

SUMMER 1993 Vol. XVI No. 5+6

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Double Issue

Cultural Appropriation

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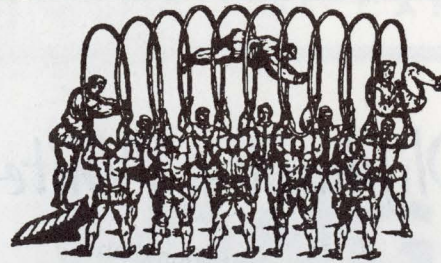
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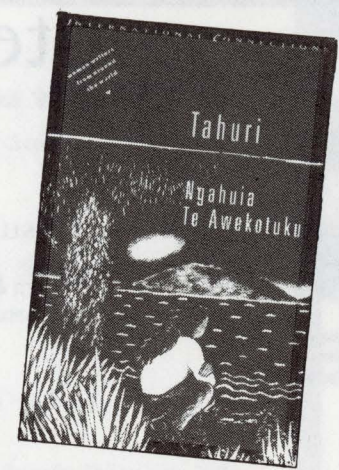
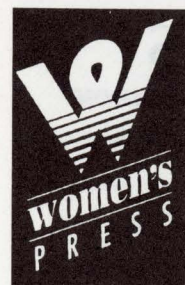
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Tahuri Ngahua Te Awekotuku

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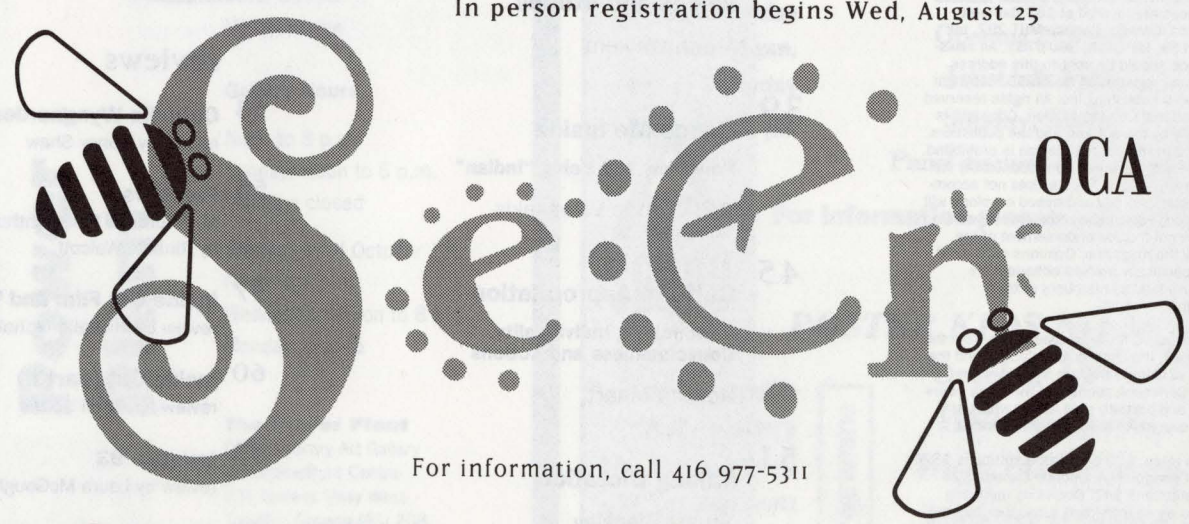
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film & Video News

by Susan Kealey

Demonstrators entering Toronto Metro Hall. Photo Jackie Peters.



TAXPAYERS, Mary!

On June 29, the Management Committee of Toronto's Metro Council recommended that an operating grant of \$4,000 to the Inside Out Collective, which had already been awarded by the Cultural Affairs Division, be revoked.

Since 1990, the Collective has organized and presented Toronto's Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival. Since its inception, the Festival has attracted a wide public and become a recognized venue for gay and lesbian independent producers both nationally and internationally. Interestingly, the right-wing attack on Inside Out (which included warnings to Council of a Sodom-and-Gomorrah-like destruction) was not on the merit of their programming or use of funds, but on the "salacious and provocative" film descriptions contained in the Festival guide which (as funding bodies re-

quire) had been distributed to a number of public centres, including libraries.

Following the meeting, in which the queer theatre company *Buddies in Bad Times'* \$26,000 grant also came up for scrutiny, an intensive lobbying campaign got underway including petitions, faxes and letters of support from a host of concerned (outraged!) artists, curators, cultural groups, members of the press and funding bodies. On July 7, when the full Council met, a demonstration of solidarity (aka "Hands Around Metro") and press conference were held at Metro Hall, including speeches by Helga Stephenson (Festival of Festivals) and Tomson Highway. However, during the course of the protracted meeting (the first item up for discussion, garbage disposal, took four hours), which included much animated shouting from the floor, the motion concerning *Buddies'* funding passed, while

that concerning *Inside Out's* grant did not, due to the procedural rules governing a split vote. At present, the item may be on the agenda again when Metro Council reconvenes on August 11.

AGM-orama

The Independent Film and Video Alliance (IFVA/AVCI) held its thirteenth Annual General Meeting in Vancouver, June 8-13. Held at the Western Front, Performance Works and Pacific Cinematheque, the gathering opened with a workshop by Chet Singh and included forums and workshops on equity, censorship, integrating independent work into the broadcast system and lobbying. Three new groups have joined: Cine-Vic (Victoria), In Visible Colours and Animorph (Vancouver). Newly elected president Shirley Anne Clayton noted that Bill C-115 (NAFTA) will "have a devastating effect

on Canadian culture," as she called for the Alliance to make its "priorities clear to those running for office." An equity motion was also approved, furthering the stance of the organization. The Alliance's new address is:

5505, boul. St. Laurent,
Suite 3000, Montreal,
Quebec H2T 1S6.

Karma Chameleon

Chameleon Media Arts Institute is a new culture and technology lab that has been launched in Calgary. The facility will provide integration of CD-quality audio, video, text and graphics on computer; in short, a professional production setting geared to those working in film, video, audio, performance, interactive and multimedia. The revenue generated from these services will be used to fund the Institute's programmes. The Institute's inaugural project is *Plain of the Six*

ISSUES & EVENTS

Glaciers, a radio installation at the Whyte Museum presented in conjunction with The Banff Centre's *Tuning of the World* conference. The second project, *Foreign Lands*, a videotape by institute co-artistic director Vern Hume, is scheduled for October. Both will be released on CD-ROM in 1994. For more information, please contact:

Don Stein or Vern Hume,
Chameleon Media Arts Institute,
1233-18th Avenue
N.W., Calgary, Alberta,
T2M 0W6.

Equity Issues at the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre

For over two years now, members of the Board as well as the general membership of the CFMDC have been trying to deal with issues concerning systemic racism, and to address a motion to develop an employment equity policy that was passed at the AGM in May 1992. With the election of a new board in May 1993, the CFMDC now has an active equity committee which has developed both interim and long-term strategies. The plan is to integrate equity at all levels of the organization, including staff, collection and outreach. The policy goes beyond the typical non-discrimination policy, but is more proactive in that it addresses the conditions and contradictions created by power imbalances in our society. The intention is to create an inclusive organizational environment "where minorities, women, Native people and people with disabilities feel validated—not just as beneficiaries of programmes that remedy discrimination, but as people who are creative, competent and cared about." The process has not been without its growing pains, but the recognition of these problems has been the most positive step in actually

addressing them. (submitted by Gitanjali, a member of the CFMDC Equity Committee and a former member of the Board of Directors)

New Initiatives in Film

The New Initiatives in Film programme of Studio D has just released its 1993 Resource Bank catalogue, a computerized listing of women of colour and First Nations women from across Canada who are involved in filmmaking. To obtain a copy, or to register for the 1994 catalogue, please write to:

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

As The Euclid Turns

While the woes of Toronto's Euclid Theatre could be said to be worthy of a TV mini-series, their ongoing problems and crises are those faced by most artist-run centres at one time or another: funding, internal strife and budgetary nightmares. On June 29, a public meeting was held to explain the current situation to the community and to try to develop a membership base that might see the organization out of its current predicament (i.e. on the verge of closing). At the meeting, a new Board of Directors was elected and 30 members were recruited. In a joint meeting held July 16, the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council and the Cultural Affairs Division of Metro decided they did not have enough confidence in the board to continue funding the centre. Ironic because, in its five years of operation, the Euclid has presented some of the best alternative film and video work from around the world and been host to numerous annual festivals and events. At present, Board and staff are locked out of the premises. An

open letter drafted July 26 calls upon all members, supporters and funders to "envision a way to overcome the present financial difficulties it is experiencing." Stay tuned for further developments.

Intermedia

The INTERMEDIA collective is hosting its first national conference November 12-14 in Toronto. The conference will include workshops, screenings and panel discussions. Interested film and video artists of Mexican, Central American, South American, Caribbean and Indigenous heritage living in Canada are invited to participate. For more information contact:

INTERMEDIA,
c/o 172 Brunswick Ave.,
Toronto, Ontario,
M5S 2M5,
fax: (416) 594-1336.

Voices in Vision

A film and video collective for women of colour and First Nations women is being formed in Montreal. Recognizing the need for film and video makers (and those interested in using these media) to exchange information, share strategies and to challenge racism, sexism, classism and colonialism, *Voices in Vision* hopes to use film and video as tools for empowerment. Upcoming projects include a film and video festival of works by women of colour and First Nations women and the production of a short video on racism. The next meeting will be held on September 18, 1993; for more information, please contact Cheryl Sim at 514-489-6402.

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KWAME DAWES

Re-Appropriating Cultural Appropriation



Definitions are exclusionary in their nature. I consider, for political purposes, people of the Nations that existed in North America prior to the arrival of Columbus and his people "people of colour." At the same time, it is important to declare that the term "people of colour" is a euphemism for people who are not white European types. This label may appear to exclude some who share the sentiments and experiences of the people I am writing about. To these people I say, be assured that if you share the experiences described in this article, consider yourself a member of this political unit — this artificial construct.

I am acutely aware of the incredible differences within these groups. I am aware that many members of what I have come to term "people of colour" would rather not be identified as such. All I can say is that the people I speak of share the experience of oppression and disenfranchisement at the hands of white society. Rather than fall into the trap of accepting the divisive game of comparing exploitation scars like locker-room denizens, we are better off consolidating our shared experience as we fight the common foe — oppression, which is spoken and acted out in the idiom of racism.

Finally, in explanation for why I persist throughout the article to refer to both "people of colour" and "First Nations people," I should state that this strategy is purely one of political expediency. By drawing attention to the distinctions between these two groupings, I am foregrounding the especially relevant and pressing nature of oppression and abuse that is distinctly and undeniably Canadian — that of its relationship with the First Nations of this geographical area. I do so, also, to counteract the tendency of many Canadians (white, of colour, of First Nations) to divide (so as to weaken) the constituents of the racial struggle along very specific lines. I am asserting that we all — First Nations people, and so-called "people of colour" — share a common struggle. By doing this I seek to preempt any attempt to exclude First Nations people from the discussion, which is often the tactical wont of many white debaters.

ARTISTS WHO FALL UNDER THE TYPICALLY PROBLEMATIC RUBRIC "PEOPLE OF colour and First Nations peoples" in Canada have learnt that it is virtually impossible to conceive of an existence free of politics. This is especially evident among artists who seek to assert an independence of artistic vision within a largely white-dominated and white-funded mainstream.

It becomes important for such artists to negotiate their way into funding for their projects from a wide variety of organizations which have in common the harrowing concept of jury selection. There are several breeds of this creature (juries) each with its own peculiar



It is also quite clear that the people who are designing and implementing policy to respond to these cries for change are not usually people of colour or people of First Nation descent. Instead, white bureaucrats are formulating these policies and in many ways are merely replicating old racist and divisive models of government through an appropriation and misinterpretation of progressive political ideology.

(other/them/those people/etc.).

It is these bureaucratic structures that generally determine the fate of so many projects embarked upon, or dreamt up by non-white artists. Their actions within the past few years indicate that while there is a level of tokenism and apparent concern for racial questions with regard to funding in this country, the artistic community—including both the artists themselves and the administrators, that is we all exist in a society of artists who work consistently in both capacities, hence the invariable instances of "cultural inbreeding" and favouritism—has failed significantly to address the very real expectations of the non-white population. This mainstream network of funding agencies persists with a conservatism that shies from any fundamental philosophical or structural change, opting instead for a mechanism that is able to absorb new ideas and new ways of approaching certain issues within the already existing structure. And herein lies the reality that non-white peoples are in no way gaining a significant power base in these organizations. The fact is that the hierarchical structures continues to produce and implement policies that suit its own interests while using tried and proven strategies of divide and conquer to disarm the call for fundamental change that is coming from non-white groups all over the country, and from the non-white individuals who are coopted into the system.

There seems to be a pressing desire among many non-white artists and producers to bring about a shift in philosophy within these structures that will ensure that the work of such "minority" artists is treated with intelligence, sensitivity and respect by those who control the funding. It is also important to these artists that the structures which undergird these funding organizations augment this respect and intelligence with a clear acknowledgment, through the implementation of new policy, that racism is a reality in the society and that such racism can occur within these very organizations. It is obvious to many that such respect and intelligence is not inherent in the current systems and so there is a pressing need for action to change this. The current debate surrounding the question of cultural appropriation, for instance, has provided the typically unimaginative instincts of top-heavy

foibles and pitfalls for the artist. The first entails the easily identified white-dominated and white-peopled juries that seek to uphold the tenets of quality and excellence in their own limited and archaic terms. The second is a peculiar creature, for it includes in its composition the carefully selected "minority" figure (read someone non-white) who is expected to validate the ethical practices of the institution that has selected him/her, especially in the area of racial issues. They become hired race-relations officers whose dependence on these organizations for a salary places incredible pressures on them to conform to and support the status quo. This individual, more often than not, is pulled away from the pool of artists and is then expected to make sound judgment on the works of his/her peers and fellow warriors/workers from the position of adversary

bureaucratic structures that participate in the funding business with another tool of exclusion and ghettoization which appears to wear the face of cultural tolerance and sensitivity. In fact, without an understanding of the role of power and its history in the context of colonialism and imperialism in determining what constitutes cultural appropriation, one is left with what can easily be another tool of fascist cultural exclusivity. Is Bob Marley's lyric "War" cultural appropriation because the text of the song is taken from a speech by Haile Selassie, an Ethiopian emperor? Is Marley, a Jamaican of Scottish and Jamaican descent appropriating the culture of Ethiopia, and if so, is this a bad thing? Is it the same as racist renditions of Native American culture or African culture seen in many Hollywood films? How is such difference defined and legislated without creating a situation in which simplistic criteria like "it's about Black people and he is white, thus we throw it out" become the operating rationale for funding policies?

Quite naturally, the greatest cry against cultural appropriation has come from people who are railing against the actions of exploitative white artists. Thus, it appears that support for legislation that seeks to end cultural appropriation would come from this group of individuals as well. And in many instances this is the case. However, it is also quite clear that the people who are designing and implementing policy to respond to these cries for change are not usually people of colour or people of First Nations descent. Instead, white bureaucrats are formulating these policies and in many ways are merely replicating old racist and divisive models of government through an appropriation and misinterpretation of progressive political ideology. If legislation continues in the direction that it threatens to go, what will happen is that only Blacks will be able to write about Black experience, and only whites will be able to write about their experience. Cree people will not write about the Mohawk, nor will the Iroquois write about the Inuit. A straight woman will never include in her work a lesbian character nor will a Mayan write about a Spanish-Mexican homosexual. The only artists who will be able to produce work of rich variety are those who have incredibly complex and mixed heritages, who are bisexual, who are androgynous, or those who don't need funding.

Can an Other person, a person different from myself because of sex, race, sexual orientation or history, effectively write about my experience in a way that I can connect with? As an artist, an avid reader and a viewer of films I must conclude that this is possible. It has to be. This does not mean that the picture will be perfect. But, by the same token, I would never presume to think that because someone is Black like myself, and male and heterosexual, that he automatically has the capacity and skill to represent my experience. However, I make a distinction between exploitative readings of my experience and readings that emerge out of dialogue and honest interaction founded on common humanity. To deny the possibility of art emerging out of such a context is to deny art its power—it is, in fact, to deny the very concept of learning.

But the issue is far more complex than that. One could quite easily declare on the basis of the above statements that legislation that seeks to uproot cultural appropriation is inherently absurd and unprogressive. Cultural appropriation—the argument goes—is not a bad thing all the time, and world cultures are already too intertwined to do anything about changing them. However such thinking assumes that we are playing on an even playing field. This is not the case. Our society is marred by significant inequities which have, for years, led to the exclusion of "minorities" and communities not regarded as belonging to the "mainstream" of the society from telling their own stories. Riding on the back of a carefully designed and efficiently implemented system of the cultural oppres-



The struggles at Oka, the Meech Lake détente in Manitoba, the race disturbances in Halifax and Toronto, and the wide-reaching aftershocks of the explosion in L. A. have all in some way contributed to the forcing of the issue in Canada today.

upon which funding decisions are made. Such a reevaluation would be founded on the argument that since so many whites have told, for years, the stories of non-whites, and have, in the process brutally misinterpreted them and established a discourse of inferiority in such portrayals, it is time to shift the emphasis and favour, instead, the non-white artists who are willing and able to tell their own story and to tell it well. This is not to dismiss the noble and sincere sentiment that may have gone into the hundreds and thousands of pseudo-anthropological folk song and tale collections that have been produced by white writers over the past five hundred years, beginning in America with Columbus' quasi-anthropological evaluation of the Arawak people. However, as has been demonstrated in countless instances many of these works are flawed by the heavy-handed application of western values, prejudices and belief systems to the interpretation of the folkways of non-white people. This, coupled with the exploitive absence of accountability to the people being written about, and the related lack of respect for their values, has generated work that is at best of poor and unreliable quality and at worst simply offensive and totally destructive.

In order to favour the non-white artist on the basis of this argument certain assumptions about art have to be made. The first and most important is that art is essentially a commodity that exists within a political and ideological landscape. We must dismiss the notion that art exists outside of culture, or the idea that art somehow transcends culture and politics. It does not. This is the reality regardless of whether we like the idea or not. Art is money, art is power, art defines effectively. Art may be seen as a means by which we interpret and represent society in a fashion that is dictated by our discourse—our history, our culture, our social realities and our politics. If we grant, then, that white artists have essentially dominated the highest echelons of art for too long, and if we further accept that this is a product, not of artistic ability, but of political and cultural will, then there is a place for the redressing of what is essentially an injustice. There is a place for suggesting that non-white artists be allowed to tell their own story. In fact it must go further than that—non-white artists should be encouraged, aided, supported and funded such that they can tell their own stories. At the same time, white artists should be heavily scrutinized such that they be discouraged from embarking on projects that essentially perpetuate the negative stereotyping of non-white cultures. For those who are quick to scream censorship, let it be understood that this has less to do with censorship than it has to do with copyright questions. As simplistic as this may seem, the rationale for such action is founded on the belief that white artists have been stealing from and misinterpreting non-white artists for too long. Now non-white artists are seeking to get back what is rightfully theirs.

The funding agencies and policy making structures should, as a consequence, so restructure themselves to allow non-white artists to feel and be included in the artistic mainstream. This means a redefinition of what constitutes mainstream—moving away from the

sion of colonialism and imperialism, much of Canada's cultural behaviour merely reflects a privileging of white Eurocentric values. In this context, minorities have often been excluded from funding which would allow them to tell their stories—instead, white artists have had greater access to the money available, even when they are telling stories that have been taken from the cultures of the "minority" people. In light of this inequity, there is a strong and compelling case that can be made for a reassessment of the philosophical foundation

notion that anything mainstream must be either white or acceptable to whites. These are political considerations and require political measures. But despite the compelling nature of the argument presented here, it is necessary to continue to bear in mind that political policy on such matters can easily shift from the liberal to the fascist. One must be wary, for instance, of the fact that legislation in such areas is often being carried out by individuals who are not necessarily sympathetic to the philosophy of change. In the context of this issue, this is a significant danger for policies may be implemented in such a way as to aggravate the situation and perpetuate the ghettoization of non-white communities in the society. What I refer to here is the perpetuation of the concept of the existence of homogeneous and pure races and cultures and the hierarchical values that many racists over the years have attached to them. Instance: Hitler's attitude to jazz and Black culture in Nazi Germany, for instance. Would we applaud his passionate plea for his pure white people to not "appropriate" the music of Black America?

The fact is that we are dealing with a society that has still not fully internalized the need for systematic change when it comes to racism. Consequently, action that seeks to redress racist tendencies are being implemented by people who have not fully accepted the negative reality of racism. There are still many instances of racist policy of which the administrators who carry out legislation are blissfully unaware. They have not yet understood the pervasiveness and Hydra-like nature of racism. They just don't get it.

It is easy, then, for such ideological constructs to be redefined and misappropriated to suit the interests of a ruling class. The truth is that if, in fact, the legislation took the form of what I describe above, then we would have a situation that would simply ghettoize all communities, thus consolidating the domination of a "pure" white society and culture. Such politically rooted criteria would assume great importance so that questions of artistic quality would become redefined. This in itself may not be a bad thing except that this redefinition would be premised on the understanding that works produced by non-whites are defined and recommended purely on the basis of their politics and race-centredness rather than on their vision and artistic credibility. Such thinking already exists today in the attitude that many Canadians have to notions of affirmative action and employment equity. Here, the non-white worker, it is assumed, is inherently weaker in skill and intelligence than the white worker but has managed to progress simply on the basis of his/her skin colour. Translated into the art business, white artists are now dismissing the credibility of the work of non-white artists on the assumption that the only reason that such non-whites have been published, produced or displayed is that their works are a part of the privileged "minority backlash." So a white male academic is able to say to me, without the slightest acknowledgment of his racism and dismissal of my abilities, "you are lucky being Black—you will get a job easily. Now if you were a woman and maybe gay..." This is the kind of self-pitying cynicism that comes from people who have had it too easy in the past and who are now lamenting their loss of power without realizing that the power they once held was wrongly and unjustly acquired. They fail to recognize as well, that their movement to positions of power at the time was not based on merit, but facilitated by their skin colour. Such attitudes as described above are also becoming basic to the cultural arena, and it stems from the basic philosophy that is ingrained in the psyche of many white Canadians.

It is evident that Canada's dealings with institutionalized racism is as varied and regionally defined as is the landscape of this country. There are parts of Canada where the pres-



Ultimately, then, it is possible to conceive of a situation in which artistic value operates side by side with cultural and political awareness in the judging and funding of projects within this society.

of whiteness in a diverse community. Here little acknowledgment is given to the presence of racism. The non-whites remain marginalized or are sucked into white society where they must conform to white values and standards and where they learn quickly how to adapt, knowing, in the process, where familiarity and affinity with whites ends. Here, there is no compulsion or pressure to recognize the presence or the needs of the non-white community. Think of how comfortably many regional theatre companies and art centres in this country design their seasons with the least regard for the question of cultural diversity. They grant themselves the pretended luxury of choosing on the basis of artistic taste and merit, when in fact all they are doing is consolidating the culture and values of the white community while denying the non-white community. The third paradigm entails the diverse community that seeks to celebrate its diversity through a process of denial. They deny repeatedly that there exists any racist sentiment or behaviour in the community. They augment this position by resisting any calls to put in place mechanisms of complaint and protest against racist behaviour. They are adamant about not accepting policies like affirmative action of employment equity for such policies simply acknowledgment something that they are not willing to accept—that there is racism in their communities. These are happy communities with a snug sense of self-righteousness who exist in denial mode until the keg blows.

Is it any wonder, then, that so many non-white political groups and artists are now advocating a hardline legislative practice which is often akin to a quota system? Hardly, because this is often the only way that many artistic centres and government funding agencies will be forced to be accountable not only to the wealthier whites who are filling the theatres, bringing in the money to see themselves on stage, on screen and on the tube, but to the less powerfully positioned non-white disenfranchised minority that such organizations are constitutionally bound to serve as well.

The struggles at Oka, the Meech Lake détente in Manitoba, the race disturbances in Halifax and Toronto and the wide-reaching aftershocks of the explosion in Los Angeles have all in some way contributed to the forcing of the issue in Canada today. Things are now at a political level as Canada searches for its sense of identity and a way to construct and understand itself in the context of today's realities. Native Canadian Nations are especially well-positioned at the moment to bring about systematic change to Canadian policy towards them and they are acting. It is hoped that their gains will be understood by themselves, and by all society as models for the re-evaluation of the values and systems of governing that have existed in this country for a very long time. It is hoped that other non-white groups who have participated in the fight for fundamental change will be able to participate in the reorganization of the society's attitude to race relations during this period. The schizophrenic history of exploitation and guilt that has characterized the relationship of white society to the Native Americans is unique and brings with it a compelling case for change which white Canada is beginning to listen to. Sadly, Canada is less inclined, at the moment, to listen to non-white and non-Native groups. However, the evolving demographics of Canadian society present a compelling case for dialogue. It is in the context of such dialogue that we can then turn our minds to resolving the troubling question of cultural

sure to recognize diversity is having virtually no impact. The reasons vary. On the one hand, one may cite the reality of numbers. Some areas of Canada are so effectively white that they manage to create an invisible underclass that does not in any way have power or recognition. The second has to do with the attempt by many communities to deny their diversity in a futile but dangerous quest to present a face

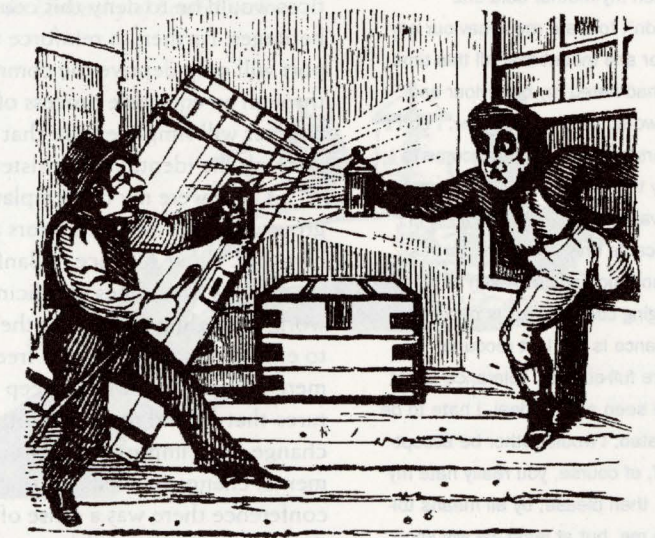
appropriation, for it is when the society begins to deal with this issue that we will start to see changes in the infrastructures that support the artists in this country.

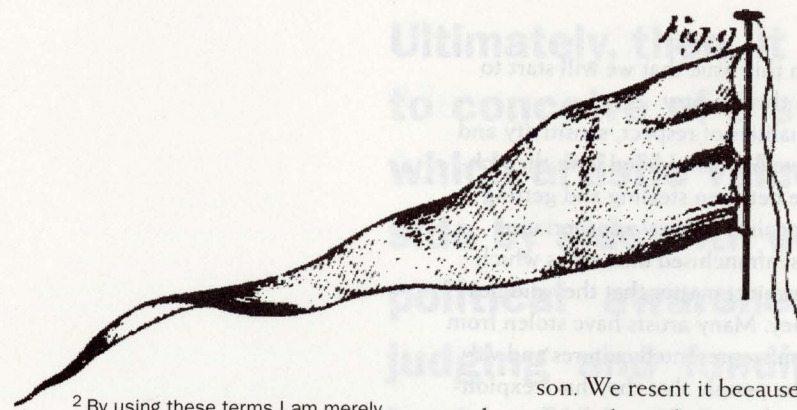
When cultural appropriation is counteracted by the qualities of respect, sensitivity and equal opportunity, the result is work that is wonderfully developed and filled with the richness of cultural interaction and dialogue. It is the difference between stealing and getting permission to take, borrow or share. The cry for measures against cultural appropriation emerged out of a sense of abuse and exploitation felt by disenfranchised minorities which characterized the work of many white artists dealing with subject matter that they did not respect or understand. It also involved the question of money. Many artists have stolen from other cultures without giving acknowledgment; they have misrepresented cultures and values with complete disdain and disregard for the values of the people that they have exploited and, in the process, they have made significant amounts of money from such efforts. In many instances, our understanding of ourselves has been determined by the language and ideology of these exploitive artists whose sense of accountability is minimal largely because it is they who have the funding and power.

Thus it is possible for white documentary filmmakers to shoot Aztec people and yet state in the overdub that they are Mayans without these filmmakers feeling the least bit of anxiety about their credibility as cultural documenters. Quite simply, the audience they feel accountable to would not know the difference. It is this disrespect, this constant "dissing" of other cultures through exploitive artistic tendencies that has driven many non-white artists to call for action against cultural appropriation. The truth is, what we are looking for, as non-white artists, is a chance to be able to determine how our stories are going to be told, and a chance to ensure that our values and culture are respected by those who seek to describe them. We, quite understandably, sometimes feel, in light of past practices of whites, that we are the only ones who can fairly treat our own experience. We are suspicious of the motives and practices of those who do not share our history of pain and abuse. Some of us take this thinking even further, suggesting that white artists do not have the capacity to tell our stories because they speak from a "comparatively superficial perspective," which does not allow them to share the pain and suffering that we have felt under their rule.¹ It is an understandable instinct but it must be tempered by the awareness that is an instinct born out of the demand for respect, accountability and dialogue.

For we concede, as well we must, that there are very few existing cultures that can be described as completely void of influence from other cultures. This may be, for many, a lamentable fact of imperialism and colonialism, but for me it is a compelling fact of industrialization and the instinct to explore and learn about other people. I suspect that this is a fact of the human condition. We are social creatures who have consistently shown a propensity to adapt our values, our sense of beauty and art, and our concepts of identity and place according to the cultures and civilizations that we encounter. This kind of interaction and sharing of culture—whether it be exploitive or that of mutual respect and sharing, is something that is arguably inherent to the human behaviour. To deny this, therefore, is to deny a fundamental human trait. Thus, any attempt to formulate policy that seeks to uphold a concept of culture as a homogeneous entity that is static and not subject to change through interaction and dialogue is bound to lead to the adoption of totalitarian and inhuman practices. More importantly, it entails the denial of the commonality of human experience. Interaction is inevitable, influences must occur. What need not be inevitable is exploitation and the movement towards a denial of one's own identity. As well, the kind of hierarchical structures that establish "superior" cultures as the ultimate goal of "inferior" cultures through the processes of so-called

¹ Janisse Browning, "Self-Determination and Cultural Appropriation," *FUSE Magazine*, Vol. 15, no. 4 (Spring 1992), p. 33.





² By using these terms I am merely completing the global circuit in the illogical and geographically questionable Western political terms "East and West/North and South." In actuality, I am suggesting that the process of cultural influence is fairly universal and is usually reciprocal. What is often varied are the terms upon which such influence takes place.

