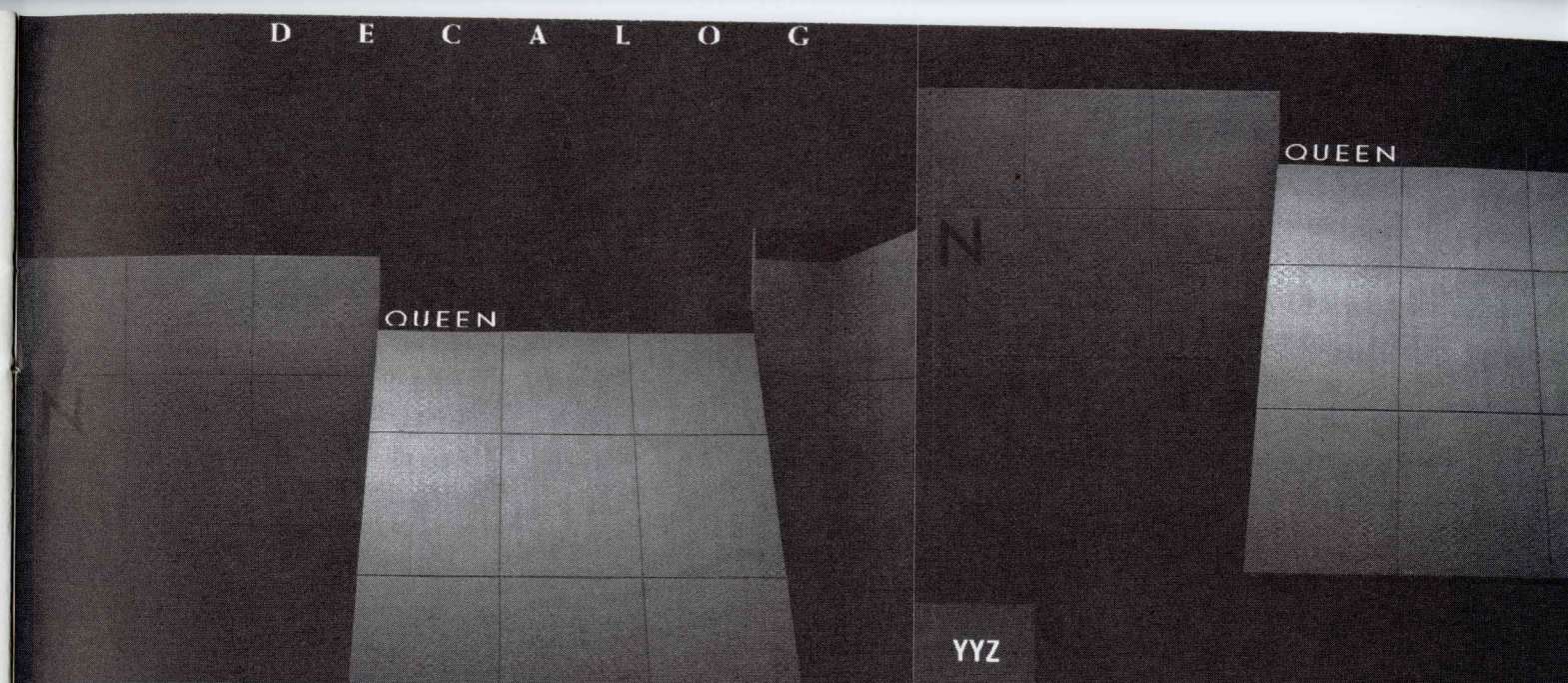
The Front may well be guilty of "the song remaining the same," with its immediate peer community often feeling frustrated to the point of wanting to remove the Western Front from its premises as a way to resolving the problem of "excessive continuity," a problem resulting from the owner/director status of its core members. Conceivably, the core members of the Front could close the organization at anytime and still retire happily to their roots, functioning as a creative social circle. Robert Filliou, from whose 1963 poem the volume's title is taken, in one of his many well-rehearsed anecdotes said: "I live from, and work for, my friends." Still, what makes this book strangely lopsided is the absence of essays by the Front's older artist-managers.

This problem of development from artist's collective to institution segues into *YYZ Decalog 1979-1989*.⁴ In her engaging narrative account of the gallery's history, Barbara Fischer begins and ends with a 1989 YYZ crisis in which the board was accused of appropriating when they mounted a "best of" selection from Round-Up '89 for its exhibition "Tour of the Instant." Round-Up's organizing committee having defined their own project as being "a non-hierarchical

structure allowing for a radically democratic way of exhibiting work without a juried or curated selection process" took offence at and protested this "intervention."

Delving into YYZ's archives, Fischer uncovers beginnings rooted in generational change and in something else equally simple: "YYZ's members began with little more than a desire to be artists. They wanted to 'do their own thing.'" In fact, Fischer continues: "YYZ never developed a more formal mandate or manifesto related to its aims, goals or identity (with the exception perhaps of the statements written for grant applications). Instead, the informal nature of the organization, its personal, partisan and non-democratic form (YYZ has a membership but, unlike A Space, an invitational rather than an elected board), insured its projects and its interests remained in close proximity to the needs and interests of its members, as artists in Toronto."⁵

Humble beginnings in 1979 led, by 1980, to an active publishing programme that facilitated the publication of a number of essays and exhibition brochures. Eight years later these were followed by two different but equally sophisticated books on art theory: Philip Monk's *Struggle with The Image: Essays in Art Criticism* (1988) and Jeanne Randolph's *Psychoanalysis & Synchronized*



Swimming and Other Writings on Art (1991).

Fischer notes that what YYZ accomplished early on was a very focused curatorial program which included the exhibitions *Monumenta*, *Influencing Machines*, *The New City of Sculpture*, *Subjects in Pictures* and *The Interpretation of Architecture*. From 1985 on YYZ also engaged in a number of exchange exhibits and continued to develop a curatorial discourse through a series of lectures and panel discussions. As Fischer makes clear, "YYZ demanded criticism and interpretation as a response (ibility) to exhibitions, as the demand for an articulation of the concerns of an art practice in its presentation or exposure." YYZ also adopted the Halifax Centre for Art Tapes' policy of establishing fee parity between exhibition and time-based work.

By locating YYZ within the complexity of Toronto's many-faceted art community, Fischer's essay provides an extra bonus. With its 124 footnotes, the essay compiles a well-researched history of Toronto art sources which, needless to say, contains many "veracities" that are from many different positions contestable.

While these four volumes of artist-run centre history don't tell the whole story about their members, their practices or their community locations, these separate "chapters" of an ongoing history of the movement (which are much more detailed and sensuous than I have space to describe) each serve as an invaluable resource on their respective subjects.

Clive Robertson is currently writing a book on community, media and theory debates that support, contest or ignore changes in art practice and authorship to be jointly published this winter by Tellem Press and Artexte.

NOTES

¹As a backdrop to these recommended titles, one could add the following: *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, Stan Douglas, ed., (Vancouver: Talon-

books, 1991). This well written and edited volume is the only book to contextualize artist-run centres within the larger institutional framework. *From Sea to Shining Sea* (Toronto: Power Plant, 1987), whose chronology of artist-initiated activity in Canada while unavoidably incomplete, provides a growingly appreciated research base. Further back are the four volumes of Parrallogramme's *Retrospective Series* (1977-80), available directly from AN-NPAC/RACA, Toronto, and a revealing but now rare document, *The New Artspace* (Los Angeles: LAICA, 1978), which juxtaposes early American and Canadian spaces and their political and structural objectives.

²In *YYZ Decalog 1979-1989*, Barbara Fischer quite rightly points out the 'binary' weaknesses that befall the use of the concept "alternative." Just as Barthes used "myth" as a substitute for ideology, so too in artist's discourse on formation has "alternative" been used as an acceptable euphemism for "oppositional."