³ I am acutely aware of the fact that I speak idealistically here and that the world I envisage is utopian. However, there is a lot that can be said about utopias which exist in our collective imaginations as they provide us with useful paradigms: ideals upon which to test our actions and to base our interactions.

⁴ When my mother said she wouldn't tolerate my behaviour any longer she meant that all this time she had hated my behaviour and this would be the last straw. I don't understand how we have come to apply the term tolerance as a positive value in society. Tolerance is applicable only when two parties are so much against each other that grudging compromise is necessary. Tolerance is the last recourse before full-out war. Tolerance is not to be seen as the ideal. I hate to be tolerated, I would rather be accepted. If, of course, you really hate my guts, then please, by all means tolerate me, but at least we will know exactly where we stand.

influence and change must be completely rejected as manifestations of genocidal tendencies. Cultural appropriation, understood in its most negative of manifestations, amounts to robbery. Coping with robbery and thievery is something that all societies have somehow had to do and the principles inherent in such coping mechanisms could be applied to cultural appropriation. We abhor robbery. We resent when our things are taken from us without our permission and flaunted by the thief as trophies and as things that belong to that person.

We resent it because in the process our achievements are denied and our enemy has managed to ride towards success on our backs. We also resent it when we give people permission to do something on our behalf and they completely misrepresent us. They make a mockery of our message and shamefully betray the trust that we had in them. Our instinct is to try and retrieve what was taken from us—the actual item that we gave in good faith to the bad messenger—and to reassert who we are and what is ours so that generations can see the truth and appreciate it. If we do not do this, our children's inheritance, that which was given to us, will no longer be there for them and they will be very poor indeed.

It is time to ensure that such exploitation be arrested. More crucially, it is time to ensure that when our gift of culture is being displayed by those with whom we have been willing to share it, that it is presented in a manner that indicates that the artist feels accountable not only to one's financiers, but to us, the part-suppliers of this person's content.

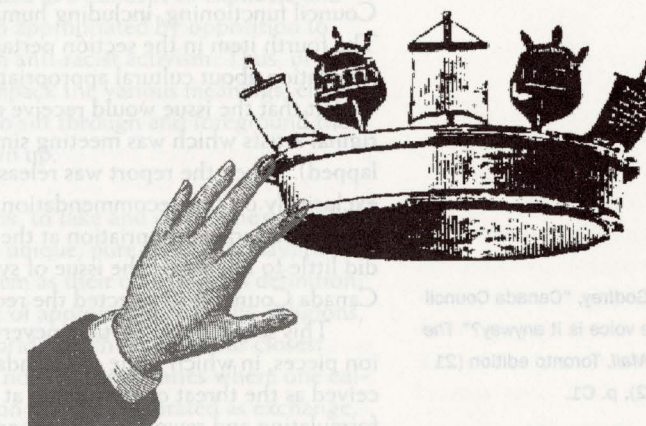
Ultimately, then, it is possible to conceive of a situation in which artistic value operates side by side with cultural and political awareness in the judging and funding of projects within this society. We must accept that the criteria for what constitutes artistic quality is not only personally determined, but further determined by the cultural legacy of each of us, and that such legacies cannot be valued in terms of "good, better, best." While the pervasiveness of Western culture has supplied most cultural communities with shared criteria for artistic value, the same can be said about the impact of Eastern and Southern—that is, the Asian continent and the combined "Southern" worlds of Africa, Australia and South America²—values on what we understand to be modern universal artistic tastes. It is incumbent on the individual who seeks to value work to have a broad conception of what is of quality and value in a Canadian society which is becoming increasingly complex in its cultural make-up. This is a wonderful challenge facing artists and art administrators across the country and it must be seen as an opportunity for the enrichment of art within the country. To shy away from it through the protectionism of exclusionary and divisive legislative practices would be to deny this country of one of its greatest assets, the diversity of its cultural heritages. Further, to reinforce the division through ghettoized policies of funding and support will only deprive the community of a chance to enrich its cultural infrastructure through an equitable process of crossfertilization.³ Finally, to privilege one culture over another will simply ensure that a dominant and unequal trend of exploitation will continue, denying the identity and existence of a large segment of the population.

These were my contemplations after spending four days with a dynamic and motivated group of artists and facilitators at the "About Frame About Face" meeting of the Independent Film and Video Alliance in Banff, Alberta, in June 1992. Many of these artists have found themselves sometimes sacrificing time they would rather spend doing their own creative work, struggling to see that the systems that operate around the industry are so ameliorated to ensure that there exists a freedom to create in a climate of something that transcends mere tolerance⁴—one of deep interest and pride. Many are highly positioned in the structures-that-be and may function, through the alliance of ideas, visions, and strategies for change, and, importantly, through the support from fellow strugglers, as catalysts for fundamental change in a manner that will encourage a change in the system. At the end of the conference there was a sense of community, a shared vision about art and its incredible dynamic with society. Most significantly, there emerged a commitment to uphold and pro-

mote the values of respect, responsibility, accountability and equal opportunity in efforts that entailed the crossing of cultural lines and the sharing of multiple heritages. In this environment of trust and shared values, there was a kind of liberation from the prison of marginalization within marginalized and ghettoized communities, through a determination to work against the patterns of exploitation inherent in the many centuries of abusive cultural appropriation. Here, those who had felt what it meant to be robbed, resisted the human urge to simply rob the next potential victim who seemed weaker (perpetuating the pattern of the colonizer), by seeking to assert a desire, instead, to share, to dialogue, and to work together in celebrating each other's culture. Each artist of colour, each First Nations artist has the responsibility to act and speak out in defense of such liberating ideology. Non-white communities should force funding institutions and art centres to look at their policies and their track record over the past few years from the perspective of those who are most significantly effected. This examination will reveal the flaws in the systems and will then force the various agencies to listen to the directives given by these communities as to what must happen next.

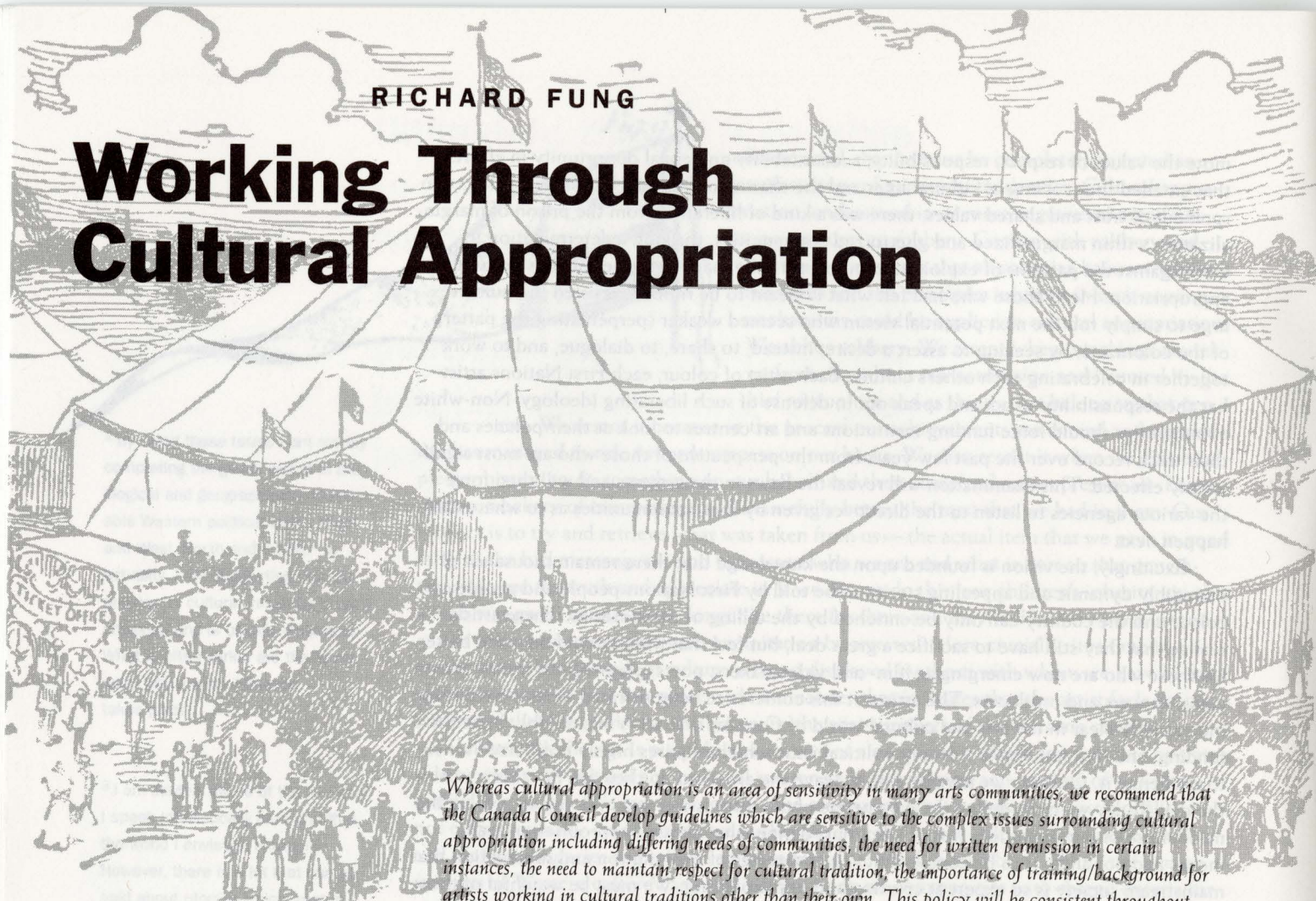
Excitingly, the vision is founded upon the knowledge that there remain thousands of incredibly dynamic and appealing stories to be told by First Nations people and people of colour and the country can only be enriched by the telling of these stories. These artists realize that they still have to sacrifice a great deal, but feel that things could be made better for those who are now emerging as film- and videomakers, poets, playwrights, artists, musicians, dancers and producers. The artists at this conference demonstrated what is becoming increasingly clear in the arts and cultural world of Canada, that art is inextricably linked to funding, and that funding is a deeply political issue which requires highly politicized artists to challenge it. One day we may be able to leave the artists to do their art, but this is not the day. Today we must define the parameters of our oppression and in doing so, evolve the mechanism of our liberation. It is us who must define what cultural appropriation really means and not allow it to be coopted into the strategies of exploitation and subjugation that mainstream society is so expert at creating and implementing. We must be watchful of those who, through what can only be described as cynical and twisted irony, choose to appropriate even the very weapons of our liberation. This is the challenge facing First Nation artists and artists of colour today. Let us not be deceived: if we do not acknowledge our shared histories of oppression and instead choose to wage our wars in isolation, we will all lose. My language is, admittedly, adversarial, but this kind of rhetoric is sometimes necessary when we speak of something as critical as the fate of our cultures and heritages. The prospects are exciting and promise intriguing developments in the future.

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RICHARD FUNG

Working Through Cultural Appropriation



Whereas cultural appropriation is an area of sensitivity in many arts communities, we recommend that the Canada Council develop guidelines which are sensitive to the complex issues surrounding cultural appropriation including differing needs of communities, the need for written permission in certain instances, the need to maintain respect for cultural tradition, the importance of training/background for artists working in cultural traditions other than their own. This policy will be consistent throughout sections and evident in application as well as jury procedures.¹

¹ Recommendations of the Advisory Committee to the Canada Council for Racial Equality in the Arts and The Response of the Canada Council. Ottawa: Canada Council, 1992, p.6.

FROM 1990 TO 1991, I WAS A MEMBER OF WHAT EVENTUALLY CAME TO BE called the Advisory Committee to the Canada Council for Racial Equality in the Arts. When first convened by the director of the Council, the committee lacked a clear mandate. After intense discussion amongst ourselves, however, the members agreed to focus on the issue of systemic racism at the Council. This, in itself, was a miraculous feat given that we were a group of nine artists, writers, and performers with widely varying backgrounds, experiences and practices, and sometimes profoundly differing political perspectives as well. By the end of our term, we had developed a series of recommendations relating to twelve aspects of Council functioning, including human resources, communications and board appointments. The fourth item in the section pertaining to juries and advisory committees was a recommendation about cultural appropriation. It was a short and rather general statement because we felt that the issue would receive more thorough consideration in the committee of aboriginal artists which was meeting simultaneously (and with which our membership overlapped). When the report was released to the public, however, the media focused almost exclusively on this recommendation, and virtually ignored all others. In a major piece on the issue of cultural appropriation at the Canada Council, *Globe and Mail* writer Stephen Godfrey did little to illuminate the issue of systemic racism and, in fact, failed to report that the Canada Council had rejected the recommendation.²

This sensationalist article nevertheless triggered a frenzy of correspondence and opinion pieces, in which some of Canada's most prominent writers ranted about what they perceived as the threat of censorship at the Council. As someone who had spent many hours formulating and reworking the recommendations, I was, needless to say, frustrated by the way our work, and the racism that made it necessary, had disappeared from the controversy. (It was hard to call it a debate, since *The Globe* chose to print very few letters offering an

² Stephen Godfrey, "Canada Council asks whose voice is it anyway?" *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto edition (21 March 1992), p. C1.

alternative framework—including my own). At the same time, the incident made me pay special attention to how the issue of appropriation was being framed.

The media often reduces issues to dualisms: a convenient mechanism for introducing conflict or demonstrating balance. Most media accounts therefore featured an opposition between an alliance of Canada Council bureaucrats (in the person of Joyce Zemans, then director of the Council) and "philistines" (mainly Native artists and artists of colour) and a number of "independent" writers such as Timothy Findley, Heather Robertson, and Neil Bissoondath, who were presented as defending artistic liberty from the tyranny of "political correctness." These writers did nothing to challenge the shocking Eurocentrism and systemic racism that characterizes Canada's cultural establishment; at the time the committee began its work, the Council had no non-white staff (except for cleaners), nor had it ever included a non-white member on its board.³ They were nevertheless quick to evoke the spectres of fascism and racism as the sure consequence of seriously taking into account the issues raised in the critique of cultural appropriation. In an opinion piece in *The Globe and Mail*, for instance, novelist and anthologist Alberto Manguel compared those concerned with "appropriation of voice" to German Nazis. Citing what Goebbels called the *Rassengeist*, or "spirit of the race," he concluded, "this fantastical nonsense, reminiscent of tales of sword and sorcery, would merely be foolish and elitist were it not also profoundly racist—as well as intrinsically ignorant about artistic creation."⁴

So here was a situation in which those opposed to the critique of cultural appropriation—for the most part white, successful males, who possessed easy access to the mainstream media—implicitly accused Native artists and artists of colour of racism (and explicitly of lacking artistic sensibility). It's no wonder that there was little real dialogue or debate. Yet it would be a mistake to be sucked into the binary polemics fostered by the media, to dismiss out of hand the concerns raised by writers such as Manguel, or to ignore the complexities and contradictions inherent within the critique of cultural appropriation.

...if I want to write in the voice of the tea cozy sitting in front of me, believe me, I'm not going to ask for its permission.

—Timothy Findley⁵

Does this mean I cannot borrow from a Bach cantata because I am not Catholic, I am Jewish?

—Linda Rabin⁶

Those who advocate against cultural appropriation often assume the definition of this term to be self-evident; those who disparage the formulation make it into something ridiculous. The critique of cultural appropriation has suffered precisely due to a lack of clarity which leaves it open to misapplication. Initially propounded as a concept to explicate and justify cultural self-determination, the term has itself been appropriated by opposition to discredit any attempt at redefining the status quo through anti-racist activism. Thus, in discussing cultural appropriation, it becomes necessary to unpack the various meanings, emotions, and agendas with which the term is invested, and to sift through and foreground the different contexts within which positions have been drawn up.

The primary dictionary meaning of the verb appropriate is "to take and use as one's own." Despite the rhetoric of various nationalisms, there are no unique, pure cultures today; people have steadily learned the ways of others and taken them as their own. By this definition, most of what we think of as culture involves some degree of appropriation. Foods, religions, languages and clothes all betray contacts with a larger world, which includes our closest neighbours, as well as distant imperial centres. There are no clear boundaries where one culture ends and another begins. But while some of this fusion may be celebrated as exchange, a larger proportion is the result of domination. The task of establishing cultural hegemony in the colonial context, for instance, entails the supplanting or harnessing of the social, eco-

³ During the Advisory Committee's tenure, the Canada Council appointed its first non-white board member, Whitehorse-based filmmaker, Carol Geddes. As of the writing of this article, the Council has only one non-white staff member, the racial equity coordinator having resigned in frustration over the administration's lack of commitment to equity issues.

⁴ Alberto Manguel, *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto edition (12 March 1992), p. A7 [Column].

⁵ Lynda Hurst, "Can(not!) lit," *The Toronto Star* (11 April 1992), p. H11.

⁶ Stephen Godfrey, "Cultural Appropriation in Dance," *Step Text*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (March 1993), p. 16.

The critique of cultural appropriation is therefore first and foremost a strategy to redress historically established inequities by raising questions about who controls and benefits from cultural resources. In this context, Linda Rabin's question is improperly framed, and Timothy Findley's caricature, irrelevant.

resources. In this context, Linda Rabin's question is improperly framed, and Timothy Findley's caricature, irrelevant.

Again and again, papers have been written, careers built, tenure granted, royalties issued, and yet the people upon whom this is based are left behind on the reserves with nothing.
—M. T. Kelly⁷

Appropriation occurs when someone else speaks for, tells, defines, describes, represents, uses or recruits the images, stories, experiences, dreams of others for their own. Appropriation also occurs when someone else becomes the expert on your experience and is deemed as more knowledgeable about who you are than yourself.
—Loretta Todd⁸

Although Loretta Todd writes specifically from an aboriginal context, the process she describes is a common, if not defining, characteristic of oppression. Does this mean, therefore, that the proscription against cultural appropriation should apply to the representation of all oppressed or marginalized groups—should whites not represent Blacks or Asians; heterosexuals not depict lesbians and gay men; should men not write in the voice of women?

Gay men and lesbians have decried the media's homophobia and heterosexism, but only on occasion has it been suggested that the way to resolve this issue is to ensure that only queers are able to represent ourselves. Similarly, feminists concerned with the depiction of women do not usually call on men to desist from representing women in their work. Most lesbians and gay men don't grow up in exclusive queer cultures, but rather in the heartland of heterosexuality, where our existence is denied and our realities disfigured. Hence, in the arena of representation, the priority is usually put on reaffirming queer identity and presence through visibility, rather than preserving cultural integrity. Similarly, although we may point to feminist cultural expression, there is no women's culture existing outside of patriarchy.

Neither feminist nor lesbian and gay cultures have genealogies for which cultural self-preservation make sense. When it comes to race and ethnicity the logic to self-preservation seems more clearly defined; however, it is in a sense even more complicated. For example, reporting on cultural appropriation and the way it was handled by The Writer's Union, journalist Val Ross confidently defines it as "white writers using stories of other cultures."⁹ This common interpretation of cultural appropriation was taken even further during the 1988 dis-

conomic and cultural systems of the subjugated, by those of the dominant power. For Native people in Canada, this has meant an often violent process of assimilation, coupled with the marketing of superficial difference either for profit (the tourism industry), or political gain (official multiculturalism). Those who raise the issue of cultural appropriation see it as a process that is not only wrong, but also incomplete—thus as one which is necessary and possible to organize against. The critique of cultural appropriation is therefore first and foremost a strategy to redress historically established inequities by raising questions about who controls and benefits from cultural

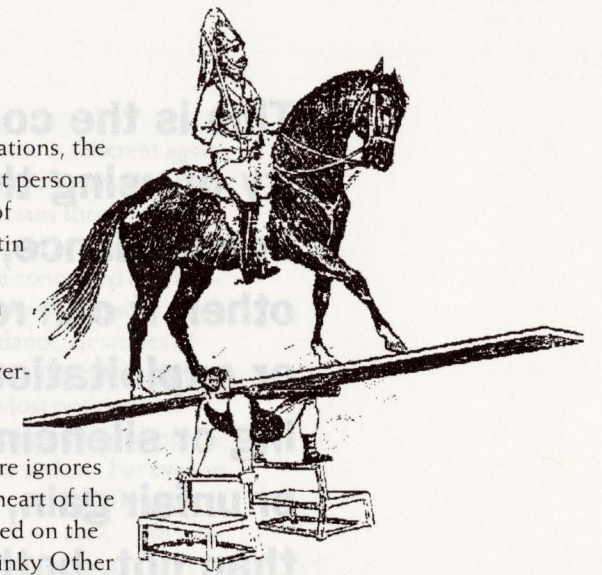
pute at Toronto's Women's Press. Amidst a range of anti-racist considerations, the issue arose as to whether white women had the right to write in the first person voice of non-white or Third World characters, or to work in the form of "magic realism," a term used to describe the work of a wide range of Latin American writers including Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Isabel Allende. The latter part of this proscription was premised on the assumption that magic realism represented a unique pedigree, quite apart from the European traditions of the North. But such a position overlooked the vital role of French surrealism in the development of what is called magic realism, and the fact that the term was itself appropriated from European art criticism of the 1920s.¹⁰ The admonition therefore ignores the cultural hybridity and creolization integral to the style, and at the heart of the *mestizo* cultures that it aims to express. As M. Nourbese Philip commented on the debate, the effect was to assign Latin America the role of "the exotic, kinky Other to the straight, realist realities of the affluent West."¹¹

Contradictions abound in the distorted racist logic of Eurocentrism. Asia's enduring rich cultural heritage has long been treasured and emulated for its incomparable high aesthetic achievements. And yet, Asian artists who worked in the pluralist contemporary mode are considered by Westerners and often by our own traditionalists alike to be a breed apart, or as strays who trespassed on someone's turf where we don't belong.
—Yong Soon Min¹²

In working through the question of appropriation, it is crucial to remember that all oppression does not express itself through the same means. Even within the category of racism, there are significant differences in the ways that the various racial others of the West have figured, both within representation, and in the economics of cultural production. Colonialism operated differently in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, and varied also according to the colonizing power concerned. To enslave and uproot the population, it was convenient that Africa be represented as a place without a culture or a history of its own—requiring, of course, the excision of Egypt from that continent. On the other hand, the aesthetic contributions of India, China, and Japan had long been valorized in Europe, and it is the products of their culture and agriculture that motivated and justified colonialism in those parts. Diasporic Africans and Asians in the Americas have different histories from each other and, in turn, from those of Native peoples: slavery is not indentureship is not internment is not head tax is not residential schools. The ways that we various "others" are integrated into and excluded from contemporary commercial culture may be related, but they are also marked by crucial differences.

In my community you walk into a classroom and when you look at the bookshelves, which is something that I always do when I go into communities, in the bookshelves are stories that are written not by our people, but by Anne Cameron, Kinsella, and a whole number of white people. And that is how our children learn about themselves....
—Maria Campbell¹³

As a person of Chinese West Indian heritage, I feel the need to preserve what I know, and to make that knowledge and history an acknowledged component of *Canadian* identity and *Canadian* culture; this is, in part, what motivates my work to eradicate the underlying Eurocentrism of our systems of cultural funding. It also forms my interest in developing art that is relevant to the Canadian context. Having a sense that my "source" cultures follow their own paths, that the cultural forms of China and Trinidad can and will accommodate, appropriate, repel and resist the pressures of western cultural imperialism in their own ways, means that for me (here in the Diaspora) it makes no sense to freeze Chinese or West Indian cultural expression according to some nostalgic idea of what it was "truly" like. For one



¹⁰ Irlemar Chiampi, *El Realismo Maravilloso* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1983), p. 23.

¹¹ M. Nourbese Philip, "The Disappearing Debate," *Frontiers: Essays and Writing on Racism and Culture* (Stratford: The Mercury Press, 1992), p. 279.

¹² Yong Soon Min, "Territorial Waters: Mapping Asian American Cultural Identity" *Harbour*, vol. 1, no. 2., p. 36.

¹³ Final report from the Vancouver forums *Telling Our Own Stories: Appropriation and Indigenous Writers and Performing Artists*, funded by the Canada Council Explorations Programme and edited by Margo Kane, 1990, p. 7.

⁷ "Whose Voice Is It Anyway? A Symposium on Who Should Be Speaking For Whom," *Books in Canada*, January/February 1991, p. 14

⁸ Loretta Todd, "Notes on Appropriation," *Parallelogramme*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Summer 1990), p. 24.

⁹ Val Ross, "Writers diffuse appropriation issue," *The Globe and Mail* (8 June 1992).

This is the contradictory reality of using the voice, sound, image, dance, or stories of another: it can represent sharing or exploitation, mutual learning or silencing, collaboration or unfair gain, and, more often than not, both aspects simultaneously.

thing, these forms were always changing even as I experienced them in my childhood, and further, this effort to fix and fossilize "other" cultures, in opposition to the continuously developing modern and now postmodern culture of the West is, after all, the central and most insidious trope of multiculturalism.

There is, however, a special urgency to the preservation and autonomy of aboriginal cultural resources, which I think makes the issue qualitatively different from those of diasporic people of colour. As Tuscarora artist Jolene Rickard

said recently at a conference I attended, "this is all there is; if this goes, that's the end!" Aboriginal cultures are cultures deprived of a state; by definition they exist as "minority" cultures within a dominant national context—Thai culture in Thailand is not considered aboriginal, whereas the Dai (Thai speaking) culture of neighbouring China is. Given the systematic attempts by the Canadian state to destroy First Nations cultures, economies and social systems, the desire to preserve and reconstruct them cannot nonchalantly be dismissed according to mechanical and simplistic readings of the critiques of essentialism or authenticity. That is not to say that these ideas are invalid or unimportant. It must however be recognized that the anthropological gaze and the discourse of authenticity is not the only mode of othering Third World, indigenous and non-white peoples. This is accompanied by a total disregard for accuracy in the public images about these people. Further, the critique of cultural appropriation doesn't necessarily require an essentialist understanding of identity. Some critics have explored the avenue of copyright law, for instance. Loretta Todd situates cultural resources within Aboriginal Title. Along with land, environment and education it is part of what needs to be reclaimed: "When negotiations over land resources are undertaken, there is room for sharing once Aboriginal Title is acknowledged and established.... This is not simply a seeking of refuge in a new class power, or even the advocacy of an essential 'Nativeness.'"¹⁴

The most hackneyed advice to young writers is: Write what you know about, describe what you have experienced. It is good advice—so long as one remembers that there are many ways of experiencing an event. Writing what you know about does not mean writing only about what you have lived. It includes all that you have come to understand or appreciate through conversation, observation, reading, dreaming, films—the multifaceted channels that feed us as human beings and as writers.

—Neil Bissoondath¹⁵

The public debate over cultural appropriation has been dominated by writers of fiction, and it is on their terms that the issue is usually argued. This wouldn't be a problem except that the questions thus raised are often carried over into the other arts, without recognizing their specificity. The concept of an imagination free of social constraints and responsibilities, apparently so dear to fiction writers, is near absent in the discourse of documentary film and video, for example. Issues in non-fiction media have traditionally included ethical concerns, into which the central question of appropriation—the relationship of the producer to the subject—easily fits. On the other hand, Native and other actors of colour seem most concerned with the shortage of opportunity to develop and display their talents: and the lack of

meaningful roles, the lack of roles for non-white actors generally. The case is different again when considering the circulation of musical forms and motifs. Most contemporary and even much classical music revels in layer upon layer of appropriation—musicians thrive on mixing things up. But that doesn't alter the fact that, in a context characterized by both racism and the commodification of culture, it is primarily white men who have controlled and benefited from the musical forms developed by non-white and Third World practitioners.

This is the contradictory reality of using the voice, sound, image, dance, or stories of another: it can represent sharing or exploitation, mutual learning or silencing, collaboration or unfair gain, and, more often than not, both aspects simultaneously. Most positions for or against the use of the concept of cultural appropriation nevertheless disregard this complexity and promote blanket proscriptions or endorsements—at least on the surface. For even in attacking the Canada Council recommendation regarding the need for research, Timothy Findley ironically affirms the same principle: "who the hell do they think we are?... No one in his right mind would write in another voice without research and consideration."¹⁶ Similarly, even strong opponents of cultural appropriation who find the term indispensable have their exceptions—discussions of the films *Dances with Wolves*, *Incident at Oglala*, and *Loyalties*, always produce a wide range of responses, for example. A pressing problem for those concerned with appropriation is that the lines dividing "allowable" appropriations from "unallowable" appropriations are not always obvious.

Even if we believe that, despite the exceptions, non-white stories, characters, motifs, or dances in the hands of another generally spell exploitation, there remain two sticky problems. First, where does one draw the lines of otherness: Is a Dene situated to write an Ojibway story; can a Barbadian Canadian fashion a Jamaican immigrant character? Second, who decides whether something is appropriation or not; who is in a position to speak for the community, for the race, for the nation? Let's not forget that while artists raise the question of appropriation, many Native and other non-white community organizations continue to choose white directors to represent their concerns on film and video, perhaps because of a perception of these directors' superior skills, greater access to distribution and media attention, or the fact that, as outsiders, they might be more easily managed. In any case, it's impossible to enforce a consensus on an issue such as this, even within our own communities, which appear homogeneous and unanimous only to an external gaze; they too are arenas of contest and conflict.

Both the practices of inclusion and exclusion revolve around a



¹⁶ Lynda Hurst, "Can(not!) lit"

¹⁴ Loretta Todd, "Notes on Appropriation," p. 30.

¹⁵ Neil Bissoondath, "I'm just a writer—that's the voice that matters," *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto edition (18 April 1993), p. C1.

It seems that the integrity of the independent jury system is a two way street: if one should not direct jury members to incorporate appropriation as a criterion for evaluation, one should not direct them to ignore it. Literature is judged "good" and "interesting" on more than punctuation, sentence structure and the skilled use of adjectives.

¹⁷ Lee-Ann Martin, *The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Contemporary Native Art and Public Art Museums in Canada*. Report submitted to the Canada Council, March 1991, p. 19.

¹⁸ "About Face About Frame" took place in June 1992 at The Banff Centre for the Arts and was sponsored by the Independent Film and Video Alliance de la vidéo et du cinéma indépendant.

¹⁹ United States. U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Arts and Crafts Board. *Questions and Answers about Title 1 of P. L. 101-644*. (1990) [fact sheet on Public Law No. 101-644 of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990].

single issue: the artist's racial background. When included within the institutional framework, contemporary Native arts are generally not accorded a value equal to other collections, which often leads to a token commitment and artistic marginalization. On the other hand, the exclusion of the arts of Native peoples implies that the artistic and cultural contributions to Canadian history by Canada's First Nations are non-existent.

— Lee-Ann Martin¹⁷

At the "About Face About Frame" conference for film and video makers of colour and from the First Nations,¹⁸ a workshop on cultural appropriation—the most thorough and insightful I've attended—concluded with participants agreeing that the key issues

in representing others were respect, accountability, and equal access to the means of production. While it was mainly white producers who were deemed guilty of infraction, these principles were seen to apply to all projects—whether the directors or writers came from the same or different communities. For many critics of cultural appropriation the crucial underlying issues are the overwhelming pervasiveness of racist misrepresentation, distortion and crass commercialization, and the fact that few Native artists and people of colour have had the resources to produce and distribute their work, while others have made lucrative careers by drawing on these same forms and traditions. In terms of the concept of appropriation, there is a desire to see a levelling of the playing field. If there were huge numbers of prospering Native and other non-white artists producing culture in their own terms, a white person's telling of a story or making a film would be insignificant: but as yet, this is not the case.