³Carol Williams, who assembled a regional chronology that includes both political and social events—"A Working Chronology of Feminist Cultural Activities and Events in Vancouver, 1970-1990" in *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, also questions the process: "How can we make use of forms such as the chronology borrowed from patriarchal history?" (p. 182) the Women's Art Resource Centre (WARC) is similarly working on a chronology of feminist art which is to be published in *Matriart* at the end of the year.

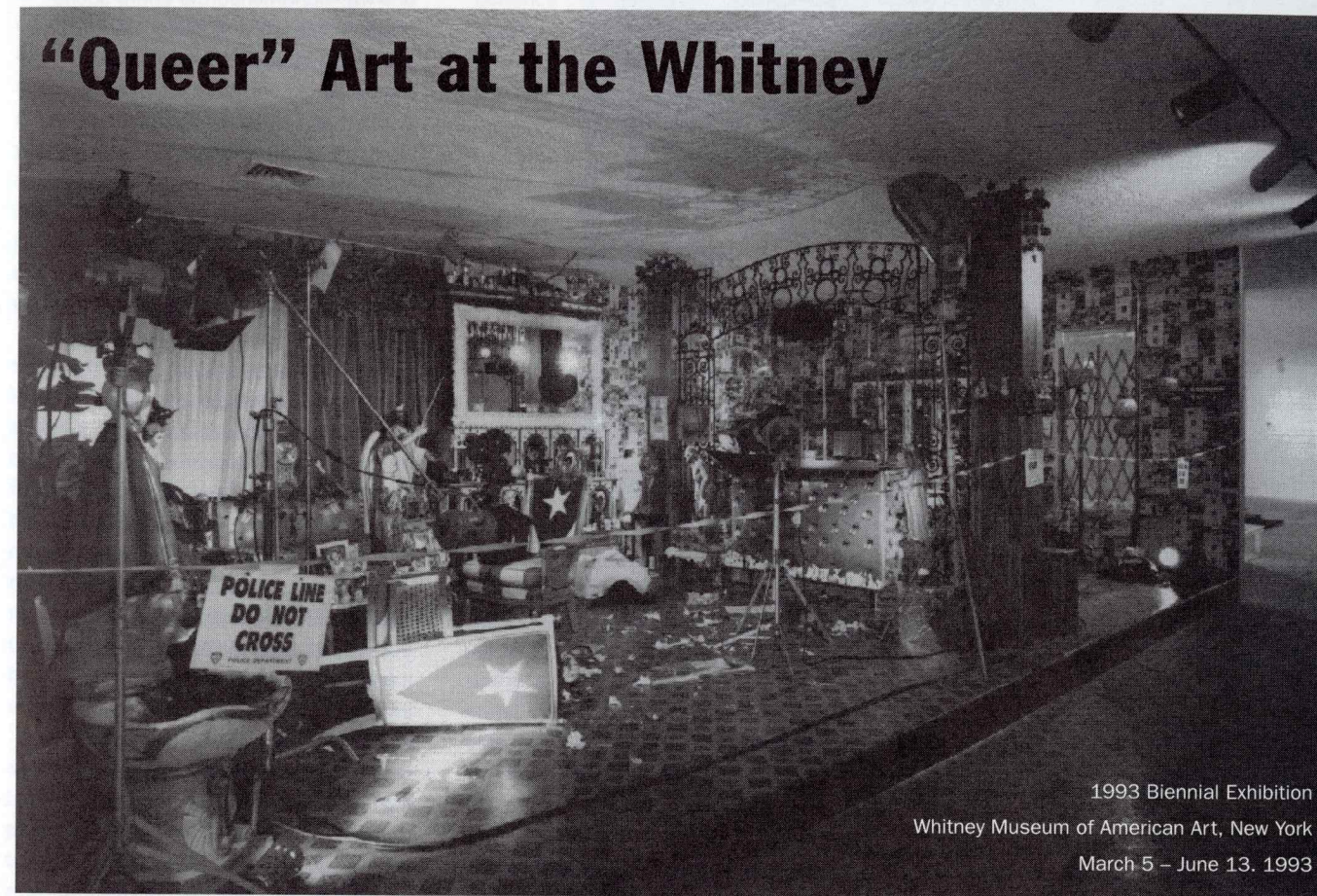
⁴Barbara Fischer almost remains anonymous—her name does not appear with her essay and there is no biographical note. Fischer began by working as a curator at Victoria's Open Space, then at the Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, the Art Gallery of Ontario; and most visibly, perhaps, at the Power Plant, Toronto, where her curatorial projects included the Tanya Mars exhibition. Fischer currently teaches art history with Rosemary Donegan and Dot Tuer at the Ontario College of Art.

⁵A Space did not receive the special funding necessary to complete its twentieth anniversary book (1970-1990). With time, A Space's history and effects over three quite different periods is only going to become more difficult to transcribe.

ROBERT F. REID-PHARR

Biennial Bliss

"Queer" Art at the Whitney



1993 Biennial Exhibition
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
March 5 - June 13, 1993

The Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime?), Pepon Osorio, (Installation view), 1993. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art

Pat Ward Williams' *What You Lookn At?*, an imposing 96" x 192" photographic mural, opens the Whitney Museum's 1993 Biennial. In the mural five fierce, young, Black men stare back at the patrons of the Whitney as they pass into the museum's expansive celebration of identity and difference. The phrase, "what you lookn at" has been spray painted across the image, alerting the "visitor" that they too are being watched, that indeed their journey into the dark beyond will be dangerous—and exciting.

The curators of this year's Biennial have, we are told, thoroughly exceeded the limits of normal artistic and curatori-

al practice. They have brought in new voices. They have put away their old concern with form for a new emphasis on "content." They have challenged accepted notions of what is and is not "Art." They have even thrown the museum's doors wide open for an impressive group of gay and lesbian artists, including Barbara Hammer, Zoe Leonard, Cheryl Dunye, Glenn Ligon, Mark Rappaport, and Sadie Benning, all of whom deal explicitly with homo(sex)uality in their works.

Still, the show seemed all too familiar. Following on the heels of the Museum's wildly hyped Madonna-supported Jean-Michel Basquiat retrospective, the direction this Biennial took placed new

emphasis on (exotic) identity. The regular suspects: African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asians, gays and lesbians, were all present and accounted for. In the midst of the carnivalesque atmosphere—Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña performed their infamous *The Year of the White Bear* during the opening—I found myself wondering if the show was indeed as transgressive as had been suggested. Was it indeed Queer?

It seems to me that though Pat Ward Williams' *What You Lookn At?* is intended to disrupt the passivity and banality of the privileged art consumer, it ultimately does not work to change very



Year of the White Bear, Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco, (performance), 1992. Courtesy of Whitney Museum of American Art

much. The irritated scowls on the men's faces demonstrates their anti-white, anti-bourgeois sentiment. The spray-painted message signals how recently the piece has been transported from the ghetto. But even so, the patrons are not really threatened. What they are looking at, after all, is only a photograph. The actual Black angry youths remain contained within East New York, the South Bronx and Bedford-Stuyvesant, while the visitors to this terrifically wealthy Upper East Side enclave congratulate themselves on their daring and open-mindedness.

The real project of the Biennial was not the queer project: the project of unlimited boundaries, of pleasure, of play. The real project of the Biennial was the

project of translation. Native cultures were being demonstrated and explicated by "bilingual" translators who had the ability to travel between the mysterious world of the primitive and the modern world of the art consumer. The show tended, therefore, to lay the didacticism on a bit thick.