The thoughts expressed at the "About Face About Frame" workshop represents, for me, an advance over the simple proscription against representing the other, because it moves toward considering a project's merits in terms that extend beyond the fact of the maker's identity, to the dynamics of the work itself. As Neil Bissoondath reminds us, there are many different ways to gain knowledge; identity in itself does not produce insight. Moreover, it is important to recognize that the critique of, and implied proscription against, cultural appropriation can easily lend itself to a bureaucratic regulation of identity. Consider, for example, U.S. Public Law 101-644 of the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act which states that "it is unlawful to offer or display for sale or sell any good, with or without Government trademark, in a manner that falsely suggests it is Indian produced, an Indian product, or the product of a particular Indian or Indian tribe or Indian arts and crafts organization, resident within the United States."¹⁹ This amendment to an existing law was responding, in part, to the concerns of Native artists and craftpersons about appropriation. But in a panel to discuss the law at the National Association of Art Organizations conference in Austin last fall, there wasn't consensus as to the value of the law. Artist Hulleah Tsinhanjinnie recited a long list of all those who would fail to be recognized as Indian under U.S. federal regulations, including her niece, who, though 100 per cent Native, lacks enough "blood" of any one tribe to qualify. Another Native artist simply stated, "this is not the Indian way to decide such things."

We must think hard before we allow the state any increased power to define. With so few non-white people in decision-making positions, satisfactory interpretation of strict guidelines about appropriation would in no way be guaranteed. Moreover, such provisions could too easily be twisted to limit the options of the people they were meant to empower; for example, to restrict Haida artists to representing Haida themes, Japanese Canadians to Japanese Canadian topics, and so on. (Of course the commercial mainstream will continue to do as it pleases; that is, to say what is profitable.)

The complexity of the net of concerns raised within the critique of cultural appropriation could not be adequately addressed in a set of fixed rules in state institutions such as the Canada Council. Even the seemingly progressive tenet of accountability to one's subject is not always desirable. For instance, if one were working on racism in a police force or a large corporation, would one demand that the organization approve the project? Hard and fast rules could not possibly anticipate all the exceptions.

While I can't entirely dismiss the fears of writers such as Findley and Manguel, in the controversy surrounding the Canada Council recommendations, it is important to remember that censorship is a state function, and that those arguing against appropriation have little exercise of such powers. Consequently, it is misleading to talk of their critique as censorship. Neither can the guidelines proposed at Women's Press realistically be described as censorship, any more than their normal policy of publishing only work by women. Once the state acquires the power to regulate voice, however, even if based on the demands of disempowered groups, then the possibility of censorship does arise.

The *Butler* decision on pornography offers a recent and instructive example of how the intentions of community activists can become distorted by their interpretation and enforcement by the State. Hailed by anti-porn feminists for supposedly replacing a moralistic with a harms-based approach to evaluating obscenity, the first raid immediately after the *Butler* decision was nevertheless made against a gay book store for a magazine produced by and intended for lesbians. Needless to say, lesbians are not the perpetrators of the violence against women that garnered support for the *Butler* decision. Rather, they are frequently the subjects of sexist and homophobic violence. Yet, once on the books, laws are available to selective enforcement and interpretation according to the prevailing prejudices of the day.

Instead of attempting to set up bureaucratic constraints for white artists, the terms of which we could never be sure to control, I believe that Native and other non-white artists would be much better served by demanding a wider and more meaningful range of systemic changes. These would improve our access to and control of the means of studying, producing, disseminating and promoting our art, allow us the financial security to address audiences as other than white, and acknowledge our power to define what art means, indeed whether we want to situate our work within an art paradigm or not. This requires an investment in the system of peer evaluation and arm's length funding, a tradition from which the majority of Native and other non-white artists have so far garnered little benefit. Nevertheless, I believe it is far wiser to demand adequate representation on juries and to educate other artists to our issues rather than to place any hope in bureaucratic or political patronage. It shouldn't be forgotten that after a concerted effort to include adequate numbers of women on Canada Council juries, the percentage of women receiving grants rose dramatically.

...firstly, such a rule or proscription is essentially unenforceable (unless, of course, one is the late Ayatollah) and for that reason should never be made. Secondly, prohibiting such activity alters not one iota of that invisible and sticky web of systemic and structural racism. If all the white writers interested in this type of writing were voluntarily to swear off writing from the point of view of persons of other races and/or cultures, it would not ensure that writers from those cultures or races would get published any more easily, or at all.... Thirdly, and, to my mind, most importantly, for those who unquestioningly clasp the rights of the individual writer most dearly to their breasts, such a proscription provides a ready-made issue to sink their anti-censorship teeth into.

— M. Nourbese Philip²⁰

²⁰ M. Nourbese Philip, "The Disappearing Debate," p 276.

Native people are few in number and mostly dispossessed of political power. We are not likely, like a Conservative government with a majority, to waste our time trying to pass laws limiting anyone's subject matter or opinions.

—Daniel David Moses²¹

²¹ Books in Canada, p. 15.

The recommendation about cultural appropriation by the Advisory Committee for Racial Equality in the Arts was rejected by the Canada Council administration. In fact, proscriptions against cultural appropriation have not materialized as policy in any cultural funding agency. There are several reasons for the failure of this issue to manifest itself in policy. Among the most significant is the fact that Native and other non-white artists are rarely given the opportunity to articulate such demands. Also, given the furor over the Racial Equality Committee's recommendation, it's not surprising that critics of cultural appropriation may now hesitate to raise the issue, because of the potential to distract from other goals. Equally important, though not often perceived or acknowledged, is the fact that Native and other critics of cultural appropriation have not generally spoken to the issue *as policy*. When First Nations artists have said "don't take our stories, don't steal our images," their objects of address have been other artists, not funding agencies. Their proscriptions against appropriation have been made in a moral and ethical, not a regulatory, arena.

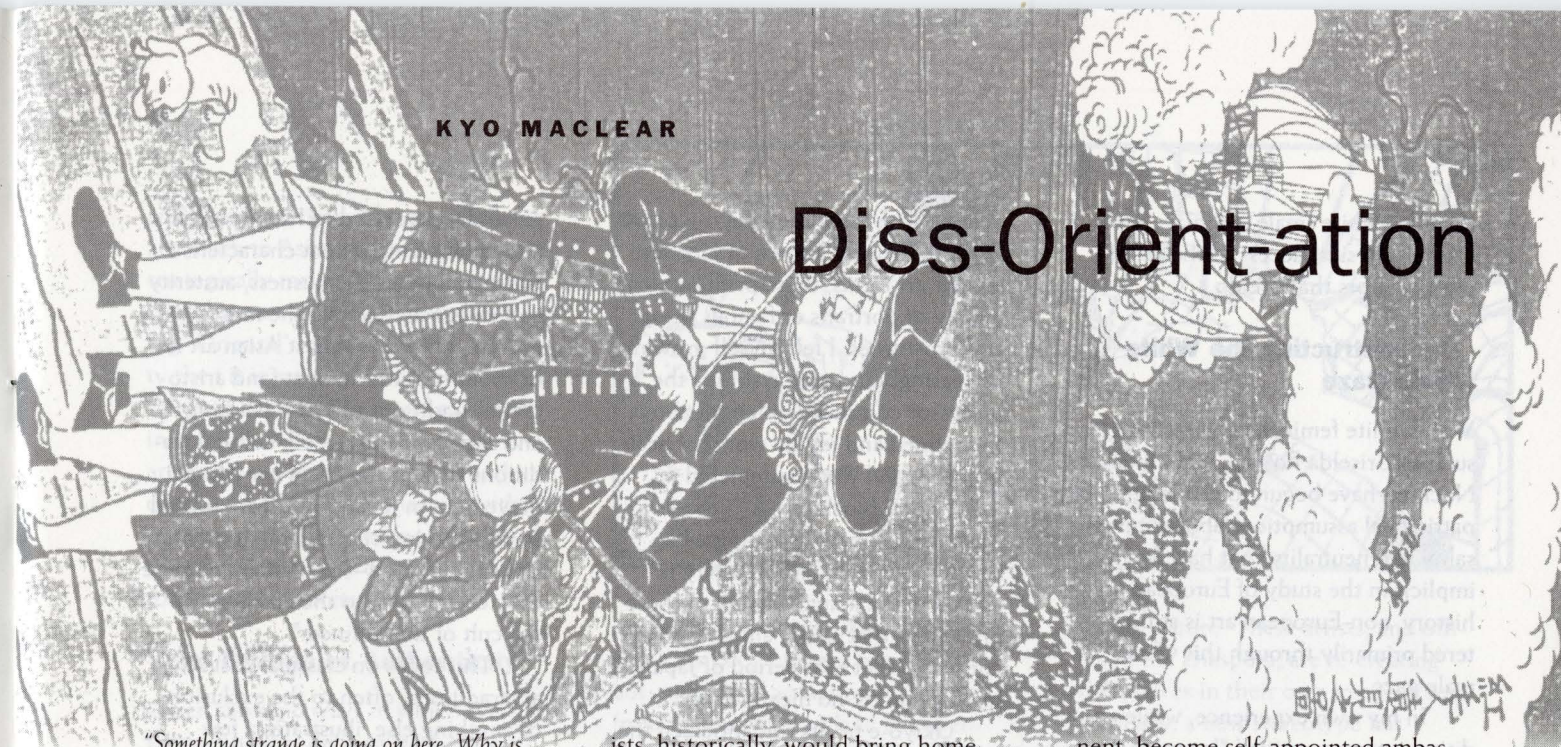
Moral and ethical directives don't easily translate into the bureaucratic language of guidelines and forms. Whereas the various approaches and protocols outlined in the Committee for Racial Equality's recommendation still strike me as relevant, the fixity of guidelines does not allow for sufficiently flexible methods of appraising the merits of individual projects. But even the rejection of official guidelines does not satisfy writers such as Timothy Findley, who object to the mere prospect of the issue arising in jury discussions or any other critical assessment. Nevertheless, it seems that the integrity of the independent jury system is a two way street: if one should not direct jury members to incorporate appropriation as a criterion for evaluation, one should not direct them to ignore it. Literature is judged "good" and "interesting" on more than punctuation, sentence structure and the skilled use of adjectives. Similarly, film and video are not assessed simply on image quality or proficient editing. The reason for having peer juries is to ensure that issues relevant to the practice and the world are brought to bear in evaluating work. Over time, these criteria will change, as will the composition of the jury itself. If the various government agencies are serious about eliminating systemic bias, juries will have to include, and consider meaningful, the contributions of qualified assessors who reflect a range, according to practice, interests, region, gender, language, race, sexuality, ethnicity and so on. The applications being assessed should also reflect this range. Thus, the issues currently communicated by the term appropriation—respect, accountability and access to the means of production and dissemination, will either arise or not. Ironically, as systemic racism disappears, we may find that the issue of appropriation becomes progressively less significant.

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KYO MACLEAR

Diss-Orient-ation



"Something strange is going on here. Why is 'ethnic' art in major institutions portrayed only as ancient relics of past civilizations? Why do I (an Asian American artist) feel as though I am intruding in some rich man's trophy room when I tiptoe through the cool, dark labyrinth of the Asian Art Museum? How is it that I feel out of place among the well-crafted artifacts of my ancestors? Why does the museum make me feel even more cut off from my cultural heritage than when I stroll through the Modern?"

—Paul Kagawa, in *Other Sources*.

Making Forays into the Orient

IN HARAJUKU, A TRENDY AREA in downtown Tokyo, there is a store called The Orient. On a regular afternoon, throngs of white tourists congregate in this multi-level store in order to partake in a cultural buying spree—buying everything from silk kimonos to samurai swords to statuettes of Buddha.

The fact that the store is called The Orient is telling. As Edward Said has pointed out, the term itself denotes a man-made construction rather than a geographical location. "Orientalism" has come to describe a colonial relationship that had (and in many ways, still has) Europe controlling and exploiting the so-called Orient both politically and culturally. Just as European missionaries and colonial-

ists, historically, would bring home Oriental treasures, including sacred objects that were stolen from local mosques and temples, present-day European and North American tourists have taken to stocking up on exotic trinkets and souvenirs from Asia.¹ These tourist-based pilgrimages amount to a form of cultural and commercial exploitation whereby indigenous arts are transformed into ethnic curios.

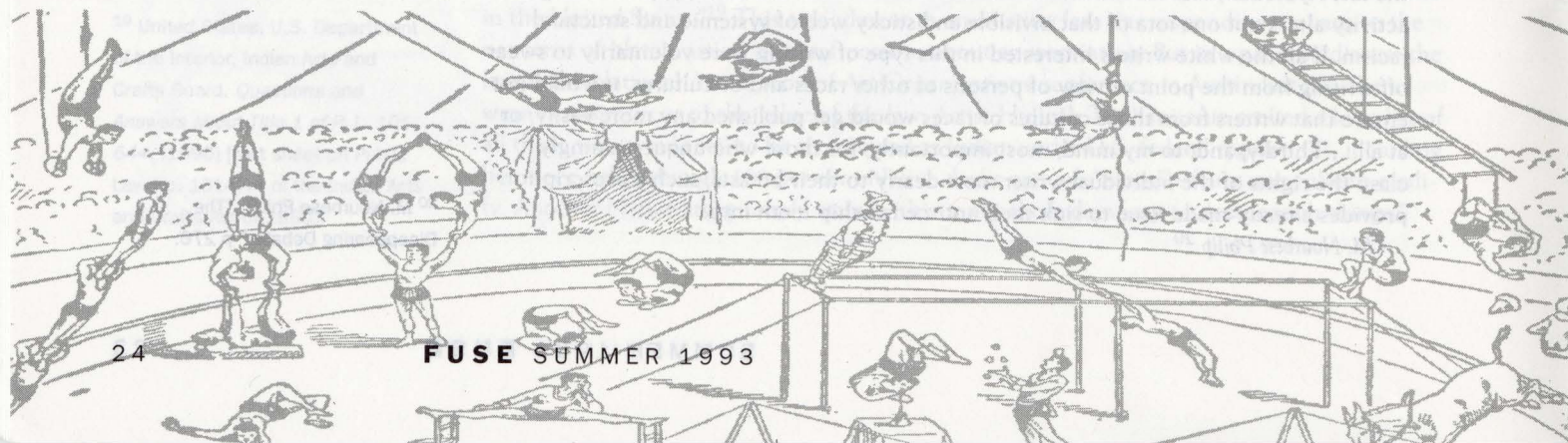
Given that North American and European hegemony (economic, military, and cultural) is still impacting the people of Asia, it is all the more difficult to deal with the collection and appropriation of Asian art forms by white Western individuals and institutions. It's disconcerting to think of all the white art collectors, assisted by Sotheby's and Christie's, who have made their fortunes by investing in "Oriental Art." In their hands, objects, that were formerly embedded in the cultural and religious activity of a community, become aesthetic remnants of conquest and souvenirs of profit.

Self-Appointed Ambassadors and other Mis-representatives

These collectors, by virtue of their economic status, and ownership of much of the art from the Asian conti-

ment, become self-appointed ambassadors of Asian culture. A position shared by curators in Canada's major art institutions, and professors of Asian Studies on campuses across the country. They are given the power and mandate to disseminate their interpretation of the cultural history of Asia. In collecting, lecturing on, and displaying what they deem important enough (to be remembered and treasured), they become the saviours/redeemers of Asia's cultural artifacts and traditions.

Those of us in the Asian diaspora who attend such exhibits and sit in on such courses, (out of thirst for cultural/visual representation and affirmation in this white-dominated cultural desert called Canada), often leave feeling emptier and more alienated than before. Bent on defining what gives form and structure to a culture they will only ever understand theoretically; these curators and professors tend to oversimplify and whitewash complex historical realities. The images and cultural artifacts presented to us are denied any cultural personality or dynamism. In these settings, the curator or professor becomes the tour guide, who, in demanding that we adopt their perspective and accept their narrative, renders us voyeurs to our own culture and history. And as voyeurs, we become unquestioning. The sad paradox is that these well-

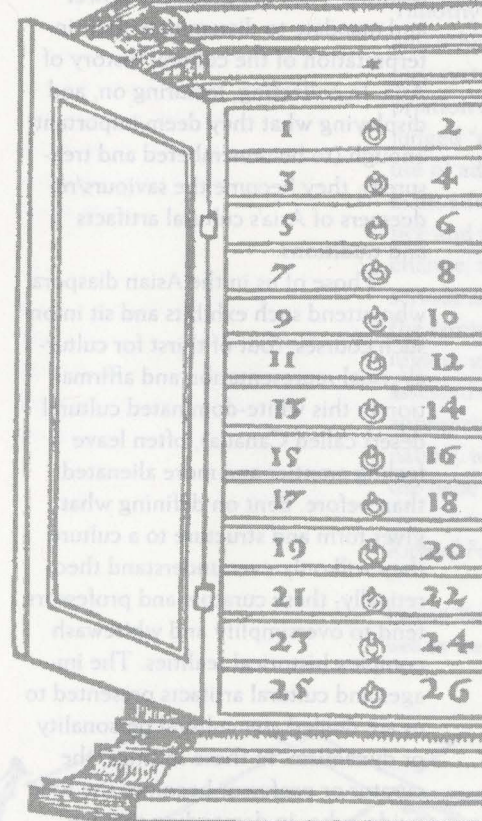


travelled white (male) scholars have greater physical access to the art of our ancestors than we do.

Deconstructing the White Male Gaze

While white feminist art historians, such as Griselda Pollock and Linda Nochlin, have begun to challenge the patriarchal assumptions about universality and neutrality that have been implicit in the study of European art history, non-European art is still filtered primarily through this white male gaze.

In my own experience, while auditing a course entitled "Japanese Art and Experience," I was struck by the professor's selective (white male) vision and interpretation. On the particular day I am thinking of, we were



dealing with Japanese Ukiyo-e prints. Perhaps the best known of Japanese secular art forms, these prints consist mainly of portraits of famous actors and prostitutes. I felt myself growing increasingly uncomfortable as the professor continued at length about the refined and idyllic world of beautiful men and women depicted in these wood block prints. Now, as a printmaker, I have tremendous respect for the technical mastery involved in the actual making of these prints, but that said, I am also very conscious that that period of Japanese history was by no means idyllic.

Ukiyo-e prints romanticized the harsh economic realities of this world of young women who had been sold by their impoverished families. If we look beneath the elegant veneer of the Edo period, as many Japanese feminists have, we find a time in which women were indentured slaves, whose bodies, when they died of the diseases of their occupation, were hastily and carelessly disposed of—bundled in straw mats and tossed inside temple compounds. In this class, however, this historical fact was being purified through art, by an overlay of sophisticated and worldly aestheticism. I left the class wondering how many students had accepted his monolithic, male-centred interpretation of Japanese history—whether he had fueled any existing stereotypes about the life of geisha in the so-called "pleasure quarters."

Blanketing our History and Experience, the "Essential" Way

Notwithstanding their academic qualifications and supposed "expertise" in the area of Asian art, these professors and curators amount to ill-equipped translators of Asian cultural expression and experience. In order to "master" the area of study, they often simplify and reduce Asian art and cultural practice to essentialist categories. For example, Japanese art is

generally perceived to have specific and unchanging salient characteristics: simplicity, spaciousness, austerity and elegance. Overall, the most prominent image of East Asian art is derived from the ancient (and aristocratic) traditions of brush painting and rock gardening. Folk cultural traditions such as the art of the Mingei movement in Japan, which are rooted in the working class populations, are virtually ignored—essentially because they do not fit into the category or the cult of the "refined."

This focus on classical East Asian art traditions, often to the exclusion of anything else, illustrates a few trends. First, it shows how class-partisan and male-centred art history is, and how this allows for the perpetuation of a narrowly constructed "low" and "high" art distinction.

Second, by emphasizing an aesthetic which is supposedly rooted in Zen Buddhism and quiet, contemplative traditions, they set up the assumption that art that comes from a secular place, a place of anger, of social criticism or of political struggle is somehow untraditional or non-Japanese. They propose that "real" Japanese artists use art, not as a means by which to express personal or political statements, but as a way to evoke a particular spiritual space or mood. On close inspection, it becomes evident that the decision to represent only these classical East Asian traditions, rather than art that is rooted in modern Asian realities, is an expedient one. After all, art that is based on spiritual introspection is generally safer and more palatable than art that is outward-looking, and perhaps even revolutionary. (By this I mean art that names injustices and empowers the viewer to mobilize against them.)

Finally, considering Asian cultural production in essentialist terms renders it static and transfixed. Art and culture should be viewed as products of the forces (social and political) that shape an artist both through history

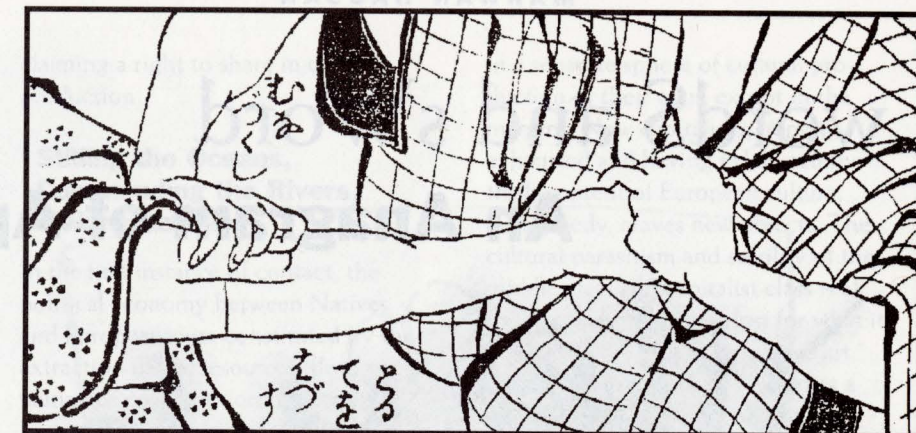
and at a given time. The essentialist approach to Asian art can be seen as strategically racist. After all, if we accept the stereotypes about unchanging "Oriental" tranquillity and passivity then it is more difficult to see ourselves as active, critical and participating people. If we accept that Asian artists are amorphous, uniform and incapable of defining themselves within our communities, how does it influence our probability of making claims to cultural autonomy?

The Burden of Authenticity

Given the rigid ways in which non-European art is defined from the outside, and the fact that there exists a preconceived notion of the "pure" or authentic Japanese artist, any artist who does not conform to that category is seen as an aberration. Works of art that don't fall within these circumscribed categories are presumed to be derived from foreign (read "European") influence—or the result of crazy or pathological behaviour. Within the present framework, Asian art can be dismissed if it eludes certain established stereotypes—and if it is not perceived as easily adaptable or absorbable into the art and life of white dominant society.

Intrinsic to the practice of cultural appropriation is the possession and monopolization of the process of defining art and what is valuable. The status and power that comes with being a white (male) curator, museologist or professor, institutional power, makes what they say authoritative and persuasive. They have the ability to form and disseminate cultural canons. As a result, we are virtually spoonfed our values, tastes, and ideas about what is beautiful and authentic.

Definitions of what is authentic Asian art often bear an impact on artists in the Asian diaspora. Artists of Asian descent are often measured against this yardstick of authenticity. The notion of cultural authenticity is ridden with problems from the onset:



Authentic for whom? Who's to decide? As Lucy Lippard has pointed out, notions of authenticity imposed from the outside can lead to stereotypes and false representations that freeze non-Western cultures in an anthropological present or an archeological past that denies their heirs a modern identity or political reality on an equal basis with Euroamericans.

I think it's telling that one of the best known Japanese American artists is Isamu Noguchi. With all due respect for his artisanship, I cannot help but conclude that his work was accepted because it conformed to the art world's definition of "Oriental art." Within a predominantly white art setting, he became a conduit to the contemplative spirituality of the East. It would seem that in order to be accepted into the mainstream, a North American Asian artist must absorb and regenerate certain stereotypes.

Re-Creating/ Re-Orientating/ Re-Claiming

As I write this, I am conscious of the growing number of artists, and activists, of Asian descent who are refusing to serve the interests and agenda of white dominant society. In the late 1980s, for instance, a group of young Japanese artists launched an exhibit entitled "Against Nature". As the title suggests, the purpose of the show was to subvert certain prevalent national/cultural stereotypes—especially those dated European views that portray Japanese artists solely as devo-

tees of nature. These artists, and others in the Diaspora, are re-creating themselves in their own image. Paradoxically, a new stereotype has emerged over the past twenty years which sees Japanese culture only through as highly technologized screen—a society completely systematized by digitalization and automation.

As artists, it is when we take control of the process of self-definition and representation—rejecting the tendency to either rarefy/exoticize Asian art or force all art to conform to a Western hegemonic analysis—that we begin to challenge Western cultural authority.

Kyo Maclear is Japanese Canadian currently writing and making art in Toronto.

NOTES

¹ The European penchant for things Oriental, in the late nineteenth century, was an active influence in the art of Bonnard, Vuillard and van Gogh.

wordS and sWord

An Anagram of Appropriation 1



Ground Zero

If art is one reflection of the physical substance or the material base of a culture which, in turn, is contingent upon the number of individuals contributing to and sustaining that culture, then, in a rudimentary way, it could be said that numbers, or demography, that seemingly banal of epistemes, forms one threshold of a culture. Numbers provide the flash-point at which individuals become a society. Perhaps nowhere in any other region of the world does as much controversy revolve around the question of the population of a continent as do the pre- and postconquest Americas. What might pass for a low-level sociological debate in other situations rushes forward with great power, at once irritating the conquering people to an act of occlusion, and giving rise to profound and protracted public arguments.

Genocide is grounded in numbers. The brutal reducing of one population by another, from many to zero, is often reduced to a numerical head count, as if it mattered whether the initial population of the tribe was 30 or 300 or 3,000,000. The diminishing of their numbers to zero or to near zero constitutes their destruction as a people. This is an example of the

kind of madness that saturates the calculation of the indigenous populations of the Americas.

And yet again *Ground Zero*, in the chronological sense, is 1492. The Christian nomenclature and chronotypology, not the Arawak, not the Mayan, not the Incan, not the Aztec, not the Iroquois, not the Beothuk. Ground zero is to be found in this calendric number itself, settled on to perversely date the existence of the continents. This date settled on for commencing the calculation of the population, 1492, grounds at once three modalities within the European myth of discovery: the trivialization of the indigenous population, the beginning of time and the numbering of history.

The Ascendency of Numbers

The arbitration of value in the arts has been, and still is, found in numbers—the calculation of viewers, watchers, readers and gallery-goers. For many, a determination of the qualitative impact of the art must be made; the calculus of numbers, the quantification process, reveals that the greater the numbers, the finer the art. This false democracy of numbers, this egal-

itarian calculus, is the benchmark and, for some, the revealer of value. Art agencies must calculate accordingly to determine that the taxpayer and the corporate sector are getting their value. If the state can't regulate the flow of numbers, then the media or private sector—the market—will intervene, mediate and appropriate. But here genocide, slavery, migration laws and indentured labour—the demographics of the past—intersect. For those few in numbers have fewer viewers, readers or speakers. The logic of racism demands that what the majority wants—a euphemism for what "whites" want—counts. The wan reply of the majority to those small in number is posed as a question: "Who's interested in that stuff anyway?" In this, all minorities and even the great majority—women, represent an insufficient constituency.

Exploitation and Appropriation

The accumulation of aesthetic capital in North America finds a corresponding set of relations in the accumulation of material capital: the gathering of furs, cod, the cutting of lumber, the mining and subsequent damming of rivers; none of which could have occurred without the exploitation of indigenous workers on a vast conti-

mental scale. From the outset, then, the indigenous peoples were both intellectual and physical workers, endowed with the repository of a vast knowledge of the continent. And that continent could not be exploited without first extracting this indigenous knowledge. The parasitism of the Hudson's Bay Company transformed itself into the locus of aesthetic power. Industrial and mercantile capitalism were also found at the T. Eaton Co.'s garment sweat shops. There was, as is now, a trade in trinkets and travel texts, items consumed in the tourism between metropole and periphery.

Capitalism, then shifted from exploitation to appropriation of an indigenous aesthetic. The scorn and contempt upon first contact was reversed, fashioning a set of craft "norms" and mass-market-object "norms," and now, high aesthetic "norms" to garner power through aesthetics. How else was it that so called "primitive" objects of anthropological curiosity were transformed into objects of "high art"?

The New Lumpenintellectuals

Those intellectuals who consolidate corporate capitalism, not out of mere productive necessity or creativity in their art, but who are the advocates and ideologues of eurocentrism while living on Native lands, form an organic relationship with the economic elite. Their goal is hegemony under the guise of a national cultural policy, Gallic or Anglo-Saxon in sensibility. In a sense, they cannot be a class in, of and for themselves. These centuries, despite their productivity, are parasites leaping from one site of production to another—labouring for the capitalist class. The hallmarks of their consciousness is their claim to being legitimate artists, and their antagonistic feelings towards those—including immigrants and Natives—who would infringe on their status by

claiming a right to share in cultural production.

Stilling the Oceans, Commanding the Rivers, Making Lakes

In the first instance of contact, the political economy between Natives and Europeans was constituted by the extraction of the resources, flora and fauna, for consumption back in Europe. This accumulation of capital could not occur without indigenous labour. What was to be done, then, when there was no longer enough labour to produce to meet demand, or when Native people could no longer be induced, seduced or compelled to produce to capitalist terms? Seizing on the principle of the "authenticity" of the imagination, and the right to freedom of the imagination, a new class of cultural producers emerges to make objects for consumption: paintings, novels, sculpture, sacred relics...think of the list of charlatans, from "Gray Wolf" to "Disco with Wolves."

So capitalism rebounds with a new intensity to exploit the natural resources which, in the form of indigenous aesthetics, sustain a new and more violent rupture, thus increasing the intensity of the ideological struggle between Europeans and Natives. Although this struggle occurs at the ideological level, it is no less violent than preceding struggles in the material domain.

Transfer and Access

All cultural production requires access to both the productive and consumptive levels. In Canada, the Native peoples, slaves and immigrant Asian workers were alienated, and metaphorically and physically transported away from the locus of cultural production so they could not participate in it. Is there any wonder there is no national culture? They were denied access to sufficient capital to engage

in a separate sphere of cultural production of their own, except in the margins. Now capitalism, in part, exhausted and having exhausted the truth content of European culture, ever greedy, craves new objects. The cultural parasitism and sterility of the middle class and capitalist class is all too apparent, hence its lust for what it defined in the past as "primitive art."

Freedom to imagine becomes a mere rhetorical proposition once an entire class of creative workers is denied access. A triumphalism of the imagination takes over the commentators on the arts.² In them, imagination allows for anybody to become anybody else: the oppressor can become the oppressed, the Nazi can become the Jew, the French Legionnaire the Algerian Arab, the Israeli chauvinist the deracinated Palestinian, the Hudson's Bay agent the Cree hunter, the Dutch merchant the Mohawk shaman.

Appropriation of Narrative

Narratives erupt, decline and arise again. The master narratives are no doubt male, European, white and straight, but these narratives are at once abstract and material. Because of the perversity of deracination, the oppressed and disinherited tend to gravitate toward one or more of these narrative modes: white women deploying the white and European while being subjugated by the masculine; Arab men deploying the masculine while being subjugated by the European and white, the European gay deploying the European, masculine and white while being subjugated by the straight... Any series of encapsulating formations work to conceal hegemonies in the aesthetic and political economic domains. They command attention because they affiliate instantly with power; their capacity at once to remain solid and to shift across the surface of the earth and oceans, or through the air in electronic waves, betrays their vulnerability.

The Bible as narrative, in Northrop Frye's imagination, betrays his commitment to narrative hegemony and the conquest of the imagination. The conquest of one narrative over another represents a conquest of the imagination. But, have no doubt all people resist—talk back.

The individual aestheticized consciousness which invokes freedom of the imagination, the right to tell a story, would claim to stand outside the power relations which support these master narratives and give expression to his/her own individuated consciousness. Although narrative is the locus of a culture's history in abstract form, including the power relations among its own members and those who come within its ambit, we are at once transported by these narratives and contained by them.

No culture is completely and transparently represented by a narrative. Narratives are as unstable as the individual psyches within a society. The ongoing struggle to achieve the greatest numbers under the banner of nationality, religion or a language, in the marketplace, under capitalism, is evidence that a narrative can provide the site of a numerical contestation. We revert again to numbers.

Numerical superiority, whether grounded in duration or in census figures, does not necessarily indicate a superior narrative, but few cultures would abandon this presupposition. The different methods for the quantification of time in Egypt or Iraq, Maya or Inca constitute a bad reminder that Europe did not come first. In relative terms Europe is a toddler. The resolution to this historical embarrassment: smash these narratives, destroy them, wipe them out of existence.

Talkin' Freedoms

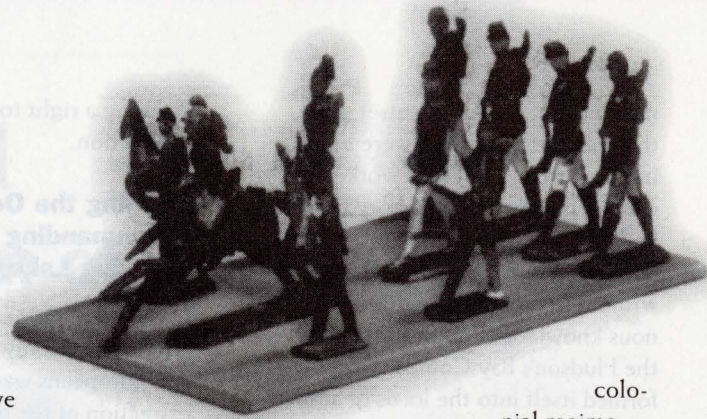
If you cannot speak through the great code, you cannot speak. Someone else should speak for you. Maybe Findley, Robertson, Manguel, Davies or

Kinsella. Their fantasies are more potent than your imagination or reality. Their minds represent a collective unconscious after all, while ours are nothing more than diminutive individual consciousnesses—parochial, a subset in the categorization of experience. Their consciousness transcends the mundane particulars of daily existence. Nothing happens on the killing grounds. With the flight of geese, or the soaring of the eagle, only the most transcendent and metaphysical consciousness can go on the voyage of the imagination.

You are not wanted on this voyage. Reserve judgment. Stand in the periphery of the imagination awaiting the revelations that freedom of the imagination is supposed to provide. Your imagination is not bred in the bone, knowledge arises and flows from a distant place to which you have never journeyed.

To question the imagination in these categories arouses in these custodians of freedom the *bête noire* of censorship. But the master narrative has already foreclosed their imaginations. They are not even aware of it; they stand in awe of their own resentments. The conflation of the question of appropriation with censorship is not unlike the conflation of an invasion with an invitation. The invasion of the imagination by one culture into another culture is also an evasion of consciousness; it is the last threshold, one of the final stages of the invasion itself.

The reduction of the debate to clichés over censorship is the strategy of those who have to look the members of the oppressed culture straight in the eye without seeming to deflect their rising resistance. In anti-colonial struggles, the oppressed should have recourse to as many methods as the



colonial regime deploys.

The question of appropriation is about the pacification of the minds of "others"; it is not about censorship, freedom of expression, or freedom of the imagination. As a phase of colonialism, it must be resisted. The rules and regulations, the canon and the great code of eurocentricism, must be resisted because they have already mutilated the imaginations of others.

Marwan Hassan, is an Ottawa-based fiction writer and novelist. He is the author of The Confusion of Stones: Two Novellas, and The Memory Garden of Miguel Carranza published by Cormorant Books.

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NOTES

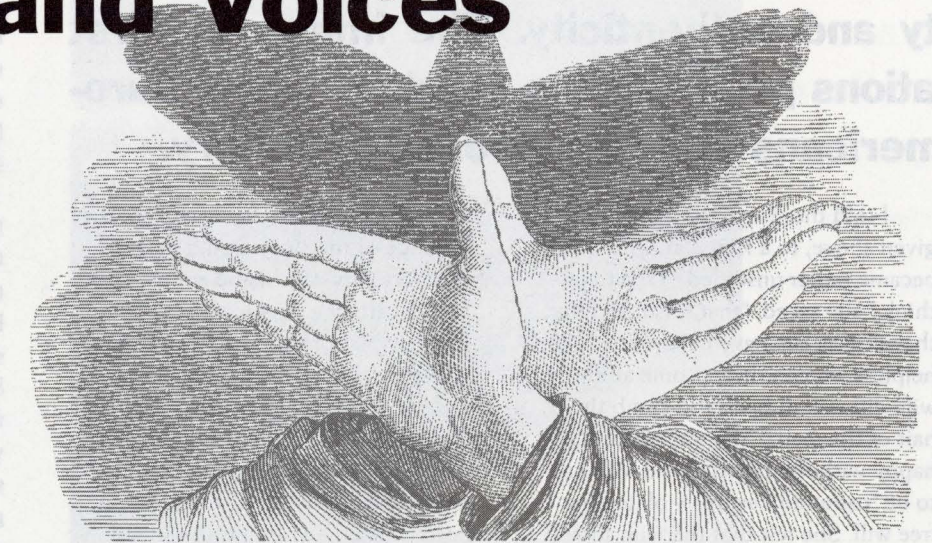
¹ *wordS and sWord* is excerpted from a work in progress of the same title.

² Ward Churchill, "Colonialism, Genocide and the Expropriation of Indigenous Spiritual Tradition in Contemporary Academia," *Borderlines* no. 23 (Winter 1991/1992), pp. 39–41.

Illustrations Farouk Kaspaules. Previous page: Arabic symbol and numbers; this page: Composition with Arabic numbers and Arabic architecture.

Farouk Kaspaules is a visual artist living in Ottawa. He recently had a solo exhibition in London, U.K.

Stories and Voices



STORIES ARE POWERFUL: stories affect change, stories give strength, stories entertain, stories heal. Storytelling is a constant creation process which places us in the world and keeps us connected. Stories within all First Nations are transmitters of social mores and the values that the nation feels are important. Stories and words can also be seen as having a sacred power. They are a component of the glue that binds different generations together and keeps a people intact.

The issue of the ownership of stories and the "right" of people from outside certain cultures to tell the stories of those other cultures is a matter that is currently experiencing a flurry of debate. When someone tells your stories and speaks with your voice, your voice is silenced. To illustrate the power of story and also to show how simple changes can have drastic effects, I am going to give an example of a Nlaka'pamux story. This story is part of a canon of Nlaka'pamux stories; one of a series of brother and sister stories.

There was a couple, of which Bald Eagle was the husband. Bald Eagle had never treated the wife very nice, he was often very abusive. One day, Hala'u called a meeting of all of the birds. "Look," Hala'u said, "Bald Eagle is being abusive of his wife, we've got to make a plan." The birds decided that they would engage Bald Eagle in a game and "capture" the wife. Many of the birds were nervous, pointing out that Bald Eagle was their grandfather, and that they were unsure about the actions they were about to take. The birds decided that they had to go ahead with their plan.

That night, the birds arrived at the home of Bald Eagle and engaged him to a game of Sla'hal. While there, they declared that they were very cold. More wood was added to the fire. The birds teased Bald Eagle that he was not being a proper host, keeping his guests freezing. Still more wood was added to the fire. And so it continued. The wife became so hot in the home that she could no longer stand the heat, so she went outside. At this time, the birds that had been waiting outside captured her and took her away. Soon after, the other birds departed from Bald Eagle.

Bald Eagle realized that his wife was no longer about and became furious when he realized the other birds had helped her in her escape. A great fight ensued. Each bird had decided that they would fight Bald Eagle. Before each bird went into battle with Bald Eagle, they had their hair combed by the wife. The small birds had their hair combed first, and each in turn went to fight with Bald Eagle. One by one they lost the fight, and Bald Eagle cut their heads off. One after the other, the birds had their hair combed by the wife and then each went into battle. Sparrow, Robin, Kingfisher, Sandpiper, Grouse and the larger birds, each had their head cut off by Bald Eagle. Finally, there was only Hawk left to fight Bald Eagle. The wife combed Hawk's hair, and the battle commenced. The battle was fought for a long time: Hawk and Bald Eagle soared to the sky and fell to the earth several times. Both were exhausted, but still the battle kept on. Finally Hawk was victorious and cut off Bald Eagle's head.

All of the birds who had had their hair combed by the wife had their heads replaced and came back to life. Bald Eagle whose hair had not been combed did not come back to life.

The appropriation of First Nations peoples' voice is centred in the issues of identity and authenticity. The image of First Nations people in the minds of many Euroamericans has been frozen in history.

I told the story, pretty much as given above, to a friend and she became rather unsettled. "Don't you think," she asked, "that it is not right that *all of the men* have to save the poor helpless woman? How come all the wife did was sit back and comb the hair of the men?" She was also not happy with the fact that the wife has to be "captured," as this violated her free will. She felt that the wife should have chosen to leave. My friend dismissed the story as "sexist."

For a Nlaka'pamux, this story would have several meanings depending on how it was told or who was doing the telling. For me, this story speaks to the issue of family violence and the responsibility of an entire community to deal with the issue, despite facts that might make it very difficult (for example, the fact that you are closely related to the abuser). For me, this is a beautiful and powerful story. The fact that the wife combs the hair of the other birds allows them to come back to life again when their heads are replaced.

I had never specified the gender of the birds that come to the rescue (for the story to have a proper telling this is impossible). My friend had assumed that the birds who come to the rescue, and are depicted as physically aggressive, must be males. A Euroamerican feminist retelling this story might change it significantly so as to reshape the role of the wife. She could be made to decide to leave on her own. Or, the story could be left unchanged, but all of the birds identified, save the wife, as male, and the story could proceed the same, except for the fact that it would be the wife who defeats Bald Eagle in the end.

While these changes may seem

innocent, the changes in terms of the message of the story would be great. Inadvertently, the blame and onus of taking care of a person who is in an abusive relationship would be placed solely on the person being abused (in today's context, the woman). The implication would be—though it would not be stated explicitly—that continued abuse is the woman's fault because she had not left the situation earlier. This shifting of blame would relieve the responsibility from the entire community to take action in a situation of family violence. Given the power of story as prescriptive, this would be a very dangerous change.

This is not to say that I do not change the story when I tell it. When telling this story to my niece (who has been known to play with people's hair for hours), instead of simply combing people's hair, the wife applies styling products and engages in hair-styling innovations (i.e., "Bluejay's hair was gelled.... Woodpecker's red hair was braided into four rows," etc.) These changes are simple and make the story come alive for my niece, but do not change its meaning. The power of stories is that they do not become outdated. Stories are alive and they change to encompass and apply to new situations. The changes that I make to the story in telling it to my niece are part of the story. I am able to make these changes and have the story remain complete because I have a respect and understanding of the story.

Understanding the power of story within First Nations culture means also recognizing that simple changes, far from being a simple stretch of the imagination, represent a political act of interference.

Storytelling is the act of a person involved within a community who is involved in the process of being within their community. Given the importance of stories in transmitting First Nations cultures, a mistelling represents a destruction.

Stories are the glue of First Nations society. Unlike the glue of Canadian society, the written constitution, stories do not cease applying. First Nations do not experience constitutional crises that are decades long because we feel the written constitution of our society no longer applies, we simply change the telling of the stories as our situations change. Our glue is not written on dead paper, it is alive in breathing words.

The appropriation of First Nations peoples' voice is centred in the issues of identity and authenticity. The image of First Nations people in the minds of many Euroamericans has been frozen in history. This means that it is possible for people to identify with images of First Nations people in the past and attempt to possess part of this identity, while not even thinking about the impact of this appropriation on the present. Jimmie Durham highlights the fact that there are high numbers of Euroamericans claiming to be "part Indian." Durham finds this trend to be bizarre and argues that "surely there is not another part of the world where members of a racist oppressor society claim to be members of the oppressed group. (These Euroamericans do not, of course, claim any of the concomitant disadvantages of being an Indian.)"¹

I have a great-grandfather who was Irish, but I am not "part-Irish." Although I can appreciate "Irish culture," I have no affiliation with Ireland. My European-biased education undoubtedly means, however, that I know more about Ireland, Irish culture, and the present-day situation in Ireland than the overwhelming number of those "part-Indian" people know about the reality of First

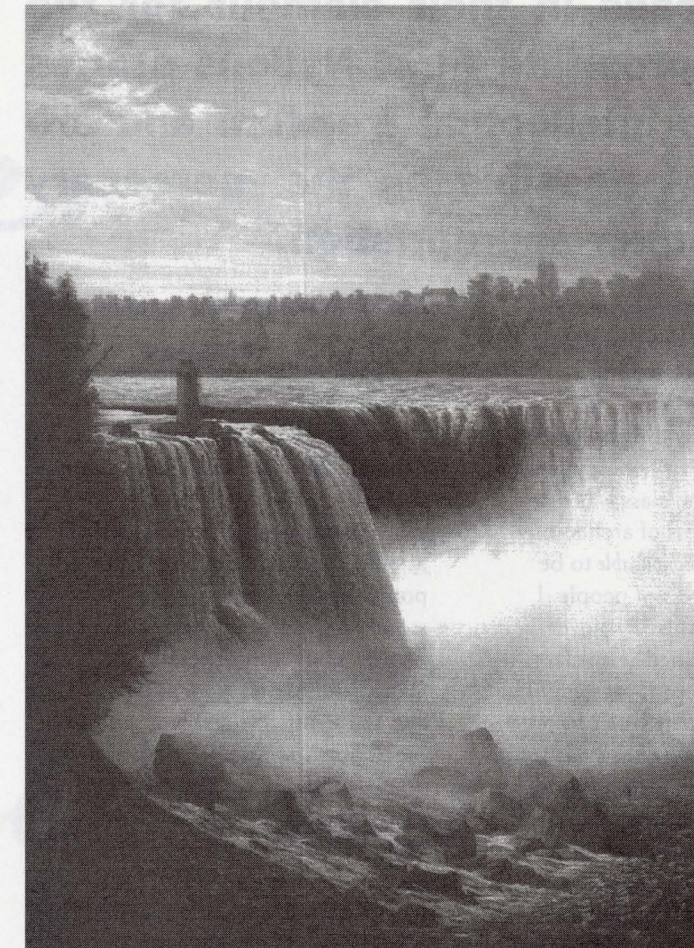
Nations. When I am describing myself, I say "Nlaka'pamux kin" meaning "I am Nlaka'pamux," not meaning that I have one parent or one (or more) grandparents who were Nlaka'pamux, but that *I am*.

Before I am accused of being an internal racist and of measuring drops of blood to establish authenticity, let me say that I do not believe that membership in First Nations should be a racial distinction, nor do I believe that First Nations people should get caught up in blood-quantum definitions of membership. I do believe that the definition of a First Nations person should be a cultural definition: a First Nations person being one who is accepted by a nation or community, and who holds that they have a primary allegiance and responsibility to that society.

Today, living, breathing First Nations people are considered to be less "authentic" than the distorted images of their great-grandparents which populate the imaginations of Euroamericans. If the majority of Euroamericans are "part Indian," what is the difference between a "part Indian" and a person who is a member of a First Nation(s)? If all Euroamericans go around proclaiming that they are "part Indian" what does this do for the legitimacy of claims of people who *are*? How can you be part of a person? Why would you want to be?

It seems to me that the main issue is one of people attempting to disassociate themselves from their history. First Nations people own their own history. I am part of a continuum, I come from here and I am writing (talking, dancing, singing, painting) my way to here: my grandmothers danced before me and my grandchildren will dance after me. I am not tied to a particular space in time, as a Nlaka'pamux woman, I have responsibilities as part of my location in a continuum of being.

Euroamericans find it easy to ignore their own racism by attempt-



ing to absorb First Nations people with the assertion that: "I am not a racist, I am 'part Indian' myself." Recent revisionist demographics of North America have shown that the rate of death of First Nations people that occurred after the initial European invasion and occupation of North America was approximately 98% of the population. This genocide was brought about by the spread of epidemic diseases (deliberate or accidentally introduced), massacres and the so-called "Indian Wars." By these estimates, within North America there was an astounding death toll of over 14 million. Rather than facing up to this and taking responsibility for the fact that the conditions and attitudes that gave rise to this decimation are still in effect and still serving their purposes, Euroamericans find it easier to proclaim that they are "part Indian"

and that this "part" of them certainly isn't suffering, so those of us with a bigger "part" must be exaggerating. In disassociating themselves from colonialism by "identifying" with First Nations people, Euroamericans are able to abdicate responsibility for their society's racism. This retelling of their identity allows this person to be seen as "neutral," certainly not a continuation of a racist history in the present. This disassociation allows that person to continue to benefit from the colonialism of which they are part, but not to take responsibility for it.

There is a tendency of Euroamericans to believe that they are able to better understand and explain First Nations than people of First Nations themselves. Consequently, First Nations people who are speaking from within the culture are dismissed as biased. This appropriation of voice

Euroamericans in their clamour for the right to appropriate First Nations stories always cite intellectual freedom and are as silent as possible on the mercenary aspects of their appropriation.

is based on the Euroamerican insistence that First Nations people are part of *their* very select telling of history.

I remember attending an anthropology class where archeology was being discussed. The class was discussing the usefulness of archeology and felt that it was *honourable* to be desecrating the graves of people. I said that I felt that this was never okay and never justified. The class pointed out that these things could be placed in a museum and used to preserve First Nations culture. I was told that "you don't speak for everybody" and "that may be the case in your nation, but..." My particular location and involvement in my nation was used as a tool for limiting my comments and observations and making them seem as though they were not applicable beyond the boundaries of my own nation. In any area where there are non-First Nations "experts" (anthropologists, archeologists, artists), these experts will be vested with greater authority to comment on the "situation" and "customs" of First Nations people than First Nations people themselves. Anything that might challenge a dominant Western understanding is dismissed as illegitimate.

The whole discussion about archeology and museums highlights the fact that many people are convinced that real First Nations are now extinct and that all existing remnants must be put behind glass and preserved. History is not suddenly halted at the museum glass and electronic casing that stops me from touching the moccasins a grandfather made with the hopes that someone would

love them enough to wear holes in them.

A friend of mine, attending a Canadian history course offered at Concordia, was upset when the students in her class kept disassociating themselves from their history, and refusing to own the actions of their grandparents as their own. At one point a rather earnest young man stood up and proudly proclaimed that he was a "seventh generation Canadian!" My friend was enraged and she jumped to her feet telling him: "That's nothing to brag about! Your Grandfather raped my Grandmother and murdered my Grandfather!" Everyone in the class became very offended and angry at what they felt was an exaggeration of history. This swift denial on the part of the class raises the question: if not his grandfather/grandmother, then whose?

First Nations people often become very frustrated at the refusal of Euroamericans to truly own and take responsibility for their history here on this continent. For the most part, Euroamericans do not *deny* that these things happened, simply that they do not connect them with the present reality of First Nations people. There is a lack of historical continuity. It is this lack of historical continuity that gives rise to the current debate about ownership of stories and who has the right to speak in whose voice.

Images of people are never neutral. The image that society projects about certain people will determine the relations and interactions between different people. "Images of Indians in media and educational materials profoundly influence how we act, how we relate to the world and to each

other, and how we value ourselves."²

These postcards (see illustrations), recently bought on St.

Catherine Street in Montreal, are prominently displayed for tourists and locals alike: Do

you think these people even exist anymore? Would you agree for your government to enter into self-determination agreements with these people? Do they look as though they are capable (much the less have an inherent right) of being self-governing? Do you think that these images are harmless?

What is very disturbing about the people who want to appropriate the voices of First Nations peoples is that they resolutely refuse to see the issue as political; they do not see the issue as a continuation of their own colonialist past. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias argues that perhaps Euroamericans feel it necessary to tell First Nations stories because that way they can make them less hurtful of themselves. "It is mostly escapist...people...[who] would rather look to an ideal native living in never-never land than confront the reality of what being native means in Canadian society."³

Ownership of stories within First Nations is not recognized by a copyright in the same sense that things can become the "intellectual property" of people today if they inform the proper government office. Copyright in Canadian law is based on the idea of profit. You can only be free to sell

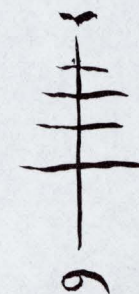


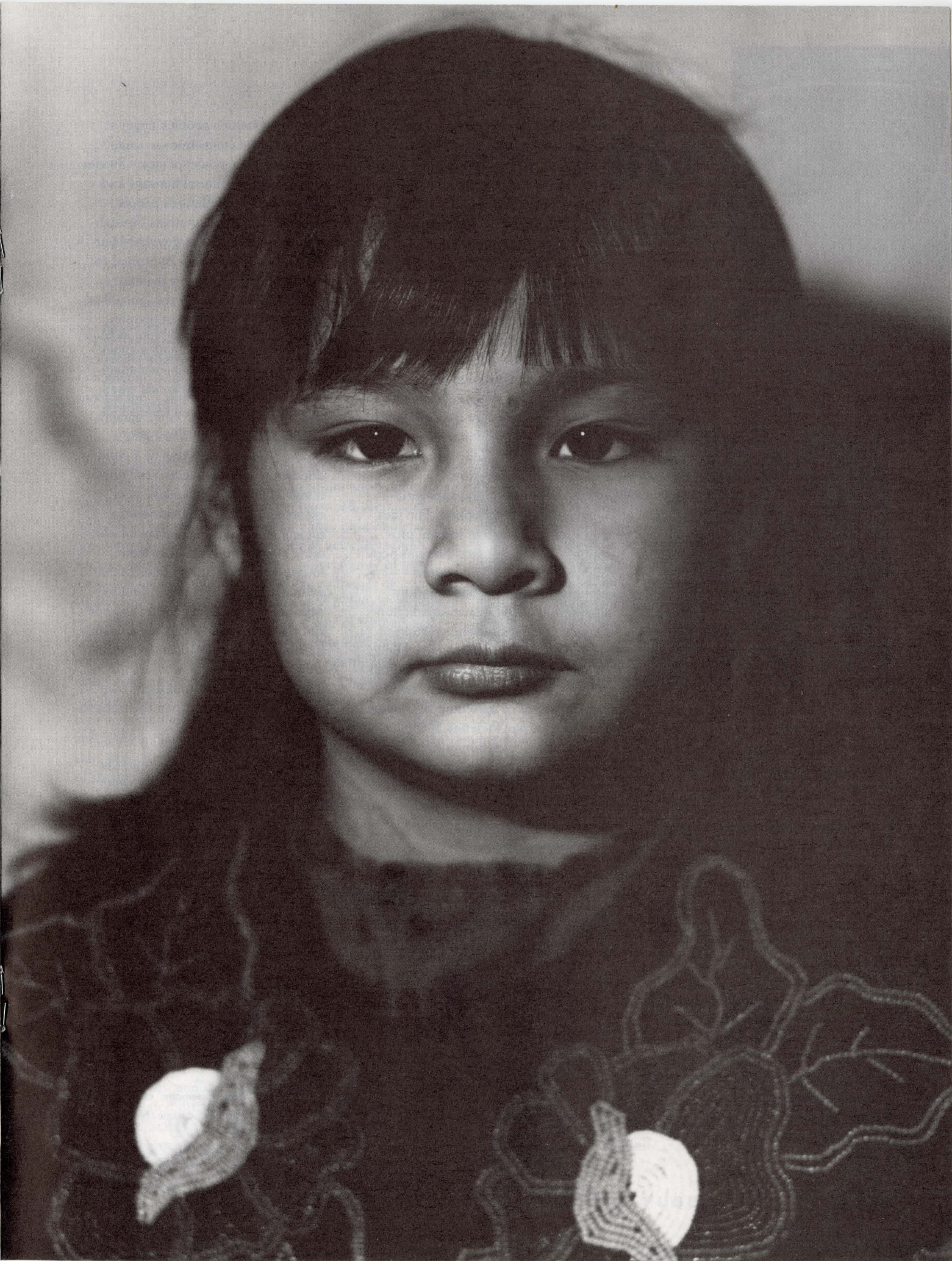
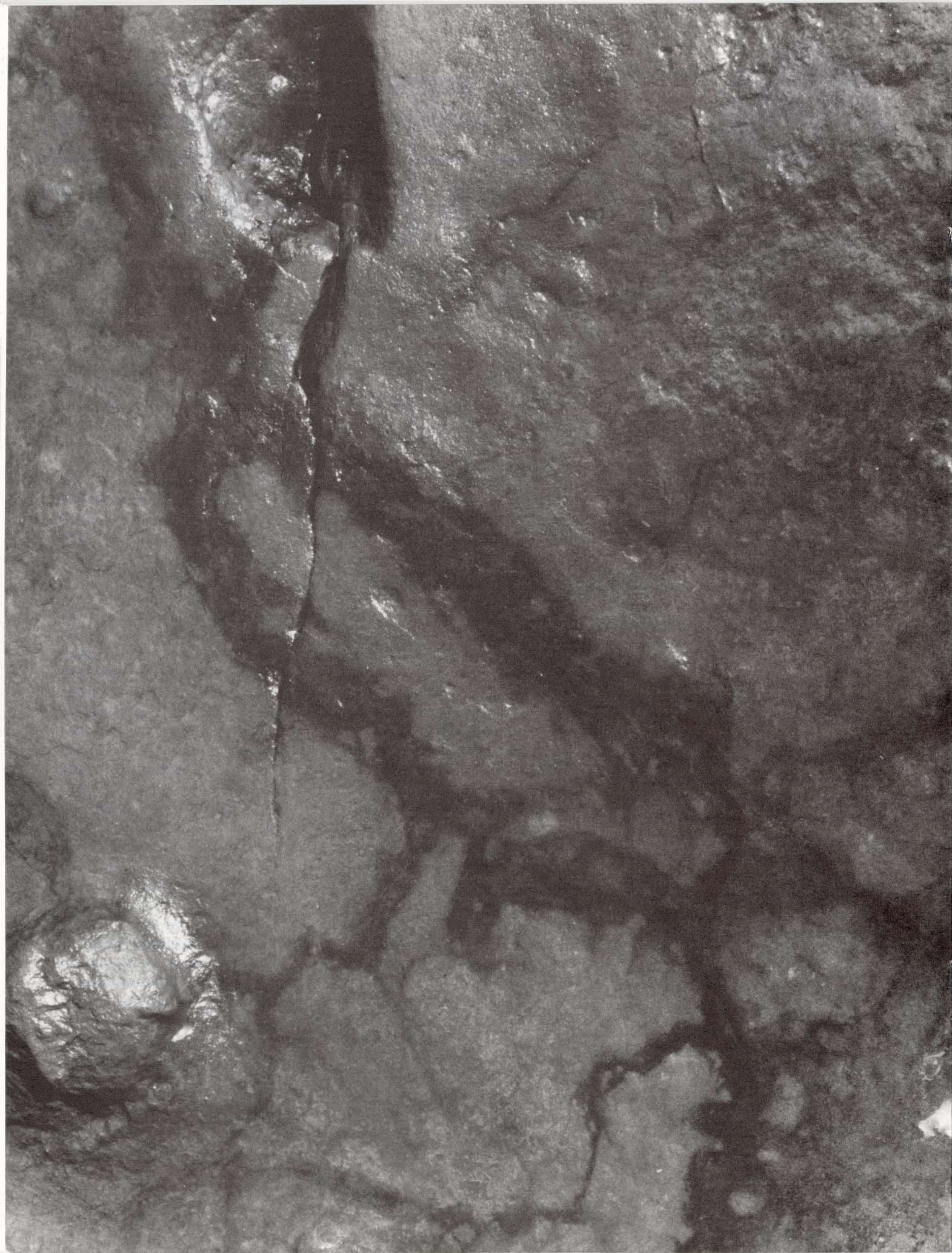
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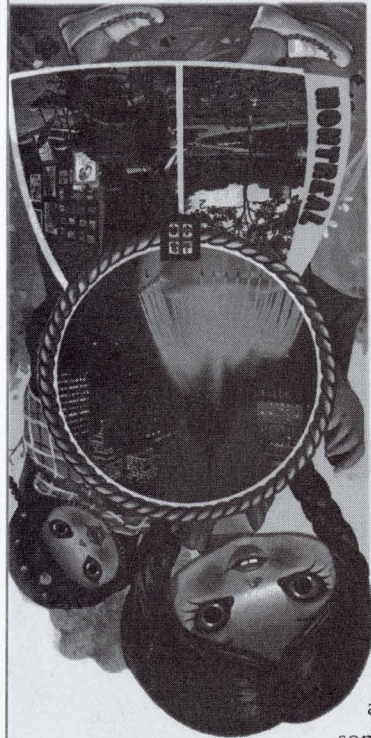
is it

Great Peace

with you?







something if it is clearly established that you have title to the property. Copyright is the government recognizing a piece of work (book, story, film) as the property of a certain person or corporation. Within Western cultures, stories are a commodity.

Euroamericans in their clamour for the right to appropriate First Nations stories always cite intellectual freedom and are as silent as possible on the mercenary aspects of their appropriation. Euroamerican authors are quick to proclaim that stories are their "intellectual property," but writers can, and do in large numbers, sell this property to corporations. Copyright is very often held by corporations, or by authors and corporations jointly. Stories, for Euroamericans, are big business, and First Nations stories represent one more underexploited resource.