Take Pepon Osorio's installation *Scene of the Crime (Whose Crime)?* Osorio recreated a Nuyorican apartment in which the dead corpse of a murdered woman lies on the floor. Film cameras and lights have been set up to record the spectacle for the consumption of "middle America." The work is powerful in the way it utilizes the rich texture and colour of Puerto Rican life. Also, it forces us to really examine the way in

which we view the Puerto Rican experience. It is at this point, however, that the piece begins to seem overwrought.

In addition to the film cameras, Osorio has sandwiched the entire scene between two walls of video cases, most of which contain films with Latino themes or actors. On each of the cases Osorio has affixed statements and questions in English and Spanish that point to the negative treatment of Latinos in the media. He even places an appeal for tolerance and empathy on the apartment's welcome mat. Throughout he maintains the emphasis on how "we" are seen by "you" thereby accepting the notion of an already-established inside and out, as well as constantly gesturing towards the (white) liberal values on which the show was constructed.

Daniel J. Martinez pulls the museum visitor even more deeply into this exploration of difference through his colonization of the museum's admittance tags. He takes the phrase, "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white," separates it into five distinct elements: I can't . . . imagine . . . ever wanting . . . to be . . . white, and then places these on the museum's differently coloured admittance tags. The result is that patrons travel through the exhibit carrying with them a single element of a profound statement on identity. They will not, however, be able to understand their own place in the logic of the statement unless they coalesce with their fellow travellers. By coming together they will be able to unfold the mystery of the tags to reveal a refreshing reappraisal of what it means to be Black or Brown in American culture.

Yet, there is more than a hint of irony in Martinez's work. One might ask, if you can't imagine ever wanting to be white then why create an elaborate system for expressing that sentiment? Is not the anti-white gesture already a demonstration of a fascination with that very whiteness? Hasn't the white norm been the focus all along?

Even in Mark Rappaport's 1992 videotape *Rock Hudson's Home Movies*,

a work whose emphasis is on gay (white) identity, there is a surprisingly un-queer emphasis on the mainstream's definition of normalcy. Rappaport's tape is terribly disappointing as both a political and artistic object. The piece is essentially a reworking of dozens of the dead icon's film and television clips. However, this time a "handsome," young, white, presumably gay narrator stands in as Hudson's alter ego, commenting that while Rock the Hollywood icon was the paragon of post-War American male (hetero) virility the "real" Rock was a fag, and, gasp, an AIDS victim.

The piece does nothing other than thumb its noses at the straight establishment. Rappaport leaves unanswered all the many questions that remain after one announces that Rock Hudson fucked (was fucked by?) men and that he died of AIDS. What indeed was the nature of Hudson's gayness, his sickness, his queerness? Rappaport does not seem to care; instead he focuses all his energy into demonstrating the hypocrisy of Hollywood, a fact which has always been a given.

If Rappaport's work, because of its simplistic rearticulation of the us/them binary, is one of the conceptual low points of the Biennial then the installations of Renee Green and Glenn Ligon might be said to be its apex. Like Rappaport, Ligon and Green are fascinated by the manner in which the oppressed are represented within dominant cultures. Unlike Rappaport they skip the finger pointing for a closer examination of the processes undergirding translation and appropriation.

In her installation *Import/Outport Funk Office*, Renee Green makes her fascination with cultural translation explicit. She plays with the tools of the anthropologist's trade, filling the "office" with institutional grey metal shelves on which she has evenly dispersed a few dozen books on the "Black Experience." At the centre of the shelves there is a video monitor on which Green plays a loop in which she follows and talks with a German exchange student. Around the

periphery she has constructed "Funk Stations," which vaguely resemble language lab cubicles and at which one is invited to privately and unobtrusively experience the native music. Definitions of hip-hop and Black American vernacular—and their German translations—are hung on the walls:

Freak: Users of LSD, self-designated as cultural mutants, wearing long hair and bed sheets; a person with distinctive sexual tastes; insane (see freak out); chaos (see freak scene); potentially sexually active female, "the girl's a freak" (see super freak).

The difficulty, or perhaps the impossibility, of translation is made apparent not only with issues of language, but also class, race and culture. From Black Speech to "Standard English" from "Standard English" to "Standard German"? Green's installation works because it demonstrates precisely our inability to altogether domesticate Funkiness or Freakishness for purposes of elite consumption. Even within the Funk Office itself the garishness of the scientific rearticulation of hip-hop culture is crystal clear.

In Glenn Ligon's *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* he revisits the controversy surrounding the work of Robert Mapplethorpe. Ligon appropriates these terrifically controversial images of Black men, reframes them and places them alongside dozens of individually framed excerpts from the many public and quasi-private statements made about Mapplethorpe, his work and his models:

Mapplethorpe appropriates the convention of porn's radicalized codes of representation, and by abstracting its stereotypes into "art" he makes racism's phantasm's of desire respectable.

—Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer

You're kind of killing the great white

father with this project, aren't you?
—Thomas Allen Harris

Left Mapplethorpe on the bar at Sound Factory and danced for hours with Lyle.

—Glenn Ligon, diary entry

Ligon's work is an eloquent articulation of the complexity of the questions surrounding the representation of the other. Mapplethorpe's photographs were, on the one hand, celebrated by many gays and lesbians as an unselfconscious demonstration of gay aesthetics. Many more saw the necessity of defending Mapplethorpe from the homophobic, anti-intellectual, anti-art attacks of the American right. At the same time many people of colour, including gay and lesbian people of colour, were shocked at what was seen as Mapplethorpe's bald racism. The complexity of this situation is made tangible in Ligon's strategic juxtapositions.

I must wonder if Ligon has not excised some of the funkiness and transgressiveness that surrounds both Mapplethorpe's work and the controversy it engendered. Even as Ligon's installation confronts us with successive images of Black physique including multiple shots of inviting Black cock and ass, one gets the sense that his work is among the most discrete and circumspect in the exhibition. We know that Ligon's camera did not capture these messy, difficult images. Moreover, the texts that he has interwoven with them are on the one hand carefully selected excerpts from the work, published and otherwise, of a fairly respectable intelligentsia: Stuart Hall, James Baldwin, Judith Butler, and Audre Lorde to name a few; and, on the other, they are the presumably spontaneous comments of Ligon's friends and acquaintances.

Yet like the "fierce" men of Pat Ward Williams' *What You Lookn At?* the Black bar queens who comment on Mapplethorpe's work are only represented to the Whitney's patrons. A space has not been made in the Whitney for

them to represent themselves. I am reminded of Robert Mapplethorpe's statement that many of the men in his photographs died earlier than necessary from AIDS because of their inability to get AZT. Only their images remain in the midst of the chilling museum silence. It seems that now Glenn Ligon, a Black man, is having the last laugh as he pieces together "Mapplethorpe" with the reappropriated images of (dead) Black bodies. But once again, is this queer? More to the point, is it possible to reproduce queerness, funkiness, freakishness within the confines of the "straight" world. Dare I ask again, "Can the master's tools dismantle (or at least fuck up) the master's house?" Is that what we really want?

Overnight "queer" has become the rallying cry for a large group of rather well-positioned, gayish bohemian wannabees. To be queer is to be politically left of Clinton or Mulroney, socially transgressive (i.e. involved in some variety of same-sex screwing), and culturally advanced. In New York the latter often involves an East Village/Lower East Side address, a serious penchant for second hand clothing, some level of drug use, and a profound distaste for anything that smacks of mainstream culture, unless it has been properly refashioned into "kitsch."

At the same time, the idea of queerness has opened up the rather stale manner in which identity, including gay and lesbian identity, has been theorized and represented in art. It speaks to a yearning on the part of many people, particularly young people, to finally bridge the huge gulf that separates the reportedly homosexual from the presumably heterosexual, and the questionably white from the allegedly Black. It is the unquenchable desire for fun, love, and joy. And it is in the following works that these are manifest.

The productions of Camille "Put All your Relatives in Your Movies" Billops and Cheryl "Put All Your Friends—And Lovers—In Your Videos" Dunye represented wonderful moments of queer tri-

umph. Billops' film, *Finding Christa* is a bittersweet documythography that follows her daughter, Christa, from the moment of her "illegitimate" birth through the process of being "given up" by Billops, readopted into a "model" family, and then reunited as an adult with her original mother. Billops has (of course) brought back the "cast" from her poignant *Suzanne Suzanne*, the story of her niece's triumphant battle against drug addiction and domestic violence.

Throughout Billops refuses every sentimental cliché. Indeed *Finding Christa* is best when it lampoons family, love, motherhood, and the rest of the sacred institutions. Yet the anger and the pain of mother, child and the people who love them is never more than just below the surface. When the filmmaker asks her rather imposing aunt why she thought Christa had been put up for adoption, the matronly woman answers that Christa was an impediment to Billops' relationship with her (white) husband, the quietly and timelessly dapper James Hatch. Hatch, who co-directed the film and whose son shot the scene in which the terrible accusation is made, responds in the next scene that he'd told Camille that she needn't leave Christa for him.

The effect is that the audience comes to recognize that the film affected the real lives of Billops and her family in profound, yet unexpected ways. The funkiness of the film shows through. Billops and Hatch have gone beyond the point of simply allowing the audience to see the film's seams, as it were, to demonstrating, maybe inadvertently, that the work itself opens up an endless array of possibilities for everyone involved in the process, including those who are only watching it.

Cheryl Dunye brings back her wise-cracking, funny, irreverent style in her twenty-five minute video *The Potluck and the Passion*. The piece centres around the anniversary potluck of a lesbian couple, played by Dunye and her lover. Their guests represent a medley of lesbian stereotypes: the rigid vegetarian, the

Black academic, the politically correct white radical, the disillusioned former Peace Corps volunteer. Of course they argue. Of course they flirt. Of course they banter back and forth about politics, lesbian identity, and the appropriate recipe for spicy fried chicken. Dunye edits staged interviews with her principle characters into the "real narrative." The effect is a video in which the director sets up a sophisticated game of peek-a-boo with the audience in which they are invited to recognize themselves in not only the characters, but also the actors who create the characters. Or is it just the real actors playing the characters who create the characters?

I think that if we are ever to achieve queerness in our own lives then we must necessarily snatch it up in bits and pieces as it inadvertently presents itself. To ask if the Whitney Biennial is queer seems beside the point. Our time would be better spent trying to find those spaces in which queerness has seeped in—or burst in—to the amusement of many, but the surprise of none. Somewhere in that process we'd have to turn our attention away from "art" to the manner in which arts acts as a cover for all sorts of nefarious activities. I think it was Foucault who said that gay, in the fullest sense of the word, is something that we have yet to achieve. I would say that queer is something that we achieve all the time, but which is nonetheless fleeting and unpredictable. Queer cultural politics then must necessarily be the politics of the moment, the politics of action, the politics of bombast, the politics of innovation, and most especially the politics of joy.

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

Colette Urban

Tracings

YYZ Artists' Outlet, Toronto

February 18 – March 13, 1993



What was she waiting for? She had to do his stupid fucking fall. Get it planted good in her mind, so when they drilled her skull, it would come out of the holes like the perfect dream, and she wouldn't need the footage from the cam strapped on her head. She stood on the rail, balancing carefully, ignoring the guards, who were shouting at her again.

"Wait!"

The punching bag had broken out of the crowd, coming toward her. He looked like he was going to be sick any moment. She stuck her fists on her hips.

"What."

He looked around self-consciously. "Ah . . . are you sure you know what you're doing? There's a flying harness in the pit, you know."

— Pat Cadigan, *Synners*.

There's a restrained, pragmatic quality to cyber-feminism. It doesn't get sucked into the hair-tugging dystopian fantasies that colour *Mad Max* or *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. At the same time, cyber-feminism has good reason to share the gloomy prophecies of the coming scarcity of means in which the cyberpunk genre (or what Marxist theorist Geoff Waite calls NBF, New Bad Future) specializes. Women have always had to deal with downward mobility.

Like Gina, Pat Cadigan's no-nonsense heroine, who works nine to five programming virtual reality entertainment and after hours as a terrorist hacker, Colette Urban is pragmatic about the machine-like properties of her body. This sort of pragmatism reflects a feminist awareness that you need to make a little go a long way: the stone-soup approach to high technology.

Urban is a performance artist, but I did not need to know this to appreciate her work. The "drawings and objects for performances" on exhibit at YYZ hold their own as cyber-feminist fantasies. The subject of these drawings and performances is a woman comfortable with the technological gadgets that extend her body, in fact seems to take it as matter-of-factly as her grandmother would have taken the vacuum cleaner. Urban's apparatuses are trickle-down versions of high tech boys' toys. In a sketch for "I Feel Faint," the performer is wearing a spoonbill-like helmet with a light, and weights dangling from it. She has halves of tires strapped to her feet. This performance, we learn from the written description, refers to the Apollo crew; so this is a knock-off of a space suit!

The objects that Urban uses in her performances are also terrific as interactive sculpture. For example, "Orchest-

NANCY GOLDHAR

Diana Thompson Andrea Ward

I went to see *Correspondences* expecting something else. Something about the effect of place on Canadian women artists. I had just returned from the West Coast. All I knew was that works by a woman artist from the West Coast, Diana Thompson, and by a woman artist from the East Coast, Andrea Ward, were being exhibited together. Despite the fact that they were women living on op-

artist's statement that this room I was entering was a woman's room, based on the "Gynaecium"—"a room set aside for women in ancient Greek times" to which "women were relegated...but [in which they] also found their separate-ness a source of empowerment."

Quickly I felt **Embraced: vb[ME embracen, fr. MF embracer. OF embracier, fr. en- + brace two arms], vt Encircled/Enclosed:** Formally, by the aesthetic boundary Ward creates and the internal cross-reference which envelopes and recontextualizes gallery space. Hu(n)g around the two sides and back walls are evenly spaced, mahogany-framed, glass-encased, designed hair sample arrangements and excerpts of text. Similar encasements are tucked away in drawers within two beautiful, stately, mahogany cabinets angled in the middle of the room.

vt Cherished/Loved/Welcomed/Included n. Accepted: Remotely reminiscent of Judy Chicago inviting women's minds and bodies to dinner around a triangle, Ward brings women, minds and bodies, to the "She-Boardroom." The stately, rich, wooden, file cabinets contain in their velvet folds, on trays to be tugged and tickled open, records of women's culture: herstories/hairstories. Beneath the hair designs black type records their stories, their birthdates placed bottom centre. The frames symmetrically lining the outer walls resemble a line-up of a Board of Directors.

The structural metaphor of Ward's installation—Gynaecium cum She-Boardroom—conflates categories of power: women's power over their minds and bodies. As part of Ward's larger se-

Correspondences
A Space Gallery, Toronto
February 27–April 10, 1993

Hairstories, Andrea Ward, (installation view), 1993.
Photo Gilberto Prioste

It occurred to me that in my physical self there remained one last barrier to my spiritual liberation, at least in the present phase: my hair.

—Alice Walker, "Oppressed Hair Puts a Ceiling on the Brain" in *Living By the Word*.