This lack of understanding of the implication of ownership of stories, or the honour of having someone share a story with you, is reflected in Euroamericans' insistence that they did not steal the stories, the stories were given to them. When someone tells you a story they are not giving you permission to tell it, they are certainly not sharing it with you so that in the end you own it. As Maria Campbell points out, the unusual assertion of ownership of First Nations stories can be likened to being invited in to have tea in some-

one's home. "You know, when you go to visit somebody, and they make you tea, you don't walk off with the tea set — the stories are the same thing. Either you are a friend of the people, or you're not. If you are a friend of the people, you don't steal."⁴

The appropriation of peoples' voices through the telling of their stories is a political act. The appropriation of voice dislocates First Nations people and attempts to restructure reality: it is assimilationist. Euroamerican writers are able to proclaim their right to appropriate a First Nations voice because they are less than honest with themselves (or perhaps they are genuinely ignorant) about the power of story.

Nationhood in the appropriations is usually overlooked. The idea that there is a generic "Indian" promotes the idea that First Nations people are not members of nations — nations that are grounded, nations that have ownership and jurisdiction of natural resources. The creation of the generic Indian promotes the belief that there is no political basis for First Nations, that we exist merely as cultural creations of museums. Stories are the fabric of our societies. If these stories are appropriated by others, then we are no longer in charge of the process that is the very weave of our societies. Leslie Marmon Silko, in her poem *Ceremony*, recognizes that stories are what keep us alive and moving:

They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death.
You don't have anything
if you don't have the stories.⁵

First Nations peoples' anger at appropriation stems from an understanding of the power of story. Stories are part of the cultural heritage and resources of First Nations people, they are part of the systems through which we have always governed ourselves. Government is not limited to the obvious government structures which are more readily recognized as "government" by Western peoples.

The aboriginal rights which First Nations are fighting for now include cultural rights. The manner in which we organize our societies is not material for the imagination of Euroamericans. Canadians would not give a copy of their constitution to a child to doodle on and then accept the doodlings as legitimate changes, now enforceable by law. Euroamerican society is willing to withdraw on the more overtly political front from interference in First Nations government. Although they are willing to negotiate towards an end to the imposition of the Indian Act, they are still fighting tooth and nail to have real control under the guise of "artistic freedom." Our right to tell our own stories is nothing less than the right to self-determination.

Ardith Walkem is a Nlaka'pamux woman currently living and working in the hottest place in Canada, Lytton, B.C.

NOTES

¹ Jimmie Durham "Cowboys and..." *The State of Native America*, M. Annette Jaimes, ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1992), p. 424.

² Allen, Paula Gunn, *The Sacred Hoop*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 192.

³ Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "Stop Stealing Native Stories," *The Globe and Mail*, national edition (25 January 1990).

⁴ Hartmut Lutz, *Contemporary Challenges*, interview with Maria Campbell (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1992), p. 57.

⁵ Leslie Silko, poem "Ceremony," excerpted from her novel of the same name (New York: The Viking Press, 1977).

GAIL GUTHRIE VALASKAKIS

Dance Me Inside Pow Wow and Being "Indian"

**Don't break this circle
Before the song is over
Because all of our people
Even the ones long gone
Are holding hands.**

—Sarain Stump, "Round Dance," Tawow, 1974

MY MEMORIES OF GROWING UP INDIAN ON THE Lac du Flambeau reservation in Wisconsin, and your memories of Indians growing up wherever you did, are rooted together in images of pow wow. You may have experienced pow wow through one of a complex of activities which Rayna Green calls "playing Indian": a symphony of tomtoms, stomping feet and war-whoops, or flashes of Hollywood's brightly painted warriors building up to battle, or performances of "real" Indians — a blur of feathers and fantasy moving to the beat of a time-distanced drum.¹ For me, pow wow recalls a kaleidoscope of deeply felt, fissured images of power and identity. As a child, I remember walking the rutted road to the gathering grounds of our summer pow wows at Bear River. There, the Lac du Flambeau drum rested beside Chippewa cousins and visiting Nations, surrounded by moving forms and the familiar patterns of beaded buckskin, appliqué ribbon, silver bullet cones. I was drawn by the beat of the drum into a circle of socialization, a mixture of fragmented feelings of community and spirituality resonating with the warmth and the closeness of my great-grandmother, and the anxious distance of Bert Skye, who might, without warning, transform himself into a bird or a dog.

Today, my memories of the Bear River pow wow are interwoven with years of participation in other pow wows elsewhere: urban and reserve, western and eastern, competitive and traditional, local and commercial. Each pow wow reflects the cultural specificity of a particular ceremony: bearing witness to the diversity among First Nations. But like First Nations, pow wows, too, express a deeply rooted, shared sense of "being Indian" which threads its way through the dichotomies we use to analyze power and identity: paradigms of belonging and exclusion, knowledge and ignorance, past and present, are all signified and collapsed in the beating of the drum and the collective singing of seemingly wordless songs.

Pow wows have become an increasingly important site of First Nations popular culture. Twenty-five thousand dancers circle the drums in Albuquerque each spring. And pow wow is smaller, but equally important in the East. In the summer of 1991, over 3000 people gathered in Kahnawake, Quebec to witness the first pow wow held in recent history on this Mohawk territory. In the summer of 1992, as Canadians continued to digest the meaning of the "Oka crisis" and Americans celebrated the Columbus Quincentennial, Indians in Toronto hosted the first annual *Toronto International Pow Wow*. Pow wows across Canada and the United States have gained new popularity at a time of increasing struggle over the politics of difference as expressed in issues of Indian identity, treaty rights, land claims and self-



¹ Rayna Green, "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe," *Folklore*, vol. 99, pp. 30–55.

determination. These gatherings offer First Nations people the precious opportunity to meet, as well as the spiritual, cultural and social sustenance needed to carry on.

Pow wow is a uniquely Indian cultural activity rooted in traditional heritage, historical representation and commercial venture. More than any other, this site embodies the contradictory narratives of the noble and savage Indian that has permeated non-Native thinking. To an Indian, "a pow wow celebration is a way of life and one of the most forceful manifestations of Indian cultural beliefs."² To the non-Native, pow wow is a performance of traditional Native cultural forms, transformed and appropriated. The textual reconstruction and analysis of these forms—traditional songs and dances—have been the work of anthropologists and musicologists since the late 1800s. Their writing reflects a descriptive analysis of Indian costumes, music and dancing with—and sometimes without—details of the specific ceremonies or occasions of which they are a part. But pow wow itself was not a topic of research until the 1950s, when anthropologists extended a functionalist analysis to the study of pow wows as institutionalized events, locating them in Plains Indian culture which constructed "pan-Indianism" as it spread East.³ More recently, William Powers has analyzed the Plains War Dance in relation to tribalism and inter-tribalism, while Noel Dyck has argued that pow wow "serves as a means for achieving symbolic resolution of some of the long-standing problems which confront Indians," and Valda Blundell has written a semiotic analysis of pow wows as performed text which can be read as "sites where aboriginal cultural producers engage in 'oppositional politics of meaning production.'"⁴ Their work discusses the popularity and meaning of contemporary pow wow, but like earlier writing, something is missing.

Pow wow is rooted in an historical and cultural reality, woven together in the external representation of "Indianness" and the internal experience of "being Indian." The affective or experiential quality of "being Indian" critically differentiates pow wow from "playing Indian." This affective quality of pow wow—differently felt, differently expressed—has been largely ignored in analysis through anthropological method, academic approach, and through the process of cultural appropriation and Native reappropriation. When the affective dimension as it relates to spirituality, culture and ideology is overlooked, pow wow becomes little more than a specific—or a generic—Indian carnival. A recent article on contemporary Native music in *The Globe and Mail* was headlined "Pow Wow Rock." But pow wow is ceremony, a complex Indian cultural performance which cannot be explained simply as "revitalization" or as a statement of Native resistance. Nor can its significance to Indians be fully understood in the analysis of a local event, the expression of recent political conflicts, the experience of longstanding deprivation or marginalization.

To Native people, pow wow constitutes what Larry Grossberg calls a "mattering map," a site of popular culture in which Indians can attempt to organize a stable identity which finds them "...at home' with what they care about, and which in the process of that alliance, produces an empowerment legitimated in ideology."⁵ Located in popular culture, the experience of pow wow operates as a "crucial ground where people give others, whether cultural practices or social groups, the authority to shape their identity and locate them within various circuits of power." The mattering map of pow wow situates the affective quality of belonging, of "being Indian," within a contemporary traditional Indian cultural and spiritual experience—deeply felt, openly shared and communally expressed as ceremony. This affective investment in what Robert Allen Warrior calls "the sweetgrass meaning of solidarity," connects and transforms those different allegiances and fragments of identity that are articulated to the ideological stance of Indian sovereignty and self-determination.⁶ For, as Grossberg suggests, "It is the affective investment... that explains the power of the articulation which bonds particular representations and realities... which enables ideological relations to be internalized and, consequently, naturalized."⁷



The mattering map of pow wow situates the affective quality of belonging, of "being Indian," within a contemporary traditional Indian cultural and spiritual experience—deeply felt, openly shared and communally expressed as ceremony.

Academic enterprise has never felt comfortable with the analysis of the affective experience of Indian ceremony. But it is the affective dimension of pow wow, which is lost in the literature, that orients the emotional and ideological histories rooted together in the outsider's representations of "Indianness" and the insider's sense of "being Indian." The feeling invested in the ceremonial production and display of pow wow situates Indian identity within the discourse that circulates around Indian Nations within a nation-

state. As Paula Gunn Allen writes, "the ceremonial is the means of achieving wholeness of being; it is the vehicle of the imagination which allows the human being to imagine himself fully... that part or function of consciousness where the Spirit and the Human meet and merge and become one, and it is beyond history or time as it is far from the narrow conflicts of pure reason."⁸ In the words of Indian artist Wayne Alfred, "When I am dancing, I feel comfortable in Canada."⁹ Removed from the "mattering map" of ceremony, the name "pow wow" signifies the imaginaries within the economy of representations that a Mohawk artist terms "the politics of primitivism."¹⁰ The programme for the Toronto pow wow notes that "The term pow wow is a European term that has since been borrowed back by natives... 'pau wau,' which means medicine man or conjuror was misconstrued by European settlers who witnessed the healing practices or the village shaman... the word was taken to mean 'the gathering of natives' that surrounded the medicine man during healing practices, rather than the individual himself." In his *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* written in 1910, Hodge suggests the sweeping definition of pow wow which has gained common currency: "a medicine man; the conjuring of a medicine man over a patient; a dance, feast or noisy celebration preceding a council, expedition or hunt; a council; or a conference."¹²

Whatever the definition, non-Natives have always understood pow wow as Indians dancing, a perception which has shaped a way of seeing and experiencing Indians since the earliest reports of encounter. As early as 1534, the French explorer Jacques Cartier wrote of Indians he met at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River who "approached neere unto our boate, dancing and making many signs of joy and mirth... Some of the women who came not over, we might see stand up to their knees in water, singing and dancing."¹³ This first account of dancing Indians is echoed in the writing of most of the early explorers and missionaries, including the *Jesuit Relations* written between 1610 and 1791, which noted dancing (along with sorcery and incantations) among the religious practices of the Indians which the Jesuits worked to Christianize.¹⁴ Throughout the 1700s and 1800s, missionaries, merchants and military men marched West, leaving a legacy of encounters rich with observations of Indian dancing. Among the most memorable records are those left by artist George Catlin, whose sketches and paintings in the 1830s "first taught Americans to look at their West" and remained the referent for a century of representations of Indians primed for pow wow.¹⁵ George Catlin painted Indians from fifty-five different tribes, an accomplishment which Hassrick notes as "an inestimable contribution to the nation's understanding of the Native American's heritage."¹⁶ When he visited the Mandan in 1832, Catlin wrote:

The Mandans, like all other tribes... devote a great deal of their time to sports and amusements, of which they have a great variety. Of these, dancing is one of the princi-

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⁸ Paula Gunn Allen, "Bringing Home the Fact: Tradition and Continuity in the Imagination," *Recovering the word: Essays on Native American Literature*, Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1987).

⁹ Wayne Alfred as cited in *Beyond the Revival: Contemporary Northwest Native Art* (Vancouver: Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr College of Art and Design, July 25–September 17, 1989).

¹⁰ Alex A. Jacobs/Karoniaktatie, *The Politics of Primitivism: Concerns and Attitudes in Indian Art.* *Akwewon*, no. 2/3, pp. 1–3.

¹¹ Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, *Pow Wow Time*, vol. 1, no. 1 (August 1992), Hagersville, Ontario, p. 7.

¹² F. W. Hodge, ed., *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 30:11, Smithsonian Institute).

¹³ Reginald and Gladys Laubin, *Indian Dances of North America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁵ Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins Press, 1953).

¹⁶ Royal B. Hassrick, *The George Catlin Book of American Indians* (New York: Promontory Press, 1988).

² *Tawow: Canadian Indian Cultural Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Ottawa: Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1970).

³ see James H. Howard, "Pan-Indian Culture in Oklahoma," *The Scientific Monthly*, vol. 18 (July–December, 1955), (Washington D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science), pp. 215–220; Nancy O. Lurie, "The Contemporary American Indian Scene," *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*, E.P. Leacock and N.O. Lurie, eds. (New York: Random House, 1971); and Samuel W. Corrigan, "The Plains Indian Pow wow: Cultural Interaction in Manitoba and Saskatchewan," *Anthropologica*, n.s., vol. XII (1970), pp. 253–277.

⁴ William K. Powers, *War Dance: Plains Indian Musical Performance* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990); Noel Dyck, "Pow Wow and the Expression of Community in Western Canada," *Ethnos*, vol. 44, pp. 78–98; and Valda Blundell, "Echoes of a Proud Nation: Reading Kahnawake's Pow wow as a Post-Oka Text," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 18, no. 3.

⁵ Laurence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 82–84.

⁶ Robert Allen Warrior, "The Sweetgrass Meaning of Solidarity: 500 Years," *Border/Lines*, no. 23 (Winter 1991/1992), pp. 35–37.

⁷ Grossberg, p. 83.

pal, and may be seen in a variety of forms such as the buffalo dance, the boasting dance, the begging dance, the scalp dance, and a dozen other kinds of dances, all of which have their particular characters and meanings or objects. These exercises are exceedingly grotesque in their appearance, and to the eye of the traveller who knows not their meaning or importance, they are an uncouth and frightful display of starts and jumps, and yelps, and jarring gutturals, which are sometimes truly terrifying.¹⁷

¹⁷ Laubin, p. 41.

But Catlin also acknowledges the spiritual quality of Indian dance, noting that "it enters into their form, and is often in their mode of appealing to the Great Spirit—of paying their usual devotions to their medicine..."¹⁸ The significance of Indian dance was recognized by Henry Schoolcraft whose insights were noted by Roy Pearce "to mark the death of the idea of savagism and the American savage."¹⁹ In 1848, Schoolcraft wrote about the Chippewa in the Lake Superior area which includes Lac du Flambeau:

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 42

¹⁹ Pearce, p. 134.

...singing and dancing are applied to political and to religious purposes by the Indians. Dancing is both an amusement and a religious observance among the American Indians. Tribes the most diverse in language, and situated at the greatest distance apart, concur in this. It is believed to be the ordinary mode of expressing intense passion, of feeling, on any subject, and it is a custom which has been persevered in, with the least variation, through all the phases of their history...²⁰

²⁰ Laubin, pp. 44 – 45.

Schoolcraft concluded that, "Dancing is thus interwoven throughout the whole texture of Indian society, so that there is scarcely an event, important or trivial, private or public, which is not connected more or less intimately, with this rite."²¹ But as the first ethnographers began to document Native lifestyle, songs and music became objects of study removed from the collective cultural practice and spiritual expression of dance. One of the most remarkable of the early ethnographers was Frances Densmore, who began to document Chippewa music and customs in the region of Lac du Flambeau in 1893. She collected songs from my great-grandmother and Bert Skye's father, Anawabe, for her report on *Chippewa Music* published by the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1913. She all but ignored the ceremonial context of Indian dance. But long before anthropologists spoke of pan-Indianism, Densmore wrote of the cultural exchange remembered by our medicine man Anawabe:

²¹ Ibid., p. 45.

²² Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Music* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 53, Smithsonian Institute, 1913).

The first of the following songs used in the begging dance is said to have come from the Assiniboine, or Rock Sioux, many years ago. The dance also was derived from the same tribe but has been practiced among the Chippewa for so many generations that it may be regarded as one of their tribal dances.²²

If anthropologists were slow to recognize the power and practice of Indian dance, missionaries and Indian agents were not. Working in consort, they mounted a forceful spiritual and legal attack on Native religious and cultural practice. In Canada, the battle against Indian religion began in the 1850s, led by William Duncan, a missionary whose contention that Tsimshian potlatches were barbaric strongly influenced the government's passage of an anti-potlatch law in 1884. Potlatches, and the songs and dances and practices that sustained them, were ille-

The Bear River pow wow at Lac du Flambeau in the 1930s.



Academic and popular conceptions of pow wow have worked to construct the narratives of "Indianness" which are represented in this imaginary. But for Indians, the transformed traditionalism of pow wow situates the affective investment in what matters.

after 1890, when federal troops, who feared an Indian uprising related to the nativistic ideology of the Ghost Dance Movement, killed over three hundred unarmed Sioux at Wounded Knee. Caught in the vice of enforced Indian assimilation, Native ceremonies were performed in secret or spoken of as a social entertainment to survive the political reality of being Indian.

With the spread in anthropology after the turn of the century, ethnographers worked with new zeal to describe and document Indian religious ceremonies and spiritual practices before their assumed disappearance. Fieldworkers reported on specific ceremonies, noting chronologies of action and details of regalia; and anthropologists collected songs, dances, costumes, and artifacts. These artifacts, which existed as living expressions of personal dreams, individual industry and communal, spiritual practice, were removed from the context of public performance rooted in their respective ceremonies, and were instead set into the conceptual frameworks that emerged to explain the transformative nature of Indian dance: relative deprivation, nativistic religion, acculturation, assimilation, revitalization. But until the early 1950s, the writing of anthropologists did not associate the Indian ceremonial dance with pow wow. Writing in 1970, Samuel Corrigan cites three articles on pow wow written in the 1950s and '60s, noting that "the topic has been otherwise neglected."²⁴

Shrouded by this ethnographic silence, pow wow was viewed as part of the touristic performance associated with the "Wild West" shows of the late 1800s and the development of western rodeo — a hybrid cultural form expressing commercial venture, sometimes co-present with, but always removed from, the process of spiritual ceremony. Corrigan writes, "pow wow...is merely a gathering of Indian people for singing and dancing, and has no religious or magical significance in itself..."²⁵

For three decades after the 1800s, "probably the most important force for Indians and whites alike in casting the image of the Indian in the lineaments of the Plains warrior was Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show."²⁶ In the years before World War I, this trope of the performing Plains Indian merged with the image of the war-dancing rodeo Indian. In Canada, this development in rodeo is remembered in the Calgary Stampedes of 1912 and 1917 and the Banff Indian Days, local fairs and festivals complete with parades, pageants, pow wows and riding competitions, which "have done much to paint the character of the imagined communities they address."²⁷ Over the years, Indians were displaced and appropriated through the discourse of these performative expressions of western regionalism. In Lac du Flambeau, as elsewhere, this trend, which became increasingly widespread in the 1920s, legitimized the touristic redefinition of pow wow. In *The September Outer's Book* of 1917 a tourist wrote:

gal in Canada until the repeal of this law in 1951. When Franz Boas began his fieldwork among the Kwakiutl in 1886, he was welcomed with the words, "We want to know whether you have come to stop our dances and feasts as the missionaries and agents who live among our neighbours try to do so. We do not want anyone here who will interfere with our customs."²³ In the United States, Indian religious ceremonies and institutions — the Ghost Dance, the Sun Dance, the Native American Church — met the same fate

²³ Peter Nabokov, *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-1992*.

²⁴ Corrigan, p. 254.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 253.

²⁶ Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1971).

²⁷ Marilyn Burgess, "Canadian 'Range Wars': Struggles Over Indian Cowboys," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 18, no. 3.

²⁸ *The September Outer's Book* (Chicago, Illinois: The Outer's Book Co. Ltd., 1917).

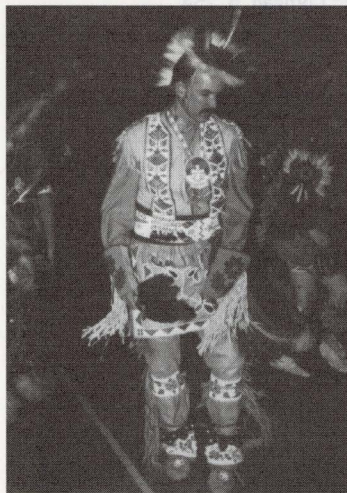
²⁹ Howard, "Pan-Indian Culture," pp. 215 – 216.

³⁰ Dyck, "Pow wow and the Expression of Community..." p. 85.

³¹ For a more extensive discussion of Lac du Flambeau see Irving A. Hollowell, *Culture and Experience* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967); and my article "The Chippewa and the Other: Living the Heritage of Lac du Flambeau," *Cultural Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1988), pp. 267 – 293.

³² Pow Wow Time, p. 18.

³³ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).



Gregg Guthrie at Lac du Flambeau pow wow.

Across Lac du Flambeau, you will find it, strange and picturesque, this ceremony of the aborigines with rhythmic tum-tum of drum and pounding of moccasined feet in lengthening sunbeam through western window.... Perhaps you will have an opportunity to snap your camera and gain a coveted picture of aboriginal costume, smiling squaw or quaint papoose — perhaps not. Most of those of the older generation retain their primal aloofness and decline to be subjects for the Kodak.²⁸

Thirty years later, as Hollywood movie makers were rediscovering the war-dancing Plains Indians of dime novels, the Western pow wow circuit spawned a new notion of cultural dynamics. In 1955, James H. Howard wrote a "seminal" article on Oklahoma pow wows which established the concept of "pan-Indianism" to describe the dynamics of Native cultural exchange. Howard argued that, rather than assimilating to the dominant culture upon the collapse of traditional tribal lifestyles, many Indians have "become members of a supertribal culture."²⁹ Tribal distinctiveness has been replaced through the uneven spread of a nontribal "Indian" culture incorporating modifications of old tribal customs and innovations peculiar to pan-Indianism. Howard's analysis of the spread of Plains Indian dance reconstructed pow wow as a new cultural form which, in the words of Noel Dyck, "has only been taken up by the Indians in Western Canada since the 1950s."³⁰ The concept of pan-Indianism was widely adapted to describe urban Indian culture and emergent political movements; but the portent of pow wow from which it had sprung was largely disregarded. Pow wow was understood as an expression of inauthentic culture and economic enterprise, as exhibitions of Indian dancing for summer tourists began in Lac du Flambeau and elsewhere.³¹

Today, touristic performances of Indian dancing remain a feature of Native economic enterprise. While the competitive and traditional pow wows which dot the map of North America are quite distinct from these exhibitions, they share a commonality of traditional songs and stylized dance. Pow wow involves distinct musical and dance genres: men's and women's traditional dance, men's grass dance and fancy dance, women's jingle dress and shawl dance; each is identified by a particular outfit and style of movement. Pow wow itself has a definite structure, beginning with the Grand Entry of the dancers, followed by the Flag Song — the Indian National Anthem sung without movement — and the Veteran's Song, honouring warriors. Throughout the afternoon and evening, open intertribal dancing is mixed with competitions which showcase different styles, and these sets blend with Honour Songs and Giveaways recognizing first dancers, elders or individuals who have passed on. Pow wow is also marked by a communal feast and a carnival of consumption — craft tables and food stands selling ageless artifacts and the politics of primitivism — squaw bread and Indian tacos, fluffs and feathers.

But the "mattering map" of pow wow is framed by the presence of the sacred fire and centred in the essence of the drum. In the words of the Toronto's *Pow Wow Time* "all the activities of pow wow dancing stem from the beat of the drum and encircle the drum. The term drum, which encompasses the singers as well, has a more symbolic representation than simply being regarded as a musical instrument. Drums are blessed and given names by most singing groups. The drum is sacred to natives and...is the heartbreak of the Anishnabek nations."³²

"For most of the past five centuries, the Indian of imagination and ideology has been as real, perhaps more real, than the American Indian of actual existence and contact."³³ Academic and popular conceptions of pow wow have worked to construct the narratives of "Indianness" which are represented in this imaginary. But for Indians, the transformed traditionalism of pow wow situates the affective investment in what matters. Through all the layers of Indianness embedded in the discourse of sovereignty and self-determination, what matters is the silenced sensibility of being Indian.

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ROZENA MAART

Cultural Appropriation

Historicizing Individuality, Consciousness and Actions

IN ADVERTISING THE CALL FOR submissions for this issue, *Fuse Magazine* somewhat directed the call by the mention of the following:

In recent years the term 'cultural appropriation' has become one of the most contentious terms used in/for examining the exercise of social power in the realms of culture and creativity. (*FUSE Magazine* call for submissions)

What is this "social power"? Is this "power" concept grounded in terms which explain the ways in which individuals attain power? Are all individuals capable of attaining this power, this power called "social power," this act performed and exercised over "others"? And who are these "others" over whom this "power" is exercised?

I would like to focus some of my contribution to this debate by examining the relations of social power and by situating these relations in terms of their larger functioning: namely, their location within systems of domination as these pertain to the intertwined, rather than singular composure of, relations of white domination — capitalist relations, patriarchal relations and heterosexual relations. Relations: related to, thus relations which function as sites within and through which acts are carried out; as family mem-

bers — tied by acts, united in blood — the individual agents of these relations merge to form collectivities and groups which share the decidedness of their goals and objectives — to dominate, to covert, to seize, to annihilate. However, all forms of domination, all relations of domination, are enacted by individuals — agents of these forms of power, and it is this focus on the individual, the agent of domination, which needs to be interrogated, needs to be scrutinized for its complexity, before we can fully discuss its operation and functioning within society.

I cannot proceed with this critical examination/writing/critique without first acknowledging Richard Hill's timely and insightful exposé of the "cultural appropriation" debate, as well as the references he cites in order to build a strong and forthright argument. In an article entitled "One Part Per Million: White Appropriation and Native Voices," Hill informs readers of the personal pain he faces in constantly being defined by "experts," and the hesitancy with which he writes on the matter since this debate, "despite it being about "Native issues," inevitably perpetuates a focus on White artists." Hill here names the individuals who have become the focus of his concerns as "appropriators" identifying them as those who

Clearly, what needs to take place is an examination of the full identity of the person who is the artist and the realm that the artist explores. We have to politicize our identities because they are all informed by political processes whether we like to admit to them or not.

"... are working from a powerful and established domination of images and texts about my culture." Hill goes on to say:

Recently as I've become aware of more and more texts and images created by *others* about Native peoples, I've found my voice rising almost inevitably—not simply because they are racist or misrepresentative individually, but rather because they seem to delineate discourse and become the central notions about us.¹ [authors italics]

In establishing a premise for my entry into this debate, I would like to subvert this "focus on white artists" by zooming in on the invisible white lens which whiteness celebrates as its absence, yet refuses to acknowledge as its presence—scrutinizing its picturesque ensemble. I would further like to highlight some of the salient features of Hill's analysis and exposé.

While expressing his misgivings about the focus on "White artists," Hill opens up several dimensions which remain uncritiqued and unclarified, yet crucial to any further discussion. For example, Hill's appropriators become "others," suggesting that the term "others" means "non-Native"—a political standpoint clearly embedded in his whole argument, an argument which intends to draw attention to the way in which whiteness maintains its centrality by resisting identification. He explores the con/text within which Native peoples are examined;

namely—in writing, in performance, in images created and presented as text. He focuses on the false assumptions in naming something "racist" when clearly what needs to take place is an examination of how this act of writing the colonized, of writing as text, of the text as a site of colonization, of the text as a weapon to be utilized at will to continually hold Native people hostage to their own reality—are part and parcel of the functioning and operation of racism and colonization, both in its historical and its contemporary forms. To resist this, Hill articulates the complexities of a number of the issues at hand, in reference to a specific debate between white artists and Native artists:

In response to her article "In the Red,"² within which Cardinal-Schubert confronted white artists about their appropriation of Native culture, FASTWÜRMS (a three-person white artist collective) defensively accuse Joanne Cardinal-Schubert of acting as a "self-appointed spokesperson for the Native artist."³ Andy Fabo's response to Cardinal-Schubert's article, provides further indication of the denial white people "suffer" when refusing to recognize their whiteness, their white privilege and the fact that they are, after all, agents of the system of white domination. In it Fabo states: "she [Cardinal-Schubert] attacks us as enemies when we are such likely allies. We endorse her issues."⁴

Is this the absence of white consciousness, or is this the absence of the *knowledge* of white consciousness?⁵

Fabo is clearly conscious of Cardinal-Schubert's Nativeness; why else would he so strongly reaffirm his ownership over her culture or believe that Cardinal-Schubert needs to be affirmed by him? Fabo is obviously conscious of Cardinal-Schubert's Nativeness, but where is his consciousness of his being, his consciousness of being white, of being white in relation to her Nativeness? In his construction as ally, Fabo reaffirms his colonizing being/potential/capacity when he highlights his own endeavours with such gleeful innocence, burying Cardinal-Schubert's concerns with his claims to joint ownership of her and her culture. Naming and claiming the unclaimed consciousness of being white is perhaps the best way to understand how white domination operates, for it is conscious in its attempts at subjugating Nativeness.

The liberal will say that she is doing something "for the Native" or "for the Black" and linger in her missionary ignorance; the radical artist will say "we're in this together." But we were always in "this" together—some as agents of white domination, or agents of heterosexism, others as recipients of these relations of domination. Clearly, what needs to take place is an examination of the full identity of the person who is the artist and the realm that the artist explores. We have to politicize our identities because they are all informed by political processes whether we like to admit to them or not. It is the "we" that has to be problematized and contextualized because the "we" that is used when speaking between and across identities—identities which do not have the same histories nor the same access to the dominant power structures—dangerously assumes a position of anonymity, and is most often utilized as a last resort, a grope in the light, a dangerous unlit light within the history of identities—a politically strategic desire for same-

ness, a desire through which "we" can all pursue an event when, painfully as it is, any deconstruction of "power" as a term, or colonization of a process of this "power" needs to take place when the recipients of this process, the people who have been colonized, take up arms (indeed artists have many tools) and do not need the beneficiaries of racism and colonization to instruct the route towards this struggle for liberation.

The togetherness is not the problem, it is the relationship between and among the individuals who make the process of domination possible, and others, upon whom dominance is thrust that have to be identified before they can be understood. Any realm which draws its lines as wide as possible so as to include all of its producers has to acknowledge that these cultural producers all enter that realm with their respective histories. To assume that because "we" are all artists creating art for art's sake is again to misconstrue the lines along which this realm operates. Clearly, as many of us know and have experienced, these lines cross out and delete from its demarcated area whomsoever threatens to extend this realm, as well as those who have on occasion "artistically" subverted the foundation upon which it is grounded. It is a policed space, within which you must account for yourself in relation to the terms set out by the primary colonizers of this site; this location, this space operating as a realm, this domain reserved for artists, is a domain animated by absent yet present reserves. The colonizers set up their primary site of colonization, demarcate the space like they did with homelands and reserves and then hold its producers, its colonized artists, on the outskirts of this realm where, like all colonized peoples, their point of entry is also their point of exit—ghettoized, tamponized.