**but to say yes
is to lay the mind open
to the whole of my unabsorbed life
stashed away in my body**

—Joanne Arnett, "Change Herself" in *Wiles of Girlhood*.

performance is watery stuff indeed, so I will just note that one of the sound elements for this piece is a taped male voice reading "How to Write a Story" from a 1945 volume called *Hundreds of Things a Girl Can Do*, and Urban writes that her childish costume and gag are meant to reflect its defeatist tone. The performance involves young women, more masquerade, low technology, Wonder Woman.

In the early '80s Laurie Anderson, another aficionado of appropriate technology, experimented with using her body as an electronic instrument. Anderson's body mic's, strapped to knees, chest and head, emitted sounds when she struck them. So you had the spectacle of a woman thumping her chest and hitting herself on the head—those exaggerated self-demeaning gestures that become part of the female nonverbal vocabulary pretty early in life—and generating a percussive collage of tones, bleats and other sounds. Anderson, who, of course, had access to hundreds of thousands' worth of state-of-the-art equipment, chose the most minimal of means to make a remarkable statement about gender and technology. Urban, too, estranges a vocabulary of feminine gesture and turns herself into a critical machine. Appropriate technology, these and other women argue, is feminist technology.

Laura U. Marks is a writer, film programmer, and artist living in Rochester, New York.

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Orchestra, (performance documentation),
Colette Urban, 1993. Photo Vid Ingelevics

rina" is an old portable record player mounted on the handlebars of a rototiller-like instrument with a single wheel. When you wheel the instrument around, a pulley mechanism from the wheel plays the record—at speeds that vary, of course, as you move. Urban's performance in conjunction with this exhibit employed volunteers from the audience to gingerly wheel these contraptions around a large hall, playing children's music in a gleeful cacophony.

Or consider the engaging object that occupied the centre of the gallery floor, which Urban uses in the performance "A Song to Sing, A Tale to Tell, A Point to Make." An old record player, the kind that comes in its own little tweed suitcase, sits on the floor. Numerous airport tags stuck to its handle indicate that this item of superseded technology continues to make itself useful all around the block. Above it, a tripod supports a horizontal pulley which is connected to the record player. A sturdy loop of tied-together pantyhose runs (no pun intended) the pulley's wheels, in a low-tech trick that you should remember when your fan belt breaks. Finally, an 8-foot pole with handles at each end attaches to the pulley. You, or you and a friend, grab the handle and walk or run around in a circle, turning the pulley and thus playing the record. Simple, ingenious, and user-friendly.

In a drawing for "My Gift to the Audience," the performer holds a mirror that reflects light/images from a projector into the eyes of the audience massed in silhouette in front of her. In this simple sketch and others, Urban briskly dismantles predominant notions of the female performer as spectacle. Her work is not concerned with critiquing the way in which women are imaged as much, it seems to me, as with turning the viewer's attention to other things. Yet her presence as a woman is underscored throughout. In some of the sketches the performer wears a girlish dress and frilly socks; in most of them the mouth pursed in concentration is a feminine, lipsticked mouth.

The trope of woman-plus-technology takes on (its default) connotations of menace in a sketch of a blindfolded female figure, wearing a long golden dress, suspended from black cables. The colours and the painterliness of this sketch reminded me of Toulouse-Lautrec's posters of Parisian showgirls, and thus, at first, it seemed like a spectacle again. The blindfold and cords make her look like she's in bondage, until looking more closely you realize she's actually the agent of this vaguely misogynist contraption—like Gina, Cadigan's tough-as-nails virtual bungee jumper.

Reading the documentation of the performance, "Blind Spot," that this sketch illustrates, proves this hunch is both way off and right on. The performer, wearing "a late nineteenth century mourning costume and black sleeping mask," attaches her hands and feet to eight bungee cords hanging from the wall. "The elasticized attachments support and confine the performer." A motor-driven flash camera both intermittently lights the performer and records the performance. Sound elements include a tango record and the voices of two children reading ballroom dancing rules, the last of which is "Do not criticize or attempt to lead your partner. Follow his lead even if you are convinced he is wrong." In short, Urban enacts the motif that being female in patriarchy is like dancing backward in high heels. But she enlists all these technical apparatuses in the project, suggesting that she is quite in control of this spectacle.

The "girl" in the flowered dress and bobby socks shows up gagged in another sketch. But this voiceless and seemingly ineffectual woman is equipped with superhumanly long arms (in necessarily long gloves). With these extended arms she rolls a globe along the floor. Denied speech, these sketches seem to say, the resourceful cyberwoman will make her imprint other ways. Again, the performance documentation, for "A Song to Sing, A Tale to Tell, A Point to Make," stresses the feminist pre-text for this cyber image. Criticism of documentation of



Witness, Diana Thompson, (installation view), 1993. Photo Gilberto Prioste

ries called *Maintenance of the Gynaecium*, which uses separate rooms to explore the construction of feminine identity in Western culture, *Hairstories* focuses on women's bodies and psychologies through specific reference to one highly charged, female, bodily element: hair.

Each piece in the room contained an original hair sample and an excerpt of text from women in Toronto, Halifax, Montreal, New York, Los Angeles and Vancouver, all of whom Ward interviewed for the show. Ward's aesthetic and structural transformation involved sculpting the hair and combining it with extra materials (drawings, painting, photography, fabric, cushions, twigs, fur, clothing) to create arrangements which would "illustrate," "bring out humorous aspects" or "heal" the women's experiences.

So I ended up finding very different correspondences than I expected. As I walked around the room viewing and reading each piece, I caught sight of the smile of a tilted, yellow-headed, black, furry ape. The accompanying hairstory read: "I plucked my chest, waxed my legs, plucked my nipple hair, waxed my thighs and bleached my eyebrows in the middle. My fetish was to remove stray hair." As a particularly hairy woman who only recently came out of the closet of hairless pretence, I felt an affinity for the piece. You see, I spent my youth sprawled on a garbage bag getting "Jolened" from head to toe before bathing-suit-bearing vacations. This was not an empowering process. I was

taught early to be the female object on display and to hide/destroy/reconstruct parts of my body to satisfy gender expectations.

In *Hairstories* women's hair is the site of investigation for the construction, destruction and deconstruction of women's physical, psychological and semiotic selves. Black, Native, Asian, mixed race, dyke and straight women express their experiences of signifying themselves amidst coercive codes of cultural convention. Issues of race, class, sex and gender are grafted onto the female body politic.

Body hair is taboo, animal. Head hair is beloved. Dreads are cultural, racial and political. Nappy as necessity. Native hair hidden. Long as femme. Short as dyke. Questions emerge: (admit only) the natural body? (acceptable) alteration? (occasional) ornamentation? (depends on) by and for whom? empowerment (gained)? disempowerment (suffered)? Ward's *Hairstories* splays open these questions.

With *Witness* Diana Thompson takes you to the scarred surface of such questions turned torturous. Canvas textures are pulled, stretched, scarred, punctured by nails and are suggestive of sabotaged skin. Chain, cord, cable, cage, lock, bolt, barred door, spike, screw, nail and metal express violence. Texts tell of "Punishment," "Prisoner" and "Captive."

The range of material and form—drawing, sculpture, mixed media—in this

work reflect the adventurousness and prowess of the artist. Each piece is incredibly, technically impressive and striking. Three large scale pencil drawings depict an elaborately posed, starved, nude, bald woman; I felt strongly addressed by (the concentration of line which creates) her. This drawing triptych is called *Prisoner 1, 2 & 3*.

Captive 1 and 2 also depict a starved, nude, bald woman, who looks more like an android-Auschwitz victim bound at the wrists. *Punishment 8* is the largest of the *Punishment* series using heavy metal linked cables to bind twisted, fleshy, reddish-pink wood over a black plywood surface impressed with leaves, twigs, hair, buttons, screen bits. Curiously, *Bed* felt like the most violent piece, with thirty-six bolts surrounding the metal encasement, steel rungs protruding from the inner, fleshy, reddish-pink, textured surface, with a narrow border of red eyelet fabric. Four altered chairs are raised on a platform: *Home* has a huge bolt poking up through the middle of the seat with ankle, wrist and torso shackles attached to the sides; *Dysfunctional Chair* is smallish, pink, a bit wacky feeling with nails angled in crooked direction, but gauged with bloody sores; *Hunger* is a black, charred-looking chair with barbed wire weaved through the seat and back; *Anatomy of Angels* is a black chair covered in glossy, red, painted hair, on which sit two silver, tits-forward, lady-with-wings figurines (hood ornaments), under which sit in a gold basket the anatomical skeletal remains of a young animal.

In this show Thompson's emotions and thoughts on the Montreal Massacre and the death of a friend suffering from anorexia and bulimia coalesce: Violence to the female body—"whether it is directed outwards or inwards"—is never an acceptable response to the complexities of female existence. Never an acceptable response to the training that a man, or woman receives about womanhood.

Thompson's related piece *Training*

is a three dimensional, mixed media on plywood, sculpted, black book with a red "X" engraved on the hard surface of the two open plates. It looked to me like a Bible of (self)destructive rules for girls. And the other titles of pieces around the room comprise the biblical books: *Martyr; Captive; Lesson; Portrait; Prisoner; Punishment; Incunabula; Bed; River; Door; Captive; Anatomy of Angels; Hunger; Dysfunctional Chair; Home*.

As an installation, however, all these incredible pieces did not, in side-by-side correspondence with *Hairstories*, address the context of the gallery space. With each piece orderly placed on walls and one installation front and centre, the general space initially seemed less gripping than the specific aesthetic and emotional content.

Just what does Thompson create with her show of image, material, texture, text and spatial design? The site of an old torture chamber. But with the added associative meanings of one of her pieces depicting a fleshy pink fetus beside a tautly pulled chord held down by screws on a gouged silver surface, oddly titled: "*Incunabula*": [NL, fr. L *incunabula*, pl., swaddling clothes, cradle, fr. in - +cunae cradle—more at CEMETERY]: a book printed before 1501; also, a work of art or human industry of an early epoch.

The "Training" (archaic book of codes) starts early; they accompany the young girl from the swaddling clothes of the cradle to the cemetery. The skin of the woman in the portraits and the surface of the plywood pieces has been gouged out like the lives of the women in the Montreal Massacre and those dead from eating disorders. The nails that drive into surfaces and out from surfaces through to the viewer reflect the "violence directed inward and outward" against the women to which Thompson asks that we bear witness.

Nancy Goldhar is a teacher and writer currently living in Toronto, contemplating a return to the West Coast.

ROBIN LAURENCE



Still from *Chinaman's Peak: Walking the Mountain*, Paul Wong, video, 1992

Paul Wong

Chinaman's Peak: Walking the Mountain
Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver
January 23 – February 27, 1993

Fire is both metaphor and agent of transformation in Paul Wong's new video installation, *Chinaman's Peak: Walking the Mountain*. Between the worlds of now and the hereafter, fire converts solid material to smoke and ash, malleable clay to stony ceramic. Ceramic urns function as eternal vessels for bones and ash, for what the flames have left behind—and for grief. But grief is also transformed by fire—into acceptance, communion, continuity.

Fire, smoke and ash play imagistically and textually across Wong's video screen, and are reiterated throughout his installation. Smoke from dozens of burning incense sticks fills the gallery, creating a fragrant cloud of remembrance within which the dead are spectrally reconstituted. Soft grey ash drops through space and time into fitful heaps beneath each burning joss stick. Tangi-

ble offerings abound (oranges, steamed buns, spirit money, cigarettes, whiskey, treasure chests), as do images of the honoured dead. Symbolically, these dead are summoned: shoes, hats, clothing, photographs, and video stills are placed around the room, triggering the memories that recall them to our world. Within Wong's installation, a place is made for memory to play itself into continuity, for the past to play itself into the future.

The interface between traditional rituals and symbols of Chinese ancestral worship and late twentieth century Western art practice and theory is paradigmatic; the video monitor installed within the shrine becomes a coffin of digitalized recollection, a technological container as much for bones, ash, and material remains as for immaterial blips of light and sound. Strategically, Wong's

work has always been oppositional, yet here personal predilection seems to override political disposition. His mood seems to be one of conciliation, reaching across chasms of time, place, race and culture to reclaim both the cherished and the forgotten dead. History is re-opened, remarked, so that it makes sense to—makes room for—the artist and those he loves.

Chinaman's Peak: Walking the Mountain was originally conceived as a broadcast and performance piece during Wong's 1992 summer residency at the Banff Centre, in a programme entitled "Race and the Body Politic." During his term, Wong intuitively assembled elements which lodged his own grief, loss and remembrance in the historical moment and geographical matrix of a local mountain, enigmatically named "Chinaman's Peak." The dead whom Wong chose to honour—his father, Hoy Ming Wong, who died in 1968 when the artist was a young boy, and the artist's friends and creative collaborators, Ken Fletcher and Paul Speed, who died in 1978 and 1991 respectively—are the three most significant deceased men within the personal sphere of his life. But the place, the time, the mountain, the programme, the politics of difference, the dynamics of identity construction, must have demanded ideological engagement beyond personal assuagement. Wong's video search for the origins of the mountain's name allusively but ineluctably reveals an appalling history of racist exploitation of Chinese labourers (miners and railway workers) in the Canadian Rockies during the twentieth century. And so a fourth dead man is metaphorically honoured: an anonymous Chinese immigrant whose very anonymity is symbol and function of his dehumanization, in life and in death. Wong places a funerary urn for an unnamed man who died alone and unrecorded in the Rocky Mountains, someone who was known to his employers only as the "Chinaman" or "Chink," someone whose bones were never collected by his family for honourable burial at home, someone whose restless spirit

has had no food, comfort or appeasement through the long cold century since his death.

Larissa Lai's sensitive and illuminating catalogue essay explains the ritual of haang san, or "walking the mountain," which is the crux of Wong's piece, as performed in Banff and in Vancouver. As seen on video in his Contemporary Art Gallery installation, *Walking the Mountain* is a performance that poses aspects of Chinese ancestral worship and funerary ritual amongst the light, bright, coniferous woods of the Rocky Mountains. White clothes are worn, gongs and clappers are sounded, food is shared, garments and money are conveyed to the dead by fire and smoke, firecrackers are exploded, incense is burned. We witness an apparent exhumation, the recovery of bones into a ceramic urn (the urn we've seen being thrown and fired), this vessel then materially reappearing within the gallery, part of Wong's installation. The installation suggests a temple, which is also a viewing room, a quiet and dark place furnished with accessories of contemplation, worship and remembrance. Walls are painted brilliant lacquer red outside, solemn sooty black inside; a red "coffin" is placed in front of a shrine; white banners, painted with Chinese characters (phrases of encouragement to the dead: "You are a good spirit," "Your spirit will always be remembered") hang luminous as ghosts in the subtle gloom. Brass gleams, smoke drifts and twines. Two etched mirrors reflect each other to infinity.

In her essay, Lai expresses concern about the possibility of "exotification" that may occur through the abstracting of Chinese ritual out of its cultural and religious context and its enactment within the context of Western fine art practice. How can one protect the living and the dead from this kind of secularization, from misappropriation by an ignorant audience? How can one protect them from supercilious, Eurocentric judgement and displacement? Perhaps the access and understanding that

Wong's show and Lai's essay so generously provide work to undermine the negative possibilities.