This realm, this space which operates as a domain inclusive of

To address the questions I pose about whether Black people and Native people are in a position to appropriate requires a thorough discussion about the operation and functioning of white domination, as a dominant system, and White Supremacy as the parent body of white domination.

those who are able to enter it via their cultural production, is not only a mythical construct, but is one which, like any space, must first be colonized in order for the colonizers to continue to live in it. Relying on their knowledge of the global nature of white domination, the colonizers construct the relations within which this realm will maintain itself by drawing the colonized in from previously colonized spaces, to falsely coexist within this "artistic space" operating as a realm. Some years ago, for instance, this realm did not include Marlene Nourbese Philip, who activists and readers now revere, nor did it include most of the few Native artists we hear about on a regular basis.

The fee to enter is presented as "production for production's sake." For as some of us know, the production of art which does not passively align itself with the rest of the conveyor belt will be belted into proportions, shortened, chopped, slithered and chewed, allowing only the morsels to be exhibited. As is clearly the intention, these morsels will appear insufficient and inadequate, at which point the agents of this operation of white domination—the artists utilizing the realm as a site of colonization—will exercise *their* artistic potential by adding onto existing works. When the artist who works under the supervision of this white dominance protests, the agent will exclaim..."We are allies. We support you. We are all on the same side."

There is no avoiding the gruesome and painful ordeals which mark

the road of freedom of expression: precisely because no expression is *free*. Each act of expression, each act of representation, is always implicated (in varying measures) in the processes of dominating or being dominated. Expressions are, after all, utterances of language which mask the absence of that which is present. While Fabo might not have considered his actions offensive or recognized that his palate savours the ingredients of profound colonialism, we must begin the analysis where we are. We, must start with our own location, start with locating ourselves, by recognizing ourselves as individuals who need to learn our histories of domination and/or being dominated. We need to examine, and in the process, situate ourselves within such histories; we need to understand our individual actions as derivative of processes of socialization which teach us to foster our control and domination over others, and learn to deconstruct these roles.

Given the complexities of this uninformed whiteness, the absence of the knowledge of white consciousness, or simply a denial—for which the AA twelve-step recovery programme could offer a rather useful methodology for those seeking to initiate white group-therapy—What options are left for writers, artists and activists who work within a white-dominated society? And if these options seem a hopeless thread of unexplained pasts and troublesome presents, how do new threads (timbles and symbols) emerge? How do we begin to unravel the complexities

around buried histories which many of us perpetuate by refusing to locate moments of resistance and defiance as significant to our present day creativities and depictions of art as art and art as activism?

To address the questions I pose about whether Black people and Native people are in a position to

appropriate requires a thorough discussion about the operation and functioning of white domination, as a dominant system, and White Supremacy as the parent body of white domination. The act of appropriation is an act exercised with an unspoken knowledge that such an act demonstrates an individual's ability to utilize, through various avenues, everything in

his or her power. Black people and Native people do not have possession or control of prevailing power structures—the institutionalized, structural or systemic components of white domination. At best, anonymously referred to as "social power," at worst, merely "power," this is the extent of the silence of wording consciousness.

There will always be dichotomies of powerful and powerless, of empowered and disempowered, and while these divisions and oppositions might be useful at times they also limit the

scope of our understanding of how various forms of domination are perpetuated and maintained. Such seems to be the case with symbolism which seeks to position itself on the side of the disempowered yet utilizes a sign that is a signifier of both disempowerment and empowerment.

Recently, "lesbians of colour" have been seen sporting artistically crafted brown triangles. What are the politics surrounding the use of the pink triangle by lesbian and gay activists (who wear this pink-coloured symbol to reflect the naming of their sexual identity...only) and the use of the brown triangle by "lesbians of colour" who feel that the symbolism of the pink triangle (as utilized by the predominantly white lesbian and gay movement) is politically informed by a [homo]sexuality which assumes whiteness? What are the political options for those who are dissatisfied with the pinkness, since the lesbian and gay movement, while building alliances based on choice of sexual preference has, by and large, paid very little attention to racism? To colour the triangle pink, then brown, then to ignore the symbol's historical significance in terms of the Holocaust, clearly perpetuates a politics of "buried histories." The complexities multiply when we go on to consider how, while on the one hand, Jewish peoples were disempowered by the Holocaust, on the other, those Jewish peoples who identify as white are empowered by the system of white domination. Thus we are faced with the question: Can one form of appropriation replace another?

To be Black or Native in a white-dominated world often requires strategies and actions which have to be positioned against the backdrop of the white experience. These strategies often involve the use of signifiers and references which, because of their association with whiteness, are easily recognizable and thus readily available for subversive use. I would sug-

gest that this might be the case with the use of the brown triangle as a means for subverting the predominantly white lesbian and gay movement's use of the pink triangle as a symbol of resistance to homophobic oppression which occurs between and across identities.

While the decision to use the triangle in the lesbian and gay movement might have been informed by all sorts of factors, there is very little to suggest that it is informed by a decision to seek an alliance with, or name, Jewishness and the subsequent identities with which this Jewishness was associated. The use of the symbol within this movement speaks to the fact that racism is not addressed and therefore avenues have to be sought to create, on the one hand, a general awareness of racism and homophobia as linked, and on the other hand, to facilitate recognition of the identity of "lesbians of colour": hence the emergence of the brown triangle.

All this triangling seems to occur without indication of the history of the Holocaust or the way in which Jews were forced to wear various triangles, often one on top of the other, each marking an opposition to the functioning of White Supremacy and its ideal identity—Polish Jew, Ukrainian Jew, lesbian, gay, communist. It should be remembered that this naming of Jewish peoples by geographical location and nationality was very much informed by theories of skin colouring and supported by theories of "racial" classification. We cannot overlook this history even if the contemporary nature of racism allows the continued operation of white domination through certain Jewish peoples, (particularly Ashkenazic Jews).

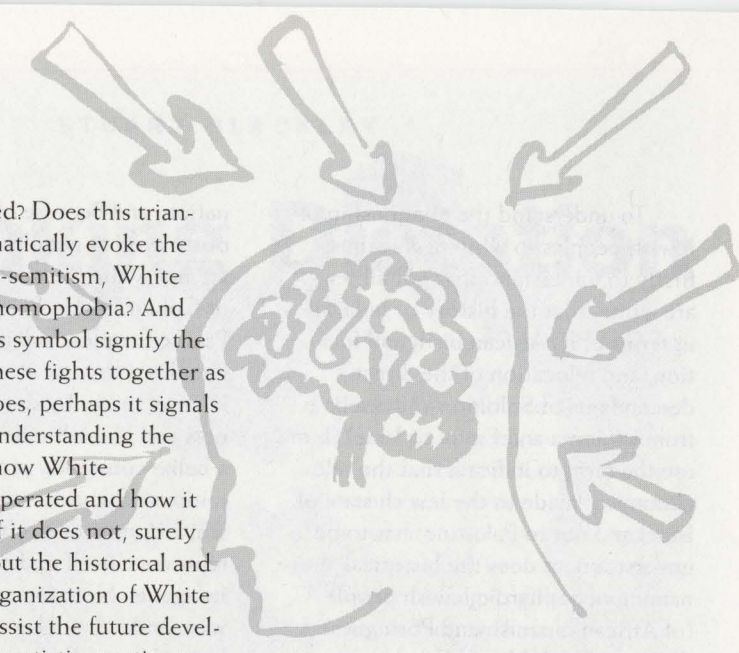
In wearing a symbol like the brown triangle, are we acknowledging the plight of Jewish peoples during the Holocaust alongside the contemporary fight against compulsory heterosexuality? If so, how are these simi-

larities established? Does this triangling then automatically evoke the fight against anti-semitism, White Supremacy and homophobia? And does wearing this symbol signify the desire to bring these fights together as one fight? If it does, perhaps it signals a move toward understanding the complexities of how White Supremacy has operated and how it operates today. If it does not, surely some lessons about the historical and contemporary organization of White Supremacy can assist the future development of similar artistic creations; for indeed, our artistic creations are informed by our desire to constantly create new and innovative forms of representation. Who and what they represent becomes the "problem" when some of us, because of our inability to understand art's relationships to various peoples or the representation of one people by another people, fail to see why art can never just be Art. The painful darts of Art pierce those parts of our identities that we cannot hide. Perhaps the art of Art lies in uncovering the history of the artist and her or his relationship to that Art. For it is now more than ever being demanded that the darts part with a knowledge of white domination and White Supremacy.

Perhaps I should clarify my constant referencing and prioritizing of the operation of white domination and White Supremacy and its importance for artists. I believe that the knowledge of the functioning of the system of white domination is often insufficient and that artists—by virtue of being "artists" in the glamorous, frivolous sense of the word—have for too long utilized their art without reference to the system of domination which supports their art and within which their art as Art is framed and illuminated. There are artists who will say "my work is political" yet clearly what makes their work political is the display of Black, Native, "Other." And there are those

who say, very often indeed, "I am apolitical" or "my art is not grounded in any politics." But, painful as it is, there is no such category as "apolitical" because individuals always reflect the presence of that which they demonstrate as an absence. It may not always be apparent to those who seek to mask or alter its appearance.

While strongly in favour of discussing the intertwined rather than singular composure of racist relations, capitalist relations, heterosexual relations and patriarchal relations, I do maintain that racist relations are the primary relations of domination. What I mean by this is that no individual can be gay, working class, or male without indicating their relationship to white domination because it is the operation and functioning of white domination which rules supreme. Your class has to be contextualized and problematized in terms of its relationship to white dominance; as does your sexuality, your femaleness or your maleness. While there are clearly similarities in terms of how various relations of domination mimic, imitate and resemble the others' structural arrangements, racist relations still determine how white people function and operate and how everyone else is named in relation to not being white within this white-dominated society.



To understand the relationship of Jewish peoples to whiteness is thus firstly to understand that not all Jews are white; that the history of Judaism in terms of its African birth and location, and relocation of the direct descendants of Solomon and Sheba from Ethiopia and Egypt to Israel (I use the term to indicate that the relocation was made to the Jewish state of Israel and not to Palestine) has to be understood, as does the historical naming of Sephardic Jewish people (of African, Spanish and Portuguese descent) and Ashkenazic (who trace their ancestry to northern and eastern Europe). It is important to understand that Jewish peoples, while occupying a space within the continuum of white domination, are not full-fledged agents of the system of white domination. Yes, their white privilege and the ways in which certain Jewish peoples perpetuate racism has to be discussed, but I fully stand behind the notion of historicizing contemporary racist relations. Not only is the question of Christianity crucial to the understanding of White Supremacy but also the fact that the history of racism in Europe indicates that Jewish peoples were recognized as Jews by the Germans by virtue of their skin colour, amongst other criteria.

I am noting all of these points here in order to assert that while white domination may at various times include certain Jewish peoples within its system of operation, it does not always. The operation of White Supremacy does not at all. While White Supremacy is the parent body and the ideology behind white domi-

nation, and because of the availability of the world's peoples, most of whom are not white (Black People, "People of Colour," Asian Peoples, South Pacific Peoples, Indigenous American Peoples, Hispanic Peoples etc.), the latter operates by drawing in whiteness and like-whiteness, mutating like a helix, constantly producing new definitions of whiteness in order for white domination to maintain and reproduce itself under the guidance of its agents. Note for example how Jews were and still are kept out of the United States Supreme Court (even Jews who are considered white) and several institutions which remain the bastions of White Christian Supremacy.

In the recent edition of *Books in Canada*, Don Gayton reviews *Nemiah: The Unconquered Country* by Terry Glavin and *Shadows In The Sun* by Wade Davis. I shall save most of my criticisms of this review for another time. However, I would like to point out the features which mark the disruption of this very Christian nature of White Supremacy so that when cultural appropriation is mentioned, this is what Gayton had to say: "...cultural appropriation, a demon nearly all writers now wrestle with, hovers in the background here."⁶ Who are these "nearly all writers" Gayton refers to? Are these "nearly all writers" writers who are white and Christian? While the devil may be the supreme spirit of evil, the one and only supreme enemy of God, it is more than clear to me that the enemy of God is also the enemy of White Supremacy. The white man's territorial, textual, intellectual and artistic enemy can only be the devil, and perhaps those evil and rebelling against Christianity appear clearly in the image of the devil, for what else can prevent successful artistic appropriation other than the devil himself?

Clearly, we have to come to grips with art as practiced and performed within the system of white domina-

tion and within this system where White Supremacy rules supreme. The debate around "cultural appropriation" will continue for a long time as many of us artists or non-artists pursue questions of identity. There are many ways in which histories get buried and clearly they need to be brought to the surface of our consciousness if we continue to do political work between and among ourselves as artists and activists in Canada where appropriation of land and people continues to take place on a daily basis.

Recipient of the McClelland and Stewart 1992 Journey Prize Award for Best Short Fiction, Rozena Maart is a writer and sessional lecturer working in areas of Black Consciousness, the politics of consciousness, psychoanalytic and critical theory.

NOTES

¹ Richard Hill, "One Part Per Million: White Appropriation and Native Voices," *FUSE Magazine*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Winter 1992), pp. 12-22.

² Joanne Cardinal-Schubert, "In The Red," *FUSE Magazine*, vol. 13, no. 1+2 (Fall 1989), pp. 20-28.

³ FASTWÜRMS, *FUSE Magazine*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Winter 1989-90), p. 2 [letter].

⁴ Andy Fabo, *FUSE Magazine*, vol. 13 no. 3 (Winter 1989-90), pp. 2-4 [letter].

⁵ For a thorough discussion of the concept of white consciousness, see my article "Consciousness, Knowledge and Morality: The Absence of the Knowledge of White Consciousness in Contemporary Feminist Theory," *A Reader in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Debra Shogan (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1993), chapter 8.

⁶ *Books in Canada*, May 1993, p. 37.

FROM A GAY WHITE MALE perspective, I am not sure what I can contribute to the voice appropriation controversy. According to Oscar Wilde, "insincerity is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities...[and] what is really interesting about people is the mask that each one wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask." If there is such a thing as a gay identity, a gay voice or a gay aesthetic, that would be it.

Yet, a few months ago I wrote a letter to *The Globe and Mail* defending the Concordia Women's Centre for not including a painting they perceived as perpetuating racist stereotypes. Or rather, I lambasted Alberto Manguel's "Crosscurrent" column in which he denounced the action of the Concordia group as being not merely vaguely fascist, but in two specific analogies, exactly comparable to the Nazi treatment of the Jews.¹ The Concordia Women's Centre are accused of believing in "what Goebbels calls the *Rassengeist*, 'spirit of the race,' a sort of metaphysical quality promised to only a chosen few"—that is, the sort of metaphysical quality of essentialist racist purity that led to Aryan racial "protectionism" through the extermination of the Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, etc. All of this because the CWC rejected a painting they felt reproduced a "condescending stereotype about women of colour." Manguel memorably closed his think-piece with the phrase (destined to become the "Quote of the Day," and prominently displayed above "Your Morning Smile" on the front page) "Cutting one person's tongue will not give another person a voice, but it turns the silencer into a dictator."

The issue of cultural appropria-

tion asks profound and even distressing questions about liberal democracy as formulated by the vast majority of cultural producers in this country, questions which they are incapable of recognizing, never mind addressing. Instead, their entire domination of the mainstream media and their histrionic Nazi analogies operate as the most efficient censorship imaginable, without any need for due process, investigative research, rational debate or actual freedom of speech. The mainstream media (I will confine myself to a few months of coverage in *The Globe and Mail*) simply takes dictation from these dominant cultural voices who broadcast their views over every media and cry out at the loss of absolute freedom of their speech when any attempt at an oppositional dialogue is provoked.

Naturally my letter, which was a little intemperate, was not published. Instead, the flow of print in *The Globe* praising Manguel's backlash on the CWC as a blow for freedom of speech was joined by the flood of outraged denunciations of Canada Council's Joyce Zemans. Zemans had, in an interview with Stephen Godfrey, defended the findings of the Council's Advisory Committee for Race Equality in the Arts:

The council does not believe that formal guidelines are the answer, but that there should be a recognition that cultural appropriation is a serious issue and requires ongoing debate by staff, juries and advisory committees, as well as the community at large.²

Since the above quotation was reproduced in Manguel's own column, he is well aware that nothing "formal,"

i.e., binding, prohibitive or even, we might speculate, effective or substantial, is on the Canada Council's mind. Yet even "a recognition" (italics mine) of the serious issue of voice appropriation is denounced in a letter attacking *The Globe* for being "highly irresponsible" for even airing these views.³

Manguel finds it "astounding" that Zeman's views go "by and large, unchallenged" in Canada's artistic community. This despite the fact that *The Globe and Mail* devoted almost an entire page to branding her everything from being P.C. to being a crypto-fascist. Under the banner "Frightening Attack On The Imagination," *The Globe* gathered ten letters from such writers as Timothy Findley, Richard Outram, Manguel, etc., in which there is surprisingly not a single letter that found voice appropriation in any way problematic—a rather one-sided "controversy." Instead, a few letters threaten at length, once again, with their facile fascism, those few artists and writers (still not heard from in *The Globe*) who for the most part are simply questioning the ethical loophole of the white, liberal abuse of the freedom of speech argument, its role in the justification of the privileged status quo, and its implication in the perpetuation of racist stereotypes. Where there is no dialogue, there is no free speech.

Both Findley's letter and Manguel's column have had a powerful ripple effect in this "debate" by being quoted extensively by Ray Conlogue in a later *Spectator* column on voice appropriation.⁴ Balancing, as it were, the high moral ground of Manguel (the "silencer as dictator" is quoted again) with sweet reason, Conlogue quotes Findley: "How dare I?" cried Findley, "imagine the lives of

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Taking Dictation



other human beings! What can I be thinking of?" This comes from the whimsical section of Findley's letter in which he defends his freedom to write in "A murderer's voice. An athlete's voice. A Jew's voice. A fascist's voice. A cat's voice." How benign, especially if we've been charmed by the cat's voice in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. What Conlogue omits is any reference to the rest of Findley's letter, which is just as fascist-baiting as Manguel: "What happened here? Does no one understand? In 1933 they burned 10,000 books at the gate of a German university because those books were written in unacceptable voices. German Jews, amongst others, had dared to speak for a Germany in other than Aryan voices. Stop. Now. Before we do this again."

This hysteria-mongering threatens to overwhelm the serious issues, as it has already distracted the mainstream press. The virulence of Manguel's and Findley's bombast completely negates their value as spokespersons not only for the Canadian artistic community, but, on a more personal note, the gay community as well. Though to my knowledge neither writer references their sexual orientation as part of this particular debate, others are not so restrained. Conlogue's column, in its reliance on both writers as authorities on the issue, and especially in the way it extends the debate over voice appropriation from that of natives, people of colour and women, to that of "heterosexuals who presume to interpret homosexuals," assumes that all cultures and subcultures are exactly equivalent in this our free, democratic society (free as in free speech? or free trade?). In my six years at *Rites* magazine and many more following lesbian and gay issues in the media, the problem of gay voice appropriation has never to my knowledge been seriously raised, and can only be the product of a straight (shall I be safe and say heterosexually identified) male's attempt

to bolster the legitimacy of his argument by including gays as a disempowered minority who agree with his unexamined notions of free speech.

What we tend to forget is that what white gays and, yes, white lesbians and white women in general produce is relatively mainstream (i.e., white) culture. Arguably, they produce what is the most interesting of the mainstream, but they are relatively mainstream nonetheless. It is unsurprising in the extreme that such pleasantly situated artists as Manguel and Findley, however gay they may be, support Conlogue's peculiar notions of freedom. Their careers depend on it, as do mine and many other white writers. The fact that white queers and women cannot separate themselves from the privilege of white society, or claim a distinctive identity and voice comparable to Native culture, is an example of why, at one level, artistic license is required, while, at another, it can be considered voice appropriation.

Throughout this controversy, *The Globe and Mail* has consistently maintained the familiar right-wing claim that we all exist in some kind of already achieved utopian multiculturalism, and therefore "that is that." It is in this kind of identity-politics potlatch, where the theft of voice gains legitimacy through the arguments of "artistic license" and "reverse discrimination," as if white men needed special protection as a minority. While white women, lesbians and gay men have had a problematic history of solidarity with Natives and people of colour, we do share an opposition to the status quo within and outside the mainstream. It is for this reason that I find the implications of Conlogue's special pleading, quoted below, especially obscene:

"What can artists do to help?... One thing that would be helpful is for other respected artists from minority groups to

denounce the censorship implicit in the voice appropriation issue, as Manguel and Bissoondath have done. A number of prominent artists have remained silent, perhaps uncomfortably torn between their loyalty to their community and loyalty to art."⁵

As if there was a contradiction. The racist assumption (never mind sexist, homophobic) that a "special interest" community (Native, Black, gay, etc.) is polarized against its opposite, art (implicitly, not-Native, not-Black, not-etc.) is appalling. "Loyalty" to these (unexamined notions) of free speech, freedom of expression—in short, Art—necessitates its corollary, "betrayal" of community. I don't think so. When has art ever been severed from community? Artists of colour must set the parameters of the debate over the appropriation of their culture, as women must for the issues of abortion and rape. This stops no one from freely speaking, from having an opinion. But authority must be acknowledged to those whose culture or bodies are the very battle grounds on which the debates are played out.

Stuart Blackley concentrates on post-homo design for living in all media—political, legal, decorative. Upcoming frictions will appear in *Queeries* published by Arsenal Pulp Press.

NOTES

¹ Alberto Manguel, *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto edition (12 March 1992), p. A7 [Column].

² Stephen Godfrey, "Canada Council asks whose voice is it anyway?" *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto edition (21 March 1992), p. C1.

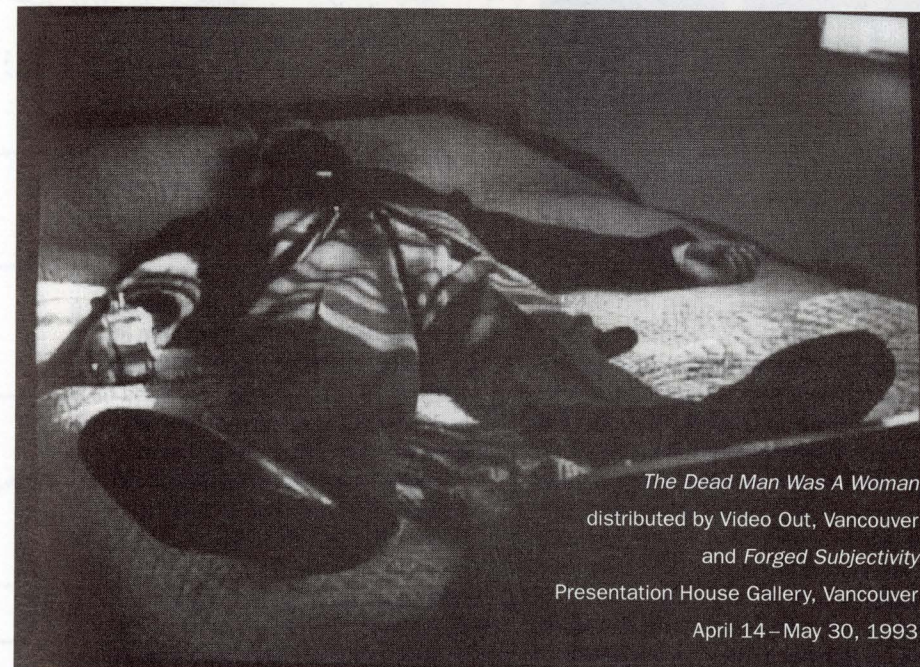
³ Alberto Manguel, p. A7

⁴ Ray Conlogue, *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto edition (6 June 1992), p. C3 [Column].

⁵ Ray Conlogue, p.C3.

Frontiers

Cornelia Wyngaarden



The Dead Man Was A Woman
distributed by Video Out, Vancouver
and *Forged Subjectivity*
Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver
April 14 - May 30, 1993

Still from *Forged Subjectivity*, video installation, 1993. Photo Chick Rice.

The Dead Man Was A Woman, Cory Wyngaarden's video drama about Vancouver's lesbian scene in the mid-sixties, begins with a murder: a young thug offs his butch companion. The murder over and done, the thriller segues back and evidence of the killer's motives accumulates. The plot is schematic—a young lesbian cross-dresses, becomes a truck driver, is found out, loses her job and is led by her ensuing alienation to shady business. The period's largely unrecorded lesbian culture emerges within the narrative's trajectory, providing glimpses of butch/femme relationships and the rough-and-tumble bar scene. Although it seems clear who dunit, this is a murder with a hitch. As the title suggests, murder foils the larger crime—a collapsing of boundaries between masculinity and femininity.

When the tape's noire-ish approach to history is coupled with Wyngaarden's recent video installation *Forged Subjectivity* lesbian sexuality is

positioned as a transgression that official history glaringly disavows. Although the installation revolves around Eliza McCormack, Canada's first lesbian cross-dressing member of Parliament (alias John White), this is not a recuperation of "great lesbians in history." Rather, Wyngaarden's work aligns itself strategically with what Jennifer Terry defines as deviant historiography—a critical examination of discursive mechanisms that legitimate power—especially the double bind of the other, whose disenfranchisement allows for a potentially disruptive mobility, but whose internalization of systematic violence is often paralyzing. When paralleled with the practices of cross-dressing, this approach to history inhabits a forbidden territory, a critical parody that articulates the effects of patriarchy's sadistic inscriptions of identity.

In order to explore the social implications of cross-dressing, *Forged Subjectivity* assumes the look of a didactic

museum display with an almost baffling abundance of references passed off as local history (paralleling North Vancouver's civic museum located one floor below). Those who might find Wyngaarden's display fragmented and nonsensical, miss her cunning deconstruction of the terms and references of a patriarchal history divided along gender lines. More precisely, this multi-layered montage of images, text, sound and objects frames historical discourse as partial, situated and highly mobile. Thus, fractures and elisions are posited as the net effects of hegemonic assertions.

The video component of the installation juxtaposes the public life of foundry owner and parliamentarian John White with the unknown private affairs of Eliza McCormack—lesbian, cross-dresser, spouse and parent. White's political life is depicted by excerpts from parliamentary speeches recounting familiar Canadian issues: suffrage, Native and worker rights, free trade, taxation and the national railways. These stand in stark contrast to the letters illuminating the politician's private life. The letters, fictional accounts based on what little is known about McCormack/White's intimate relations, find her lamenting a debilitating illness to her partner and securing plans to keep her gender secret from doctors, coroners and undertakers.

An undertone of authority is gleaned from copious support materials such as audio excerpts from Susanna Moodie's *Flora Linsey*, a semi-autobiographical novel by this famous Canadian pioneer. As Moodie was a neighbour, her proximity ambiguously situates McCormack/White within the realm of official Canadiana. A series of photographs in light boxes with captions such as "Chimera," "Radical Thief" and "Masquerade" undermine the medical and scientific diagrams that parade as objective knowledge. Bone saws set in display cases operate as artifactual evidence while poking fun at, and incriminating



Still from *Forged Subjectivity*, video installation, 1993.

nating medical essentialisms that bind gender to genitalia. Two official looking oil portraits loom on one wall, and not surprisingly, the man and woman look uncannily familiar.

When John White dies, his cross-dressing goes undetected. Cross-dressers, like others operating in the interstices of heterosexual protectorates, radically question the arbitrary imposition of gender determined and imposed by biology. Those who shun assigned roles can expect to be either ostracized or made into highly visible examples by those institutions and laws that pathologize, criminalize and incarcerate those who question the dominant culture's prerogatives. McCormack/White is double trouble: she is homosexual, dresses as a man yet proves conclusively that women are capable of public life. Nevertheless, she masks her anatomy to avoid public disgrace and scandal. Because her radical challenge goes unnoticed, the status quo remains intact.

A similar dilemma presents itself to Chris O'Steele, hero(ine) of *The Dead Man Was A Woman*. Like all good thrillers, the ending is a surprise. We are lead to believe that Craig, the local drug dealer and RCMP snitch, kills the transgressive Chris, prompting a resumption of heterosexual order. This opening scene replays at the end of the video, only this time a heterosexual resolution is tripped up by the addition of a few small details. When Craig assumes his aim, Chris grabs her gun from the glove compartment and kills him. Even

though the deed was done in self-defence, Chris does not "fess up." As a lesbian, she has no legal recourse because in 1965 homosexuality was a criminal offence in Canada. She opts for a cover-up, planting her male ID on Craig, who assumes an elaborate identity as outlaw, impostor and snitch; murdered by a woman dressed as a man. Craig, who is now Chris, becomes the husband of a dyke who marries a woman. The conundrums spin on. The police decide to accept the death at face value as further investigation would implicate them in his murder — after all, Craig was their plant. Although she escapes incarceration, the former Chris O'Steele's fate is not much better as she is exiled by her community. In an era of Cold War paranoia, the police had sweeping powers of surveillance, and even Chris's closest friends avoid her for fear that her presence as "undetected outlaw" within their midst would make them guilty by association.

Both works produce a critical impasse — frustrating the seduction that climactic narratives convey. Declaring themselves as fictions rooted in historical incidence, *Forged Subjectivity* and *The Dead Man Was A Woman* present partial glances at past lives. The ruptures, contradictions and failures of historical discourse become the object of study — encouraging political mobility in the gaps and lacks of hegemonic logic. Because cross-dressers operate from the vantage of radical doubling — laying bare the artifice of the law that

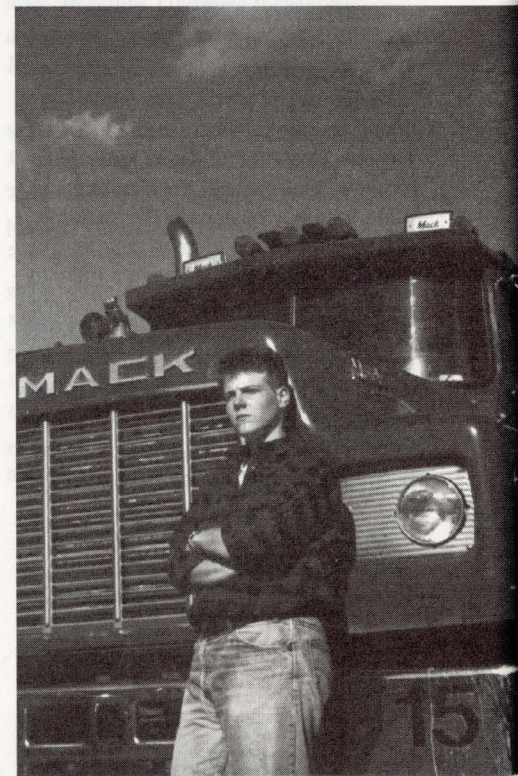
conceals itself in nature, heterosexual imperatives are displaced. This displacement of the dominant paradigm of sexuality allows for a concept of transgender to emerge. As patriarchal logic is revealed as a signifying practice dependent on the domination and exclusion of those it defines as other, its epistemological claims prove to be just another masquerade.