Significantly, the overall impact of the installation is one of considerable grace and elegance. These qualities may seem surprising because of the artist's quite conscious use of elements of "Chinatown" kitsch. Glowing red electric "candles" and "incense sticks" inside the gallery, and stereotypical figurines and souvenirs in the building's front window seem to signify the commodification of Western notions of "the Oriental." Somehow, though, the lavishness of the installation's scale, the refined beauty of its other components (urns, chests, chairs, tables, carpet, and the shrine itself), the high degree of finish and careful attention paid to both surface and form create a fine and honourable place for living and dead, East and West to meet.

Discrimination, enslavement, exploitation, otherness, and the racist omissions of history are certainly sub-themes to death and remembrance here. The discourses on marginalization, orientalism, and the politics of difference, and the creative processes of recovering place and reinscribing history, all engage us through Wong's evocations of his beloved dead, his images of ancestral worship, and his metaphors of transformation and continuity. Wong challenges the political, cultural and social conditions that have, until now, refused to name Chinese people in Canadian histories. And yet, as I have suggested, the transcultural and transformative elements of *Chinaman's Peak: Walking the Mountain* create a state of "beyond-ness." Wong's art reaches beyond blank didacticism, beyond accusatory confrontation, beyond ideological closure. He weaves a complex and subtle fabric between the loose threads of which meaning, memory and reconciliation arise, shift and mingle like the smoke of a thousand joss sticks.

Robin Laurence is a freelance writer, critic and curator, based in Vancouver.

Joe Sarahan

"Curse" of the "Homo"

Pitt Gallery, Vancouver

February 5 – 27, 1993

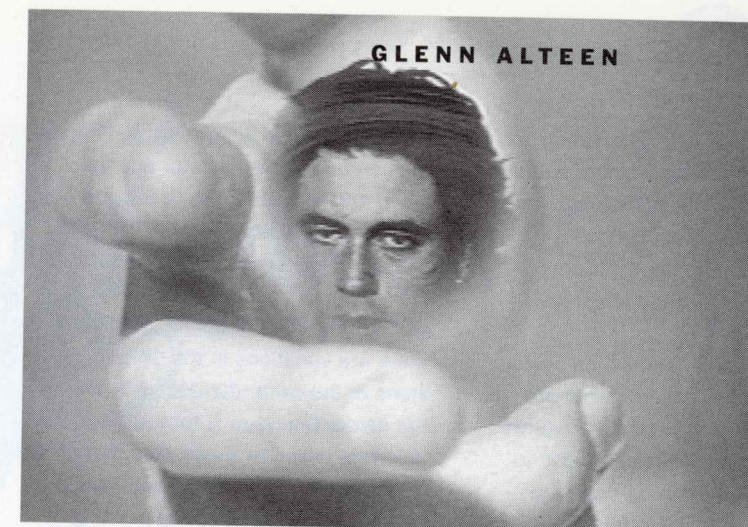
Our culture has always twinned death and desire as if desire and sex could lead us to the brink of the netherworld and allow us to become so consumed in the process that we lose ourselves and, for a few brief seconds, cease to exist. Since the advent of AIDS this largely poetic truth has been unpoetically brought home. Desire has and does kill, and small decisions bear great consequences. In no other way has this been so gravely inscribed as by AIDS. And nowhere has this been so gravely driven home as in gay communities. For the last ten years it has been a resounding truth as we watch the losses mount, the memorials continue and the quilt gets larger and larger and larger.

Desire has taken on a whole new tone, darker, surely, and more sinister. Its ancient twin has never been closer, and with it has come those ghastly metaphors opening the door for homophobia to become another plague preying on our communities, laying its mortal blows on the queer body and on its desire.

But this is an old story...

Upon venturing into Joe Sarahan's installation "Curse" of the "Homo," the blackened gallery with flickering video monitors and industrial soundtrack cause an immediate tension in your chest. The first element encountered is white hand-painted text reading "Anonymity and Silence is Loss" and in this installation Sarahan attempts to define and identify a community as well as to articulate its loss. "Curse" is a complex exploration of some of the forces at work on that community, namely AIDS and homophobia and their effects on the state of desire. But Sarahan is as critical of desire as he is of the conditions it must endure.

The installation consists of three video monitors and a number of other el-



still from *Adam/Adam*, Joe Sarahan, video, 1993

ements including a sealed glory hole, a silver cock-ring and an altar. The altar incorporates a form of Jacob's Ladder, a six-inch cathode-ray monitor displaying a flickering candle, a slide projection of a young man and, on a plinth, a triple light socket holding two small red lights and one longer one. Although the combination of elements is dizzying and one wonders where to place emphasis, after giving the work time, all falls into place.

In the central video image, *Adam/Adam*, a young man looks out longingly from a pastel vortex, arm outstretched towards the viewer. The hand recalls the Sistine Chapel fresco of Adam reaching toward God. He seems to be moving away from us even as he strains to touch us. It is as if we could save him, if he could only reach.

The other two videos are more intense. Boxers spar in the second, with a young man's voiceover describing cruising a peep show, recounting incidents of unsafe sex, and with texts that read, "labels my body with their morality," "aren't you just dying to know?" and "this plague rules my thoughts." The boxers' punches are emphasized by animated sequences reminiscent of the 1960s camp Batman television series.

But it is the final video segment that is the most disturbing. Excerpted from Sarahan's unfinished video *West Coast Homo Love Story*, it is based on Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks*. A lone sailor (the artist) is surrounded by bikers hurl-

ing catcalls at him. They dismount and continue to taunt him, beating him with chains. The point of view of the audience coincides with that of the sailor. The chains hit with a resounding thud. The bashers then don rubber gloves and proceed to dissect the body, removing internal organs and passing them around. While the tape begins as a terrifying gay-bashing, by the time the body is cut open it is reminiscent of SM porn, perverse, frightening and fascinating.

This section is the most difficult to watch and interpret. The gallery reported that some victims of gay-bashing couldn't remain in the installation because it brought back all the suffering. Sarahan likens the bashing to SM practices in that it deals with consuming and expending. One thinks of pre-Stonewall gay representations where the protagonist must pay for his desire with his freedom or his life. It speaks of internalized homophobia, of seeing ourselves as they see us. Gay man as sinner.

These themes continue at the altar. The lights on the plinth recall Priapus, a homage to the penis. On the floor is the same combination of lights lying in spent desire. The slide image reflects a young man through a mirror like Narcissus entranced by his own image in the pool. On the wall the "Jacob's Ladder" takes the form of an electrically charged glass tube, with a flashing neon light that burns like lightning up the tube, breaking with a loud static crackle at the



Portrait: Clamorous Intentions

top. You watch energy die, be spent. Yet on the small cathode-ray monitor a lone tired candle flickers and keeps burning, recalling AIDS memorial services with their candles and despair. In "Curse," Sarahan tells us it is not enough just to grieve.

While Sarahan's installation deals very much with the present, there are many references to mythological figures such as Priapus and Narcissus, and to the gladiators of the boxing ring. One senses that he is trying to find other terms to use in dealing with this disease and its effects, and that he is unwilling to fall back upon the already overused memorial imagery. Save for the lone flickering candle on the six-inch disembodied screen, one gets the impression that Sarahan is not really interested in the dead. In fact, the gay Vancouver paper *Angles* quotes him as stating that the effect of efforts like the AIDS quilt is like that of saying "shut up and sit down and sew."

Sarahan is more interested in mapping the effects of AIDS on the queer body, on what it has done to desire. In this instance he doesn't mince words or images. Heading straight for the nihilism that has been linked to our sexuality he reduces it to its most stereotypic form: priapic narcissism as "size queens" looking for their own image. The work acknowledges how AIDS has brought us back to the '60s representations of homosexuality, The-Boys-in-the-Band-style "show me a happy homosexual and I'll show you a dead queer," and Sarahan questions our complicity in this.