Nancy Shaw is a Vancouver writer and poet. Her recent book Scopocratic is published by ECW Press.

NOTES

¹ Jennifer Terry, "Theorizing Deviant Historiography," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 3.2 (1991), pp. 55–74.

Still from *The Dead Man Was A Woman*, video, 1992.



Frontiers

M. Nourbese Philip
Stratford: Mercury Press, 1992

Frontiers is an in-your-face collection of M. Nourbese Philip's essays on Canada's culture and race battles. Spanning an eight year period, this is the first collection of its kind by an African Canadian writer. Over the years, Philip, a poet and novelist, has also taken public positions on a wide range of issues in essays and letters and has thus been located as a controversial figure by the dominant cultural establishment in Ontario and, by extension, Canada. Philip's non-fiction writing bears witness to the systematic failure of the cultural establishment to foster a truly "multicultural" artistic community in Ontario. However, this collection is not simply located in an Ontario politic, but is an indictment of Canada's supposed multicultural character.

In a bodacious challenge to Canadians, Philip dedicates *Frontiers* to Canada, "in the effort of (Canada) becoming a space of true be/longing." In essay after essay she details with clarity why Canada is currently not a space or home of "true be/longing" for African Canadians. In stark poetic verse, the introductory essay *Echoes In A Stranger Land* details a long process of exile and the struggle to find and define home. Philip details her own exile from Tobago, then Trinidad and her discomfort in Canada. However, her notion of exile does not end with Canada; she traces it back to the forced exile of Africans through the Middle passage to the Americas and evokes an Afrocentric perspective, linking Africanity not to geography but to mentality, the latter shaping the tone of this entire collection. For Philip, exile is not only geographical, it is also psychological.

In a reading from *Echoes* at the book's launch in November 1992, the essay's poetic and performative quali-

ties revealed its author's sense of African-Caribbean-Canadian-ness. Philip weaves together diverse issues that are of vital importance to African Canadians, such as police shootings, geography, identity and naming with a politics that works across and through borders. *Echoes*, which was written in Tobago, is the strongest essay in the book, exhibiting the multi-layered quality of Black postmodern identities.

Throughout this collection, notions of representation and equity are stressed. Philip's insistence that African Canadians and other people of colour are not adequately represented in, and on, important decision making bodies comes through as a strong and incisive criticism of Canadian arts funding practices. In *The "Multicultural" Whitewash: Racism in Ontario's Arts Funding System* Philip interviewed artists of colour, recording their experiences of dealing with arts councils. She also challenges artistic and aesthetic paradigms in a number of fields such as the visual arts, music and dance. Analyzing dominant interpretations of these fields, Philip argues cogently that Black artistic proposals are often poorly understood and thus unfavourably juried by funding bodies. Fully aware of the complexities of the ideological situation that she is addressing, Philip argues that Black artists and artists of colour should not be forced into categories that would locate their art as "folk" or "multicultural," identifying a lack of willingness among jurors to transcend a "folkloric" reading of proposals: "the work done by the type of Black artists I am describing here is often a challenge to, and a criticism of, the system, and must be differentiated from the 'heritage' type of activity that helps to foster the myth of our happy multicultural

RINALDO WALCOTT

reviews

family in Ontario." Philip's case for equity and representation is made strongly in this essay as well as in *Gut Issues in Babylon: Racism and Anti-racism in the Arts*.

In *Frontiers*, Philip's well known disagreements with Canadian arts funding bodies are presented. These essays demonstrate the tension-filled relationship that she must have with the Canadian cultural establishment. Despite the fact that her public indictments of racist practices in the culture industry are well warranted, her courage in taking on the very councils that she must apply to for funding is admirable. In the essays where Philip interviews and quotes other artists, it is clear that her experiences are shared. Hopefully her writings and actions will not be seen as the thoughts of one individual, but rather as one of many voices articulating a position of resistance and calling for change. While much of Philip's critique of the cultural establishment has been used by the mainstream press to "diss" her (a recent article by Joey Slinger in *The Toronto Star* referred to Philip as a novelist "no one knew of" until her encounter with June Callwood), the issues that she has raised are issues that must be seriously addressed if Canada is to become the place where exile ends and the possibility of a home for African Canadians can be envisaged.

In *Frontiers* Philip takes a polyvalent approach to the question of identity. Her analysis migrates from Canadian to Caribbean examples, and back again. In this way, Philip maps the complexity of an identity constituted from multiple sources. Throughout the anthology, Philip asserts seemingly disparate identities—African Caribbean, Tobagoian, Trinidadian and African Canadian—articulating the homelessness of exile. However, in many respects this assertion of multiple identities is a position of resistance and her assertion of African Canadian-ness carries with it the insistence that Canada is home. The book's dedication could be read as a demand that Canada fulfill the promise of providing a home. Philip's use of the work of other writers of African de-

scent (James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Walter Rodney, Angela Davis, Rasheed Areen and Ngugi Wa Thiongo to name a few) also points to the complexity of the politics of identity. The book is populated with references to other African writers and Philip's use of their work places her within a community with a notion of Afrocentric identity that is not bound by geographical borders, but rather, organized through a radical politics.

Although it could be argued that discussions of race, class, gender and sexual orientation are currently hot topics, *Frontiers* examines race and culture through gender and class in an informative, passionate, emotive and complex manner. Reading the book, one longs at times for more extensive coverage of these issues, perhaps drawing on other scholars to extend and deepen her arguments. At the same time the essays represent particular moments in Canadian cultural history, and revisions would probably rob them of the tone and urgency they exude. Philip's collection fits into a tradition that African American women have established. Writers like Alice Walker, June Jordan, the late Audre Lorde, as well as bell hooks and Michele Wallace have all published essays on cultural production, race and gender. *Frontiers* breaks ground for the development of a similar tradition in Canada that would see other African Canadian writers record what it means to do cultural work within a white hegemony.

Philip's use of language stands out as one of the most striking aspects of the collection. Her concern goes beyond simple revisions and inversions; using language to play with and locate identities, and to subvert and shift meanings taken for granted. In *Women and Theft* for example, Philip's practice of going back to the etymology of words shifts the meaning to such an extent that in the process, the history and practice of capitalist relations and patriarchy is unmasked. She does not need statistics and other such devices to show how and why women are poor, in order to make a strong case. Working through the complexities of language has been a key

marker in Philip's fiction. In *She Ties Her Tongue*, *Her Silence Softly Breaks* (winner of the Casa de las Americas prize), a long poem about African cultural reclamation, Philip uses language to (re)construct cultural practices lost to Africans living in the Diaspora. Many of the essays in *Frontiers* indicate that the use of language is vital to understanding the colonial and racist constructions of people of colour. The language and the voice of the Caribbean rings throughout the essays, which go from standard English to Caribbean nation language (what Philip prefers to call demotic), in both tone and rhythm as well as sentence and phrase construction. Philip uses language deftly and her writing always demonstrates an engagement, struggle and tension with it. At the same time there is a belief in its transformative qualities.

In *Looking For Livingston*, she greets Livingston with the statement "Livingston I presume" before laying bare his exploits. After reading *Frontiers*, we can look at the many cultural events taking place in Ontario and elsewhere in this country and say "Canada I presume" as the essays lay bare the practices of the Canadian cultural establishment for close scrutiny and criticism. Philip's literary outspokenness on issues may be a factor in her lack of acceptance by the establishment. On a recent interview on TV Ontario's *Imprint*, host Daniel Richler did not ask Philip one question about herself as a writer. But M. Nourbese Philip is in their faces and there can be no turning back.

Rinaldo Walcott is a dreadlocked city cyclist and graduate student.

The Inside Out Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival of Toronto

Presented by the Inside Out Collective

The Euclid Theatre and Cinecycle

May 6-16, 1993



Still from *Voices of the Morning*, Meena Nanji, video, 1992, U.S.A.

Marking its third year in the Toronto film/video festival circuit, the Inside Out Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival represents one of the rare occasions for short independent work by lesbian and gay artists to be screened and seen. This year's festival was an eclectic array of work, provocative and challenging in both subject and matter, themes and aesthetic approaches. This review primarily concentrates on a selection of work from the women's programmes which articulates a critical discourse about low budget independent practice as it originates from concerns with issues of race, sexuality, desire and cultural identity.

It is no coincidence that most of the work by women programmed in this year's festival has been produced on video as opposed to film, video being,

by far, a more accessible and less costly medium. The concern with a high production value is generally not a priority for independent lesbian producers who don't want to incur high budgets or become solely dependent upon arts councils and other public agencies for funding, but who want to get the message out. The aim is to shoot with a low budget and low tech in order to get work completed and seen in a relatively short period of time. This strategy is necessary in most instances since there is an enormous demand for work produced by lesbian artists (in particular, lesbians of colour) at film and video festivals. Offsetting the lack of high production value, lesbian producers working on low budget video projects are challenged to create a counter practice and mode of "story-telling" that engages their audi-

ences. Cheryl Dunye and Sadie Benning, for instance, are two such producers whose work is low tech and low budget but has proved nonetheless engaging. Both artists use a candid direct address style which resists and clearly subverts a conventional narrative mode. The act of "story-telling" in Dunye and Benning's work assumes an autobiographical voice and authorship, and attempts to engage lesbian audiences via humour based on momentary recognition and identification with the situations and codes of lesbian cultural identity.

In Inside Out's "Fluttering Objects" programme, the object was desire: the various permutations, visual styles and tastes of lesbian erotic yearnings. This programme was an all-taste foray into the gamut of lesbian desire; from the budding of newly awakened desire to SM, to concerns with the construction of the erotic in interracial relationships. Clare Beavan's *Suddenly Last Summer* is a comic foray into the "Martina Syndrome"—the dyke lust-mania over the tennis star player and the wave of adoration from fans who travel across the world to catch a glimpse of their icon. Through the commentary from an investigative roving dyke "reporter," *Suddenly Last Summer* offers witty insights into the world of dyke sports enthusiasts and the star athletes who become objects of their lust.

The emergence of self and the erotic expression of desire are the central concerns of Neesha Dosanjh's *Beyond/Body/Memory* and Cheryl Farthing's *Rosebud*. *Beyond/Body/Memory* is a promising first film which explores the internal transformation of a South Asian woman through the external repetitive imagery of a self-caressing and cleansing and the touch of another woman. *Rosebud* is a smart and wittily



Still from *Beyond/Body/Memory*, Neesha Dosanji, video, 1993, Canada.

executed film about the awakening of a young woman's desire. The initial voyeuristic sighting of her two sexy dyke neighbours stirs a young woman's imagination and desire as she begins to explore her own sensuality in the private and public spheres of her life.

The four tapes *I've Never*, *Vanilla Sex*, *What's the Difference Between a Yam and a Sweet Potato?* and *Brown Sugar Licks Snow White* were part of an installation curated by New York video artist Shu Lea Cheang. "Each of these short works explores the realities, fantasies, and contradictions that figure in interracial lesbian relationships." The interracial focus of these four tapes is specifically between Black and white lesbians. While each of these tapes is provocative in its own right, it is necessary to realize that the monolithic notion of the term "lesbians of colour" can and does subsume the racial and cultural differences among lesbians of colour. When "lesbians of colour" enter into interracial relationships with each other, there is a different set of variables at work than with white women.

Pamela Jenning's *I've Never* and Cheryl Dunye's *Vanilla Sex* both attempt

to explore the contradictions and differences involved in Black and white women's sexuality. In *I've Never*, sensuous imagery of the rituals of washing and cleansing of the body is counterpoint with the voice-over of a Black woman's speaking about the "exoticization" of her sensuality in interracial relationships. *Vanilla Sex* is a quirky take on the contradictory meanings of the term "vanilla sex." In one camp, "vanilla sex" refers to the SM label referring to sex without toys and, in another camp, "vanilla sex" refers to Black women dating white women. Although the video explores the dualistic meaning of "vanilla sex," it however, remains implicit in the assumption that only white lesbians engage in SM. There is no attempt to further explore the contradiction that Black lesbians and other lesbians of colour also practice SM.

In *What's the Difference Between A Yam and a Sweet Potato?*, the visual metaphor is a recipe consisting of yam and sweet potato in interracial relationships between Black and white women. The representation of colour, body, sex and desire is humorously explored via the suggestive imagery and text of the

recipe; words such as squeeze/stir/grind/roll/knead/rub/smack/mix are cleverly juxtaposed with the nude bodies in various postures. The fourth tape of the interracial series, *Brown Sugar Licks Snow White*, is a theoretical rumination on the politics of desire and racial difference.

Maureen Bradley's *She Thrills Me* is a titillating and humorous tape which interweaves interviews with sexual imagery as a means of locating a space and presence for lesbians to talk about their sexuality and their pleasures, from vanilla to SM. *It Wasn't Love* is yet another piece by festival teen star Sadie Benning. Playing with roles and labels as only Sadie Benning could, eclectic fragments of pop/funk music and aesthetics are married with sentimental recollections and images of erotic role-play.

The final piece in the "Fluttering Objects" programme is Su Friedrich's *Rules of the Road*, a melancholy lamentation of the loss of a relationship reenacted through the history of a shared beige station wagon. The repetitious imagery of the beige station wagon on the highway functions as the signifier for the cyclical pattern of obsessive relationships and the difficulties of letting go. The dragged out style "ending" of the film is predicated upon the lesbian narrator's internal struggles with resolving and putting some "closure" to a relationship that has run its course.

A further programme that explores lesbian desire, fantasy and sexuality from yet another angle is "Wicked Women," an exploration of some of the wild variations of the cerebral and physical boundaries of lesbian sex and sexuality. The title of the programme borrows the "wicked" from Azian Nurudin's *Wicked Radiance*, a black and white tape structured around the "Wayang Kulit" — Malaysian shadow puppet theatre's characteristic interplay of light and shadow. Through the use of a low tech aesthetic (Fisher Price PXL video), Nurudin attempts to articulate, via the form, a means of reconciling fragments of both a cultural and sexual identity. Symbols from the artist's Islamic cultural background are countered with SM rituals as a means of bridging the two entities and articulating a space for the

expression of both in the artist's life. The concern with ritualized sexual representation is very much present in Charlene Boudreau's *Perilous Liaisons*, an in-your-face series of silent tableaux depicting the fetishized SM body in numerous erotic postures and positions. *Perilous Liaisons* attempts to radicalize the image and expression of lesbian sexuality and desire through explicit sexual reference.

These three short tapes redefine the wild, the wicked and the clichéd in the representation of lesbian sexuality. Jennifer Montgomery's short experimental pseudo investigative-style video *Do You Think A Candidate Should Look Like This?* is a look at the would-be scandalous and illicit secrets about write-in presidential candidate and lesbian poet Eileen Myles. The potential for narrative pleasure for the lesbian viewer is ever present in Susan Muska's *Stafford Story*, a tale of a sex-club encounter related by a female subject with a penchant for strap-ons. In Gloria Toyun Park's *Red Lolita* the devices of voice-over, text fragments and Asian B-movies are used to self-consciously reflect on the effects of erotic clichés. The cliché in this case is based on Nabokov's icon of pubescent sexuality, Lolita.

The programme of "Domestic Bliss" grapples with adventures and misadventures on the home front via "reflections on food, clothes and other ritualized aspects of everyday life." This collection of short film and video, by mainly African American lesbian artists, explores with comic sensibility the emotional and erotic complexities of living and loving as lesbians. Cheryl Dunye's *The Potluck and the Passion*, and J.E. Dunlap and Adrienne Jenik's *What's the Difference Between A Yam and A Sweet Potato?* (already discussed) are the two most provocative and funny tapes in this programme. Dunye's *The Potluck and the Passion* adroitly fashions a narrative structure based on the misadventures of arranging a dinner party among a couple's friends. *Potluck* comments on the politics of coupledness and interracial relationships via the unravelling of emotions, jealousy, insecurities and passion that is unleashed at the "celebratory" dinner party of a couple who

have been together for a year.

The programme of "Nitrate Kisses" borrows its title from dyke experimental filmmaker Barbara Hammer's first feature film. Programmed along with *Nitrate Kisses* is *Voices of the Morning*, a brilliant first video by Meena Nanji.

Shot in black and white, *Voices of the Morning* is a poetic and sensual rumination of the yearnings for self-fulfillment amidst the strictures of an Islamic cultural tradition. A series of fragmented tableaux evokes a woman's (played by Mississippi Masala star Sarita Choudhury) search for voice and a personal space. In a terse and passionate voice-over, Nanji conveys the exile's sense of displacement between two cultures; the internal and external struggles between shame and acceptance.

Like *Voices of the Morning*, *Nitrate Kisses* is also a poetic and powerful reflection of history, memory and sexual identity. *Nitrate Kisses* cleverly reclaims and locates a space for the inclusion of lesbian and gay history and desire via the use of archival footage in concert with explicit imagery of a variety of cou-

Still from *I Never Danced The Way Girls Were Supposed To*, Dawn Suggs, Video, 1992, U.S.A.
Photo PtaH Hotep/Tehtuti Images.



The Inside Out Festival of Toronto (Part 2)

Presented by the Inside Out Collective
The Euclid Theatre and Cinecycle
May 6-16, 1993

One of the themes running through the 1993 Inside Out Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival was the issue of public images and how they affect our sense of self. Or should I say selves? For if one thing is becoming clear, it is that there is no single gay or lesbian identity. Our communities are too diverse, and our individual identities too fluid to sustain that fiction.

Maureen Bradley, in her ten minute video, *Queer Across Canada*, uses a travelling weather girl motif to report sightings—not of heavenly cumulus and high pressure ridges, but of the more earthly, though nonetheless varied incarnations of the lesbian body.

In her own mind, Bradley is a dyke; to her mother she's gay, while her boss considers her to be a gay woman. Checking out the climate on the western Canadian front, Bradley discovers that in Edmonton she's a lesbian, in the North she's simply gay, while in rural Alberta she is an unmodified woman, plain and simple. In certain macho tourist spots her identity is clouded still further when she is seen as a boy, and thus divested completely of her subordinate gender. By the time she arrives in Vancouver, she is ready to be queer.

Playing chameleon is a survival strategy. Everyone does it, but the process is more complex for lesbians and gays, who have many occasions to "pass" as different selves. The temporary acceptance of certain problematic identities—such as boy instead of grown woman or lesbian—is a means of jostling the boundaries of the self, si-

multaneously playing out and subverting social expectations.

As Bradley points out, identities are no less real for being constructed. Both fluid and intermittently sturdy, they emerge from the dynamic interaction of personal psychology, media manipulation and community consensus (and we all know how inherently unstable that is). Kind of like all those hot, cold and warm fronts in the weather system.

In reference to the media, Bradley asks "can a lesbian actually live in televisual space?"—a question that would have been almost inconceivable twenty years ago—and concludes, "only if she is a gay woman" like Sandra Bernhard on the *Roseanne* show. When it comes to naming, there's still a massive phobia about the "L" word in the mainstream media—recent covers of *New York* and *Newsweek* magazines notwithstanding. One can either view TV's gay women as sell-outs and compromisers, or as lesbians in camouflage who save the community from total invisibility. By accepting even a camouflaged presence on the small screen, performers such as Bernhard communicate to both lesbians and non-lesbians that we exist, thus ensuring our survival in the real and reel worlds.

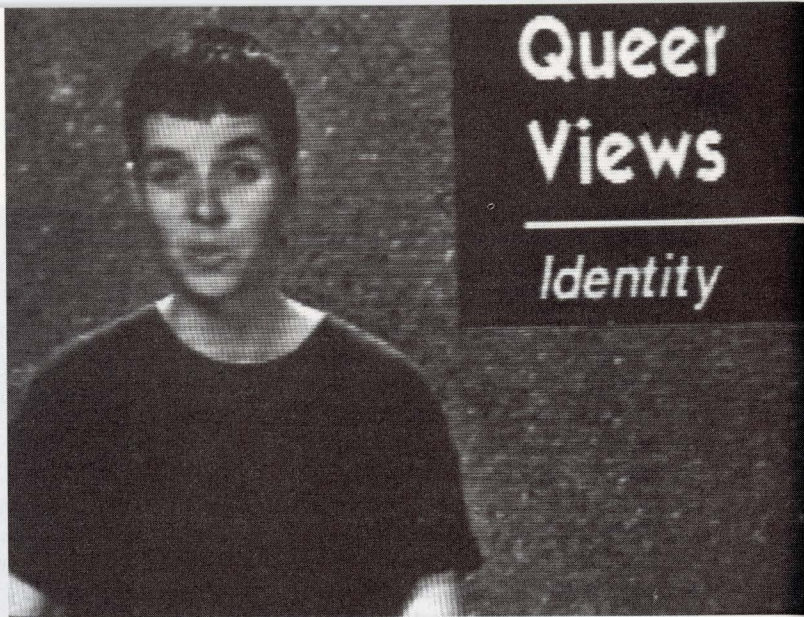
Speaking of the reel world: *We've Been Framed*, by British videomaker Cheryl Farthing presents a brief history of the often covert lesbianism in movies, starting with *Pandora's Box* in 1929. This screen history is interspersed with commentary by women of various ages, races and colours about

the images of lesbianism available to them in the movies.

As Farthing indicates, it's only very recently that we have been in the frame at all, let alone with any frequency. Though more doesn't necessarily mean better: with few exceptions (*Desert Hearts*, *I've Heard The Mermaids Singing*, *Liana*, etc.), lesbians in mainstream movies are depicted as blackmailers, murderers and psychopathic predators—all this on top of being nefarious recruiters. They are usually white, emotionally immature and sexually enticing to men. With little or nothing in the mediascape to counterbalance these fictions, films such as *Basic Instinct* imprison the lesbian community, framing them in an exotic, negative space within the popular imagination.

The absence of positive lesbian imagery in Hollywood films is no accident. Conscious decisions were made to cut all the lesbian scenes from Allan Moyle's 1980 film *Times Square*—albeit with the excuse of protecting public sensibilities, narrative structure or commercial viability of the project. The doctoring began even earlier with the recent *Fried Green Tomatoes*. The novel's lesbian relationship was excised from the film script.

Hollywood and Homophobia by British director Clare Beavan asks how to deal with a commercial film industry which is using more and more gay and lesbian imagery in increasingly restrictive contexts. As outing advocate Michelangelo Signorile points out, in



Still from *Queer Across Canada*, Maureen Bradley, video, 1993, Canada. Courtesy of V Tape.

Hollywood, gay and lesbian have become shorthand for deviant, devious and destructive. Again and again, characters are shown not as villains who happen to be gay, but villainous because they are gay.

David Ehrenstein, film critic for *The Advocate*, concurs: "*Basic Instinct* is a film in the tradition of many other films in which gay and lesbian characters are seen as symptoms—as symptomatic of psychopathology." Screenwriter Ted Tally, speaking of his own screenplay for *Silence of The Lambs*, demurs, saying the killer in *Silence*...was not necessarily gay, and that narrative and other constraints made it difficult to explore that character in depth.

But Ehrenstein isn't buying. "The signifiers are there for one purpose only. They are there to get a response out of the audience that I'm sure Ted Tally is fully aware of. All he would have to do is drop in some Saturday night where *Silence of The Lambs* is playing, and hear the audience yell 'kill the faggot'.... There are negatives within our lives which need to be examined, but in a complex manner, not in a reflexive manner...the instant villain. Just add gay or lesbian and stir—you've got yourself a villain." Interestingly, Thomas Harris, in his exhaustively researched novel—the basis for the screenplay—takes considerable pains to show that the murderer, Buffalo Bill, is neither gay nor, though he's applied for a sex change, a genuine transsexual. His "psychological profile" as a serial killer is specifically heterosexual, and he's actually a homophobe who, while thinking he's gay, has already murdered several gay men. As Ehrenstein is evidently aware, conveying a character this complex would require a narrative subtlety that is absent from most Hollywood filmmaking.

For Tom Kalin, director of *Swoon*, a retelling of the infamous Leopold and Loeb child murder case, the basic problem with *Silence of The Lambs* was exactly this failure of artistic nerve. "I think the thing that I felt was missing in that film was a real exploration of a kind of gender politics about what it means for a man to dress up in the skin of a woman. I mean that's the most literal

kind of transvestism and a kind of transvestism which is psychically extremely disturbing. Had we seen Buffalo Bill dressed in the skin of real women trying to somehow act out his identity of being a woman I think it would have been really profoundly disturbing and would have harkened back to the criminal case it was based on, which basically concerned a man whose identity was either asexual or heterosexual. I think that was mainly for me a kind of looseness about the material and not being vigilant separating sexuality away from gender, which is something I think that really needs to be done. I don't think gender and sexuality are inextricably linked together."

There are plenty of gay people working in all areas of the media and popular culture. Many are closeted and go along with the homophobia around them, either because of internalized homophobia or simply to save their careers. If their actions or non-actions are doing harm, do they deserve to have their closets protected?

To out or not to out is the question posed by Toronto video artist Andrew Paterson, in *Pink In Public*. He plays

Patrick Anderson, an entertainment reporter who is determined to turn his puff piece on heartthrob of the month, Blade Carson, into a vehicle for outing not just the man's sexuality but his right wing political associations as well.

With serious intent and comic effects, the video discusses the pros and cons of outing. It asks whether the money made by the right wing media from protecting closeted celebrities while simultaneously titillating the public is sufficient justification for outing. Does outing an individual help combat homophobia? Will increased visibility alone do this? By attacking an individual, albeit one in power, how are the structures challenged? Outing, says one character, reduces an individual to a single identity. True enough, I say, but this is because mainstream society sees gay and lesbian people as one-dimensional, not because of the outing process itself. The arguments continue, and by the end we know where Anderson, Paterson's alter ego, is positioned. But I remain unconvinced.

I have two fundamental objections to outing. First, it violates the principle of freedom of choice—something that

Production still from *Pink in Public*, Andrew James Paterson (dir.), video, 1993, Canada. [l: A. Paterson, r: R. Naismith.] Photo Ted Myerscough.



gays and lesbians have long been fighting for. Sure, in order to effect political change, it would help if we were all out of the closet. But no one can presume to know all the reasons why a particular individual refuses to come out, or what personal and professional cost they are able to bear. Unless someone is actively harming the community, persuasion, not coercion, should be the tactic of choice.

My second objection is that arguments about outing take time and energy away from more pressing issues such as AIDS, gay bashing, the rise of neo-Nazis and other right wing organizations, health care for lesbians and gays, to name a few. It's true, as Patrick Anderson says, that "the cat must be let out of the bag or else it suffocates" — but let each of us decide when to emerge. Meow.

Randi Spires is an arts writer and broadcaster, and is currently host of *Frontiers in Print* and *Caffeine Free* on CIUT community radio.



Images 93

Presented by Northern Visions
Euclid Theatre, Toronto
April 23–May 1, 1993



Still from *Lockjaw*, Paulette Phillips, 16mm, 1992, Canada.

Northern Visions' annual *Images* festival draws together some of Toronto's diverse communities of cultural producers to celebrate the "independent voice" in film and video. With no more specific agenda than this, *Images 93* proved to be a vital reminder of the strength of independent media within Canada. Presenting ninety-six films spread out over twenty-three programmes, *Images 93* offered audiences a combination of guest-curated and "New Works" programmes (the latter culled from an open call for submissions); a workshop series entitled "Speaking New Media"; and a retrospective of the films of Robert Frank. While slowly maturing into an international festival—with strong showings this time around from Third World Newsreel, the New York City based distributor of videotapes and films by artists of colour—Canadian work remains firmly at centre stage. In

fact, *Images 93* suffered, if anything, from a desire to be all-inclusive by including tapes and films which have been screened a number of times in Toronto.

What emerged from this large and diverse gathering of films and tapes, at first, seemed to be somewhat of a paradox—it was the verbal rather than the visual that dominated this festival of "Images." Whether spoken, written or sung, in monologues, dialogues or scrolling as text, an overwhelming number of films and tapes relied upon language as a vehicle for expression. In some of the best of these works, Lisa Mann's *Seven Lucky Charms*, for example, the relationship between the verbal and the visual was symbiotic, offering viewers an experience which was at once thoughtful and visceral. In one of the worst, *The Raft of the Medusa* by Julian Samuel, the image was an after-

thought. It was almost one hour into the tape before oddly placed special effects were utilized in an effort to add a visual dimension—leaving one to wonder why it was produced as a tape rather than as a written text. And yet, despite its faults, *The Raft of the Medusa* remains a stubborn reminder that for many of the artists represented in the festival, the image alone is no longer a sufficient means through which to tell their stories.

In *Megalopolis*, author Celeste Olalquiaga describes the postmodern experience as a displacement of the verbal by the visual.¹ Bombarded with a virtual "Niagara" of technologically constructed images—from television, advertising, films and video games—the visual has become the standard against which we measure individual identity. Created by a "dominant culture" which controls both the means of its production and its dissemination, contemporary visual imagery frames even our most personal inner thoughts and desires, making it difficult to distinguish between artificial constructs and subjective experiences. For Olalquiaga these "ready-made" images are commodities which are easily interchangeable, characterized by proliferation and consumption.² Lost within a landscape of the visual which renders the self defenceless, individual identity likewise becomes a "free floating commodity" composed of fragments of discarded images. Language, the act of "speaking out" or "giving voice," delineates a boundary, a personal space where subjective experience can begin to be validated. But as the visual increasingly displaces the verbal, these boundaries become more difficult to stake out.

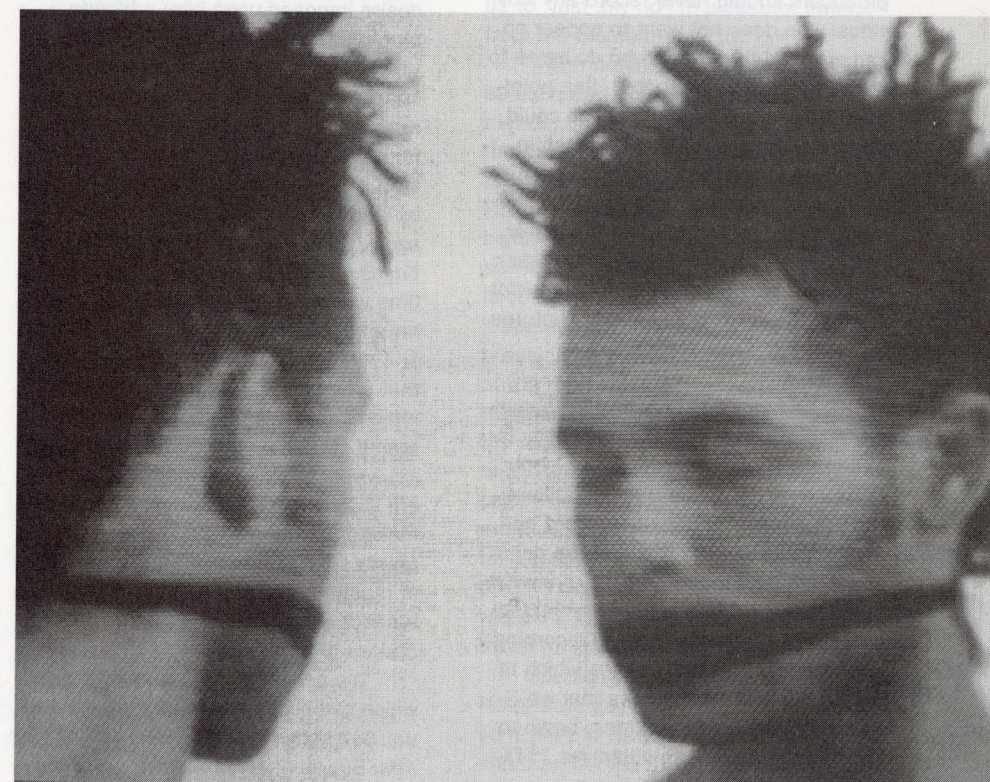
At *Images*, this last point was most succinctly expressed in *th... mm... bb...* (1989), an animation by John Bowyer-Smyth and Neal Davis, presented as part of the programme "Crossection" curated by Ellen Besen and Tom Knott. In *th... mm... bb...*, a man who is literally constructed of fragments desperately tries to speak. However, each time he begins to talk he is reconstructed, his image continually changes and alters throughout the film. The very act of speaking is a struggle, albeit in vain, against the fluidity of his own identity.