"Curse" of the "Homo" affirms that it is not enough to protest for rights and go to memorial services. It insists we must reclaim our sexuality as a positive force in our lives. Sarahan is aware of the difficulties inherent in the exercise of reclamation. How does one exorcise the spectre of AIDS from our desire when it feeds so easily upon the ancient coupling of sex and death?

By referring to ancient mythology Sarahan attempts to go to the core of those myths and mythological figures

which endure today, Narcissus, Priapus, the centurion, the gladiator and the satyr. And Dionysus, the Greek god of inspiration and drunkenness. Dionysus was born of Zeus' thigh. He and his female followers came out of the East to perform the rites of spring. Although there are variations in the different versions of the myth, the ending is always the same. Dionysus is torn apart by his followers driven by these rites into an orgiastic frenzy. The god is sacrificed in view to a successful spring planting.

The Christians modelled their Christ after the Dionysian myth, although death by crucifixion was much more suited to a Christian sensibility than was the ripping apart of a body. Communion, the symbolic eating of the body of Christ and drinking of his blood, is directly linked to this earlier myth. Sarahan's installation refers to these ancient myths of destruction and renewal. In *West Coast Homo Love Story* the sailor's body is cut open and the organs removed. In the Dionysian myth it is significant that he is ripped apart, torn in a frenzy by bare hands. In this installation those same hands are found everywhere: Adam reaches for us, the boxers pound us, and the bikers cut us apart.

In "Curse" of the "Homo" Sarahan demonstrates that it will take more than platitudes to reclaim our desire. Sarahan's quest goes to the core of Western cultural myths, bringing back representations that relate to current situations. Those myths inhabit a dark place not unlike the darkness that surrounds our desire and there's no reaching it by staying in the light. Since the Renaissance, many artists have used these same myths to interpret their own contemporary situations. These myths are at the core of Western culture. And Sarahan should go back to them because it is right to go back into the dark and start the work of reclamation.

Glenn Alteen is a curator, writer, artist and is currently the Director of grunt gallery in Vancouver.

Clamorous Intentions is a lesbian curatorial collective comprising Claire Sykes, Sharon Switzer, and Frederick Peters. Like other curatorial groups operating without the permanent support of an established institution they are also deeply involved in fundraising and organizing. The trio amalgamated in late 1991 when Canadian artist/curator Robert Windrum approached Switzer for assistance in coordinating the Toronto component of the New York-based *Electric Blanket AIDS Projection Project*. This relatively successful creation of a space for mourning and memorial (on December 1, 1991) prompted Clamorous Intentions to expand upon this initial momentum. Clamorous Intentions' subsequent projects have included: *The Memorial Project* at A Space and the Euclid Theatre in the fall of 1992, and *Re:Dressing the Body* at Garnet Press Gallery during the summer of 1992.

The organizational energy the trio devoted to the realization of *Electric Blanket* led artists James MacSwain and Andy Fabo, who had been planning an exhibition around mourning, memorialization, and activism in the wake of AIDS, to retain Clamorous Intentions as curators for an exhibition intended to coincide with last year's *Day Without Art*, or World AIDS Day. A lack of focus in terms of how to acknowledge World AIDS Day within the various parallel or commercial galleries in Toronto had become frustrating to many artists. In response to this situation, Clamorous Intentions initially conceived of a gallery exhibition entitled *Gathering* which would be complimented by *In Absentia*, two

evenings of time-based works (film, video, performance, and music) presented in a theatrical space rather than an art institution.

Re:Dressing the Body shares with *The Memorial Project* an ambivalence about the traditionally rationalist space of the art gallery or institution, seeing such spaces as all too frequently characterized by denials of subjectivity in favour of unspecified universalisms. Art focusing upon the body, upon identity, art concerned with health or life and death issues has traditionally been discouraged or even shunned by art institutions—not to mention the laws of the market. For *Re:Dressing the Body* the three curators selected artists they felt were capable of breaking down false divisions between the theoretical or conceptual and the personal. Although throughout the history of the art institution there has been an enduring but ultimately false belief that works in which the artist has a personal stake will tend to be lacking in both theoretical smarts or political savvy, Clamorous Intentions are specifically attracted to artists whose work eludes such oppositional mind/body belief structures.

Because radical subjectivities tend to resist the universalisms employed to homogenize differences, many artists have of course taken to forming their own curatorial collectives: often exhibiting in various public as opposed to art-institutional locations. While the members of Clamorous Intentions all emphasize that theirs is not strictly a curatorial collective, they feel that far too little creative curatorial activity is taking place

within artist-run centres, public, private or commercial galleries. At the same time as they express an unwillingness to submit to a political climate within the artist-run centres, which seemed to be inherently suspicious of outside curators, they remain aware of the limited options for creative curatorial presence within commercial or larger public galleries. In addition, Clamorous Intentions are strongly in opposition to curatorial practices which minimize the involvement of the artists, feeling doubtful that there is much serious curatorial motivation for many (but not all) group exhibitions beside the need for artists to exhibit. They represent their own position on collectivity and independence in the following curatorial statement:

We have come to understand curation as the expression of aesthetic and intellectual possibilities through association, both in the form of group shows, and within the collective itself. This awareness makes us less interested in the traditional unilateral authority of the individual curator, and more in the expanded possibilities afforded through collaborative efforts. It has thus been second nature to include the artist in our initial curatorial research discussions and invite their input in a continually evolving thesis.

As well as the engagement of the artists themselves in a more or less participatory manner, the juxtaposition of relatively well-known and relatively less-known or emerging artists is crucial to the group's curatorial position. Not only does this juxtaposition strategy make sense in terms of gallery attendance or exposure, the use of the familiar and the less familiar are also intended to provide context for one another. In *The Memorial Project* for instance, the principle of juxtaposition paralleled those works memorializing specific individuals with works acknowledging an inability to merely memorialize individuals in the face of the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic.

The next project on the horizon for Clamorous Intentions will be a collaboration with curator Bill Arning of the White Columns Gallery in New York whom they will be assisting with a show entitled *Optimism/Pessimism*. This exhibition will be undertaken in collaboration with both YYZ and Garnet Press—a parallel gallery and a private gallery. Optimism and Pessimism are two concepts which demand each other but remain symbiotically unstable. For the curating of this show, it is precisely this tension which proves to be the attraction for Clamorous Intentions.

Andrew J. Paterson is a video producer, writer, cultural observer and gadfly (seemingly permanently) located in Toronto.

censorship in the lesbian, gay and bisexual community: a pride day weekend program

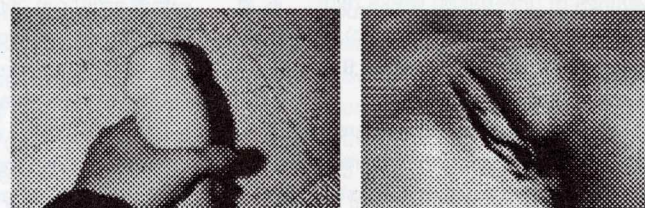
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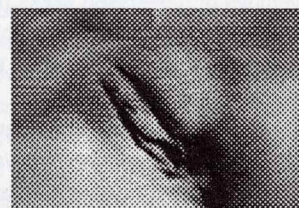
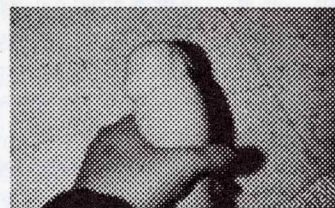
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