Likewise, *Lockjaw* (1992) by Paulette Phillips, offers a potent metaphor for the (post)modern condition. The protagonist attributes her ailment—lockjaw—to the stress of living within an artificial environment. In *lockjaw*, the jaws become firmly closed, making the process of speaking extremely painful. Recognizing that language and, hence, experience, has been reduced to a series of clichés ("the shit of language"), she engages in a "dialogue" with a blinking LCD screen, an odd audiovisual hybrid, questioning the possibility for meaningful verbal exchange in an image-laden world.

But the very act of speaking, no matter how difficult, is—to borrow from cultural theorist bell hooks—an "act of resistance" through which oppressed individuals move from powerless object to self-defining subject.³ A number of films and tapes presented as part of *Images* attested to the need for oppressed or otherwise marginalized groups and individuals to "give voice." In *Trigger Finger*, (1990) by Melodie Calvert, the pain in speaking

that the main character demonstrates is actual rather than metaphorical, the result of a horrifying real life experience—sexual abuse at the hands of her father. Constructed in a highly subjective manner, shot with a shaky camera which is sometimes out of focus and which, at other times, oddly frames its subjects, *Trigger Finger* instills in the audience the same sense of discomfort the main character exhibits. Revealing only fragments of her life and her abuse, the tape signals the beginning of this woman's healing process. The liberating power inherent in the act of "speaking out" was celebrated in the opening night crowd pleaser, *Samuel and Samantha on "The Emancipation of All"* (1992) by Jorge Lozano & Samuel Lopes. As we witness Samuel's transformation into his alter ego, drag queen and performer Samantha, we are treated to a witty, raucous, controversial and extremely entertaining rumination on a variety of subjects affecting the Latin gay community in Toronto. The tapes end with Samuel/Samantha joyfully

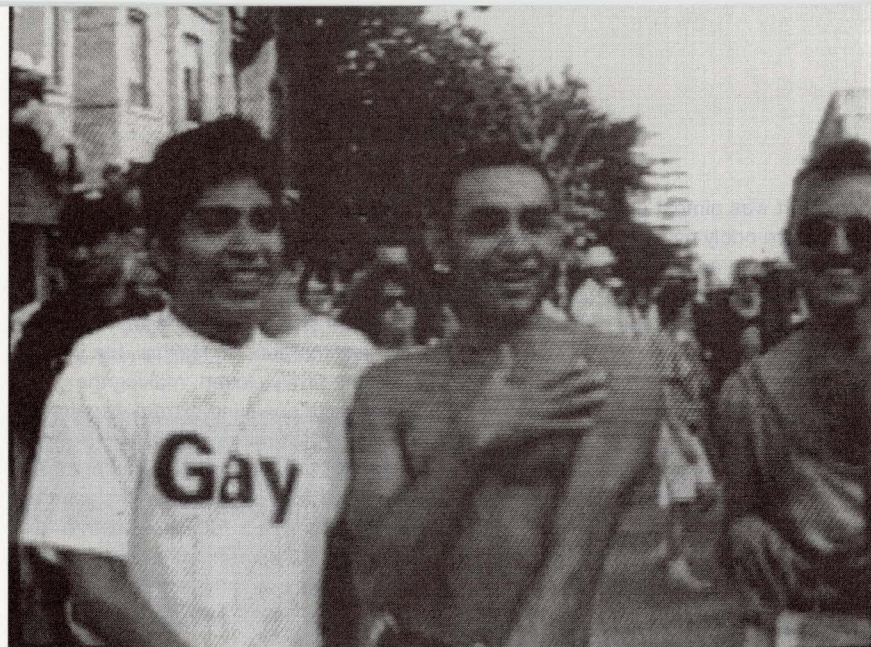
Still from *Gender, Lace and Glass*, David Findlay, video, 1992, Canada. Courtesy of V Tape.



and vehemently declaring all that he/she is—Latino, gay, a drag queen—and demanding respect. Defiantly speaking out from a marginalized position, *Samuel and Samantha* is a true testament to the personal as political.

However, the very act of speaking out also threatens those who would prefer the oppressed to remain powerless, to remain voiceless. For an individual from a marginalized community the mere act of talking to a camera, in lending both voice and image, can place her at tremendous risk. Toronto filmmaker and prostitute's rights advocate, Gwendolyn, brought this point forward following the screening of *Beijo Na Boca / A Kiss on the Mouth* (1987) by Jacira de Melo. *Beijo Na Boca* is a documentary produced in Brazil which features on-the-street interviews with prostitutes working in the Lixu or "Garbage" district of São Paulo. Interrupting the introduction to her own film, *Prowling By Night*, Gwendolyn noted that while she basically liked de Melo's tape, she was uncomfortable with two things—images of women covering their faces so as not to be on camera, and a street interview with a prostitute on police brutality. Gwendolyn reminded the audience that producers should never record any individual who does not want to appear on camera, and that those who do agree to speak need to be protected. She pointed out that the São Paulo police could take retaliation against the women interviewed in the tape at any time—next week, next month or next year. The safety of the individual, and the power of the camera to exploit, must be taken into consideration at all times, especially when the video or filmmaker ventures outside of her own (privileged) community.

On a more personal level, the camera also offers artists the possibility for self-exploration. The video diary, popularized by artist Sadie Benning, allows the videomaker to bring both word and image firmly into the realm of the personal, creating in the process a new "visual language." In a culture dominated by visual imagery it is only by recording new images, personal images which attest to our own experiences that we can, as Olalquiaga concludes, begin to "reach others and see ourselves."⁴ Di-



Still from *Samuel and Samantha* on "The Emancipation of All," Jorge Lozano and Samuel Lopes, video, 1992, Canada. Courtesy of V Tape.

aristic tapes produced by a diverse group of makers of colour actively working to reject the imagery of the dominant culture, form the core of " 'I' Witness," the strongest "New Works" programme within *Images 93*. *Gender, Lace and Glass* by David Findlay (1992), arguably the most powerful work in this programme, is a painfully beautiful tape in which a young Black man rejects the patriarchal image of desire imposed upon him: a blonde, blue-eyed, heterosexual white woman. Verbally questioning the reality of this image and its relationship to his own experience ("how separate you were from the everyday concerns of my life...or anyone's life"), he frees himself by literally tearing apart the white image which has engulfed his fantasy life. *Edges*, (1992) a raw, sexy tape by first time video artist Ayanna Udongo could have benefited from a screening within " 'I' Witness." Like the producers in that programme, Udongo is resisting an image imposed upon her under a patriarchal system—that of the "good girl." Recognizing the oppression inherent in this image—good girls don't make it in a man's world—she rewrites her identity, offering up images of masturbation and a butch-like countenance—and boldly declares "I choose to be a bitch."

The call for a new visual language which can accurately represent individual, subjective experience is nothing new. But as direct broadcast satellites

prepare to beam hundreds of channels of television into our homes, it is vital that a diverse community of film and videomakers stake out and lay claim to a territory amidst this crowded visual landscape. For while the process of coming to voice is an important step in individual identity formation, in order to reach others, it is paramount that a variety of voices be heard, a variety of images be seen. It is only in the distribution of these images and words, in placing them "out there," that alternative versions of experience become validated. Festivals like *Images 93* offer artists and audiences alike a safe haven where a new discourse can begin.

Laura McGough is a video artist and curator, currently residing in Buffalo, New York.

NOTES

In writing this article, I have greatly benefited from conversations with Kika Thorne and Chris Hill.

¹ Celeste Olalquiaga, *Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 4.

² Ibid., p. 4.

³ bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking feminist, thinking black* (Boston: South End Press), p. 12.

⁴ Olalquiaga, p.93.

RANDI SPIRES

"The only thing I can ask for is forgiveness."

Still from *Non, je ne regrette rien (No Regret)*, Marlon Riggs, video, 1992, USA.

Tim Miller Marlon Riggs

As presented at Images 93
Presented by Northern Visions
Euclid Theatre, Toronto
April 23–May 1, 1993

Body Language, one of twenty programmes of the sixth annual *Images* festival held in Toronto, articulates the way the male body speaks and is spoken of in Western society. Although all bodies, male and female, are biological entities, our understanding of them and thus of ourselves is not a direct and natural process but is mediated by cultural and political forces.

For over a decade, in such works as *My Queer Body*, *Postwar*, *The High Cost of Living* and *Survey of Human Happiness*, American performance artist Tim Miller has been exploring what it means to be gay in a post-Stonewall, yet still puritanical, United States. Using a bare bones approach—he is armed with only his voice, his frequently barbed and humorous words and his expressive and often naked body—Miller posits the body, especially the queer body as a site of pleasure and a place of pain, a vehicle of expression and a conduit of repression.

In these parts, Miller is known more by reputation than by experience. He is, after all, one of the NEA Four, that quartet of performance artists

who, due to pressure from right wingers such as Jesse Helms, had their grants from the National Endowment for the Arts withdrawn. Three of the four are gay or lesbian and all of them do work which is socially charged and sexually challenging.

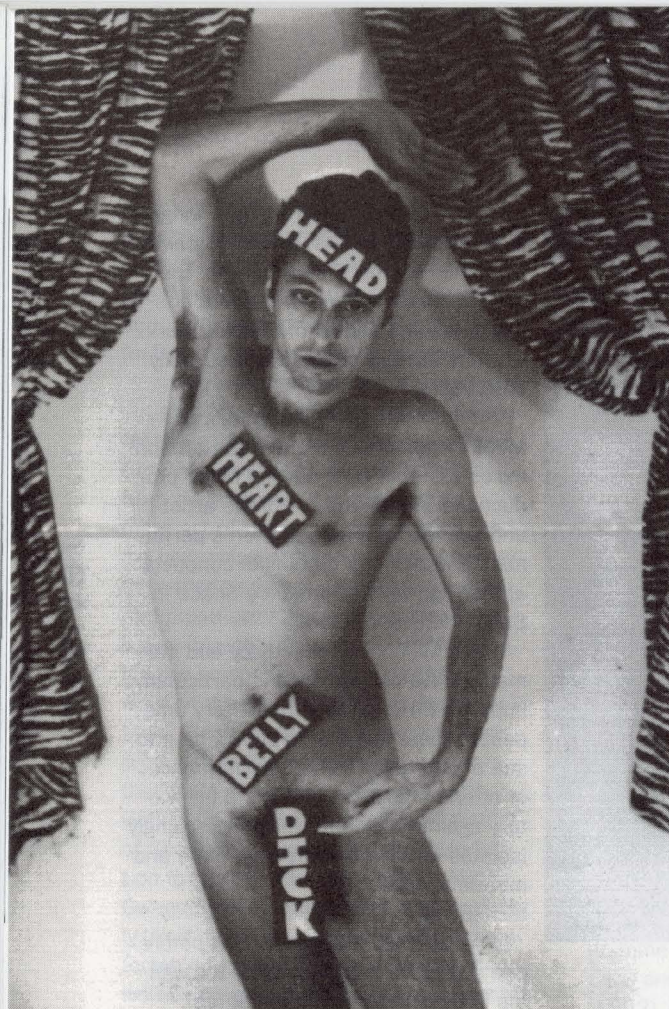
Tim Miller: Loud and Queer, by Montreal filmmaker Richard L. Harrison mixes excerpts from several Miller productions with interviews of the artist and scenes from the gay men's performance workshops that Miller conducts at the Highway Performance Space in Santa Monica, California.

For Miller, the immediacy and intimacy of live performance is particularly important. He believes that every time people come together in public, be it to see a film, enjoy a stage performance, or attend a political rally, it's a tiny victory against a culture which increasingly isolates its members through more and more elaborate technology.

Miller's work suggests that before one can move with assurance through the body politic one must first feel strong and comfortable within one's own physical self. This is difficult to achieve in a culture that keeps telling us to "just say no" to pleasure, almost from the moment of birth.

Miller believes it was not obscenity as such that provoked Helms and his friends, but a puritanical revulsion for the naked body, not only Miller's, but also Robert Mapplethorpe's and Karen Finley's. Miller seems to be splitting hairs in that, for people as repressed as Helms, public nakedness of any kind is obscene. The maintenance of power, it seems, requires that this sort of repression be enacted with the complicity of the repressed. However, I do agree with him that the real obscenity lies in the fact that, in Jesse Helms' home state alone, the tobacco industry receives handouts equal to four times the entire NEA budget. As he says, half a million needlessly diseased lungs are passed over without a second thought while the image of a naked man sends these functionaries into shock.

Speaking about his workshops, Miller says gay men have internalized so many prohibitions about themselves and their bodies that it has become es-



Still from Tim Miller: *Loud and Queer*, Richard Harrison, video, 1992, Canada.

sential for them to get together in a safe place (without women or non-gays) for an extended period of time (several hours, in order to begin to speak of things about which they have long kept silent) without alcohol or distractions. What he says is undoubtedly true, but at least gay men are men and, as such, are expected to be sexually active even if they do get mixed messages about what activities are allowable. Women, despite twenty-five years of feminist politics, are still disdained as sluts or whores if they show too much interest in sex or demonstrate a libido independent of male desire.

Miller's admiration for the mythopoetic men's movement of Robert Bly et al., is obvious. The men sing together, embrace one another and speak their pain. No doubt there is much needed healing going on in those sessions, but the problem with Bly and friends is that they focus on rediscovering, redefining and reasserting their "essential" masculinity rather than their particular individuality. These events are

all too often about the eradication of difference and the re-establishment of power. Women remain other and therefore subordinate. The grand old myths many leaders refer to are not timeless and universal but part of patriarchal structure and ideology.

Being grounded in the body, in the way that Miller is, forces you to confront its limitations, its morality, its vulnerability to time and to trauma. Most of us try to defer this as long as possible, but eventually circumstances force the issue. The HIV positive men featured in Marlon Riggs' videotape, *Non, je ne regrette rien (No Regret)*, deal with all this and more, with insight and dignity.

It is funny that, even though we supposedly live in a scientific age, an illness is never just an objective, clinical

phenomenon. Our understanding of illness is in fact social and political as well as physical. Certain diseases are thought, even by those who ought to know better, to signify the moral or lack of moral worth of the sufferers. Illnesses such as cancer and immune disorders are chaotic and unpredictable. They become a metaphor for what society fears most.

For those with Manichean inclinations and serious social prejudices, AIDS comes ready-made with two kinds of victims, worthy (children, transfusion recipients) and unworthy (gay men and I.V. drug users). For them the gay male "sin" is to have been blatantly sexual in a puritanical society. Drug users, like gay men, are preoccupied with "useless pleasure" in a society that distrusts felicity without concomitant pain.

The men in Riggs' video discuss a multiplicity of viewpoints, from informing their families and coming out in their churches, to dealing with the homophobia of their communities and to struggling with the guilt people inevitably feel after being repeatedly told that they brought their condition upon

themselves. When is a virus only a virus? Perhaps when it attacks all segments of society with equal ferocity. And perhaps not even then.

While most of the men are dealing with anger, guilt and other emotions, they continue to do inspiring and positive things. Some have become activists. One man insists that his mother respond to him and the news of his seropositivity, not as a mother, but as one human being to another. Its a daunting request. How many parent-child relationships would flourish if the parties had to relate to each other without the persuasion of blood ties? Despite everything, all these men have continued to grow and develop.

No Regret is not as formally inventive as certain of Riggs' previous works such as *Tongues Untied* and *Anthem*. He eschews much dazzle and simply lets his subjects speak in their own quietly moving ways. All the while Riggs has the camera lovingly caress the Black male body—first adoring its parts (eyes, mouth, hands), and then contemplating the whole. The poetry of the late Donald Woods and David Frechette provide a number of touching interludes, but their words don't have quite the power of those penned by Essex Hemphill. Hemphill's intense writings can be heard in *Tongues Untied*, *Anthem* and in Isaac Julien's film *Looking for Langston*.

But the last words of *No Regret* belong to Assoto Saint, a Haitian-American of great presence and charm. He feels no shame about his extensive erotic life and believably declares without a hint of false bravado:

"Yes, I was a part of the sexual revolution and I have No Regret. I did it all—the baths, the bars, the trucks—in Europe, in Africa, in the United States, in Canada. And I regret nothing."



GITANJALI 五神 月工 Mayworks 93

8th Annual Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts, Toronto. April 30–May 8, 1993

A Pedestrian Affair...Mayworks Takes It To The Streets

On a very basic level, most artists desire a moment when the air is filled with energy and expectation, knowing that they are connecting with an audience, and the dream of every audience is to connect in a meaningful way with an artist. All too often, when artists and activists are busy focusing on aesthetic and/or political concerns, this is forgotten. Really, the test of those concerns is the ability to convey the ideas in a way that will be meaningful and challenging. And it is the role of a festival to facilitate that process. Looking for a connected audience can be a hit-and-miss affair, especially for a festival with a challenging mandate such as *Mayworks*.

The *Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts*, now in its eighth year, has made conscious efforts to steer away from a tradition of "lefty artists talking to lefty unionists." By necessity rather than design, it is fulfilling its mandate: showcasing working class culture to non-union audiences. Union? Non-union? It doesn't seem to matter now, given that fifty per cent of *Mayworks* traditional union audiences are now out pounding the pavement as people who "wish they were working." This year, the festival featured thirty-three events and over 200 artists brought together by ten guest curators including, for the first time, people from Vancouver and Montreal.

A balm for depression, *Mayworks* has developed a gregarious and outgoing personality and found creative new sites and venues such as donut shops, sidewalks, telephone poles, subways, malls and almost every welfare and UIC office in Toronto. Although this places artists and their works at the mercy of chance, indifference, the elements and vandals, it has become a challenge to them to create work that is immediate, clear, concise, free of the hot air and pretension of the "art world," and without soapbox political posturing. Either you've found your moment (you have three seconds to grab their attention) or you haven't. That's it. Fail, and people are just going to walk on by.

An appropriate reflection of these aims was *Class Act*, a group of diverse, identically clad, blue overalled, guerrilla, street performance artists, curated and stage managed by Jenny Keith. Armed with slogans, portable music and hopeful advertising they appeared at numerous factories, welfare offices and sidewalks. Says Keith: "I wanted to curate a group of people who had experience in creating their own works rather than people working in the theatre...people who would go that extra length, who could pull it off to go into the streets." The group itself decided on topics and how these would work, each person developing a piece for five actors.

10:30 AM, Yonge and Bloor. Start with a bedtrack of traffic noise, construction and a group of Hare Krishna devotees crossing the street. Tari Ito is an installation and performance artist who has been brought here from Japan and her piece is called *The Race*. We have just been informed by the Royal Bank that we must move all of our belongings and equipment away from the building. It is spitting rain. The show begins with the sound of gleeful giddyup country and western music. The performers are all lined up at the starting line awaiting a signal from the ringmaster.

The Race begins in slow motion, the runners grasping for the finish line. The performance presents several symbolic life cycles, each one controlled by the whistle and gun of the ringmaster: work, a basketball game, a nightclub dance floor, a devouring lover's den, a wailing birth canal, and a war complete with killings and nuclear holocaust survivors. The destructive cycle ends when the players combine their energies to rid the ringmaster of his hat. (Ringmasters only have as much power as they are given by other people.) Although the piece itself was intriguing, and the performances were dynamic, the persona of this public audience left much to be desired; in fact, some walked right through the performance area, seemingly oblivious. Breaking through the imaginary sidewalk corridors of apathetic Torontonians is a feat. A much more receptive crowd of about forty people gathered at Queen and Bathurst across the street, giving the performance a round of applause.

"I wanted to do a whiteface," says Donald Carr, wiping shaving cream from his face. His piece *2B 2B*, in support of the recent protests around the staging of the musical *Showboat*, challenged advertising and other manufactured images that create stereotypes of Black people. Carr finds it particularly significant that the African Canadian communities are protesting *Showboat* so vigorously rather than their American counterparts; since American cultural icons and stereotypes created in the 1930s seem of little relevance to Canadians in the '90s. *2B 2B* offers a wacky collage of media stereotypes. The performers

begin as dutifully beautiful and happy, but they become progressively obscured by the lies they are immortalizing. In the end, Carr puts forth a dream of another image: Black angels bringing good tidings, reassuring people over and over to "Fear Not." However, the piece somehow felt like it should have been on a stage rather than on the street.

Rochelle Hum's meditative *Glass Senses* did not draw attention to itself, rather it seemed to exist without needing a response from an "audience." Placards, resembling protest signs, advertised for people to connect with their five senses, (add music from the Glass Orchestra to the bedtrack of street noise). See-no-evil monkeys, a traditional Asian symbol, made an appearance as a deterrent to indulgence in negative thinking. As a restful signature of repose, *Glass Senses* lent itself well to the parks where it was performed, but would get lost on a busy street.

Pedestrians, shopkeepers and street people saw Darren O'Donnell's blustery howling *Lonely Dog* creature marching past fruit and vegetable stands in Kensington Market. The reactions went from curiosity to puzzled smiles as the thing sprouted new heads and sometimes spoke quietly in Japanese. *Lonely Dog* presented a sped-up lesson in the frustration of rotating power dynamics of working within collective environments. The group pro-

gresses forward until someone stops, challenges the authority figure and then dancingly usurps the power, while the rest of the group processes and follows. At first encounter, the inner feelings of this eccentric ten-legged sculpture seemed familiar, but judging by the furrowed brows and smiles of passerby's, the meaning of it all remained somewhat elusive.

Louise Liliefeldt's *The Working* drew a similar response in an awkward tiny parking lot at the corner of Nassau and Spadina. Another "human sculpture," its clockworkings of monotony wound up, marked time and gave product in the form of a rock painted like a Canadian flag. This human machine found its "moment" between two Hydro trucks. As Kensington Market shoppers stood by and watched, the workers unravelled huge cables in perfect timing past the performers, their rhythm counterpointed by a shopkeeper's dog. One of the Hydro workers was overheard remarking "It was a great piece, but I can't understand it." Maybe it will take awhile for Torontonians to get used to guerrilla theatre, but in this case, they seemed to know when something had been made especially for them.

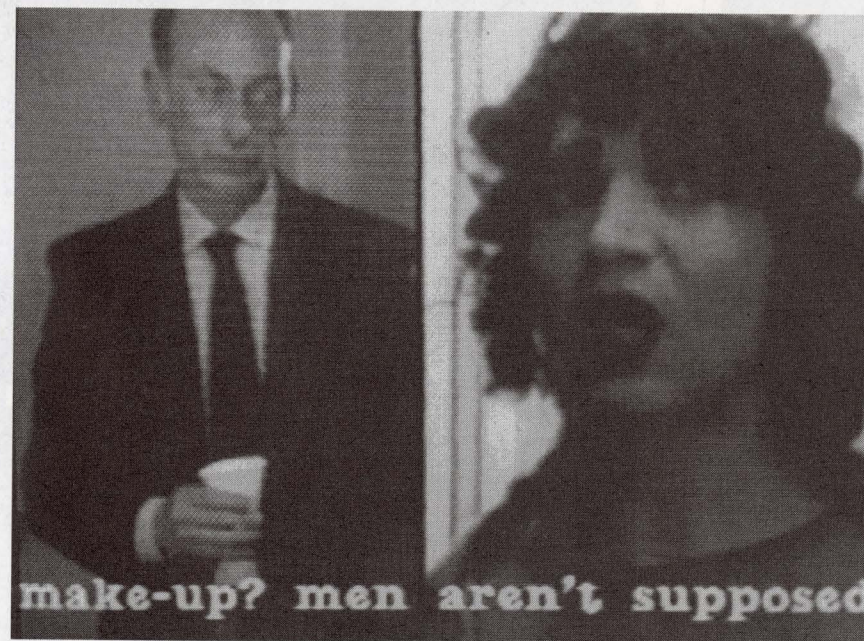
Although *Mayworks* advertised that it was highlighting work by Toronto's Asian communities (which would include those with origins from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia), it seems that they had bitten

off a lot more than they could chew, as the programming was almost entirely weighted towards people of Chinese origins. At a post-festival evaluation, one attendee pointed out the importance in the future of connecting with labour movements within designated communities, rather than just their communities at large.

Okay, so *Mayworks* itself may have things to learn, but the event did produce a stunning set of black and white street posters called *Sweat Off Our Backs*, curated by Marilyn Jung. Describing herself as more of a facilitator in this instance than a curator, Jung did not want to impose her own agenda, and instead selected the artists on the basis of geographical criteria: two from Toronto, one each from Vancouver and Montreal. The diverse set of posters reflects a Diaspora that can be found worldwide in various Chinatowns, which, as Jung explains, tend to stay comfortably the same, despite each wave of immigration. The posters went up in various Chinatowns in the city, campuses, Chinese name centres (Tai Chi and Kung Fu clubs), as well as community centres in Toronto and Vancouver. Again, with a public not accustomed to seeing art in the streets, they were not sure of the meaning of these posters, which did not advertise anything. Although there was no structure for audience participation, such as a place to discuss the issues that the posters brought up, the public response can perhaps be measured by how rapidly the posters were removed from the telephone poles as, presumably, they found their way into people's living rooms.

While working completely independently of one another, the artists, not surprisingly, came up with similar themes: the documentation of a working history and the validation of memory.

Brenda Joy Lem's *You Can Take The Girl Out Of Toisan: But You Can't Take Toisan Out Of The Girl* combined the humour of its title, a romantic and lyrically composed image of rural Chinese farm women, with garden variety family snapshots. Jim Woo remembers and celebrates the over 600 lives lost during the construction of the Canadian



Still from *Double Shift*, Bruce La Bruce, video, 1993.

Pacific Railway, with the prominent and sentimental precision of a social realist style. Ana Chang brings forth lived contradictions by juxtaposing a snapshot of a tender moment between a mother and child behind the counter of a grocery store gently buoyed up by four ghost-like hands, with its harsh title, *Taste All The Bitterness Of A Hard Life*. In *Sound East Strike West*, Mary Sui Yee Wong validates dreams that never came into fruition by showing a snapshot of her father holding up a certificate of appreciation.

While Jung is pleased with the favourable response to the series, it remained difficult for her to address the linguistic diversity within the Chinese communities, since some people, many of them first generation women, are not literate in both English and a Chinese dialect. She maintains that this does not necessarily need to be a barrier, because people have the ability to read different things from the work besides brainy conceptual responses.

Kass Banning decided she wanted to shake things up a bit. She curated "60 Second Dissent," a set of public service announcements designed for television by five video artists interested in breaking dialogue and questioning leftist orthodoxies, while remaining

"funny, in-your-face, critical and political." Banning's theme emerged from a belief that in order to build effective coalition politics, the room for dissenting voices must be made. The result was work that packs in the ideas, briefly, directly, honestly.

The series (including two sexy shorts) was aired on Rogers Cable during the festival (unfortunately minus Gwendolyn's sexy short), and at the Queen Street arty trendy Squeeze Club. Unhappily, the series was not broadcast by any other networks, once again, because of their inability to deal with sexual content that challenges the status quo.

Jeannine Marchessault's *The Muse Is Working Overtime (Again)* began the compilation. The first scene looks deceptively serene, a clock is ticking and a woman starts to write a letter when she is called away by the cries of her sixteen-month old baby. In the following scenes, the letter becomes obscured with the expressions of others as the child grabs the pen and the husband idly continues the doodle while pontificating about how "the left can't seem to cope with difference." The work brought home the political realities that are affecting women at any given moment and showed how

much censorship happens at the level of the individual.

In *One Word Out Of You*, Gwendolyn simultaneously takes on her passion and rejects a barrage of political assumptions and judgments that are useless in her bedroom, all in sixty seconds. The judgments are centred around a series of images of her — "lesbian stripper, whore and porn performer" — having sex with a Black male. Her voice-over argues with and eventually rejects the voice spoiling her fantasy.

Work To Live by Donna James offers a cooking lesson and a quick glimpse into the work memories of Black Caribbean women. Multiple images of grating and cooking coconuts accompany a layered soundtrack of laughing and kitchen chat, with the voice of a woman recounting leaving an abusive employer.

Bruce La Bruce's *Working The Double Shift* packed five minutes of ideas into one. He drew the humorous but somehow dubious parallel of sexual harassment of secretaries in the workplace, with that of gay and transvestite hustlers on the street. A split screen depicts the contrasts and similarities between street and office working environments. In either case, in the end you just get eyed up anyway. The image however, of the oppressed gay male nail-filing secretary was rather far flung to elicit true sympathy. Ruby Truly's *Making Fire* was like Donna James's work in that it featured earthy images: a Japanese woman chopping wood, with the soundtrack recounting working memories and tales of immigrant ancestors who worked in the sugar cane fields. The images look like they come from Vancouver, lots of crisp fresh air and greenery. The story, which recounts early disappointments and later defiance, brings the lessons of the past to the present.

While this series fell short of its intended television audience, it in no way diminished the work of the five artists, nor did it fall short of its intention to shake things up a bit. Festival coordinator Pat Jeffries points out that this series' premise offers a challenge to middle and upper middle class lefties who tend to patronize the working class by

The Race, Tari Ito, performance from the series "Class Act," coordinated by Jenny Keith Photo Chamba Acosta. Performers (l to r): Donald Carr, Rochelle Hum, Louise Liliefeldt, Tari Ito and Darren O'Donnell.



insisting that they know what is appropriate for them to view. By insisting that working people are unable to deal intelligently with complex ideas or to discuss issues of sexuality, they have often effectively silenced people's voices with their "good" intentions. Hopefully "60 Second Dissent" will find other audiences through the unions and the festival circuit.

Finding a gallery audience is a bit like fishing on a still lake on a sunny afternoon. Away from the street noise, galleries allow the time for individual reflection. Beaver Hall hosted two shows simultaneously this year. "Working Image V," coordinated by Carole Conde, included works by ten artist/union members who have been exhibited in past "Working Image" shows.

On the other side of the room, in keeping with *Mayworks'* developing street sense, was *Hey Girl!* curated by Cassandra, featuring for the first time, visual art by members of the Sex Workers Alliance of Toronto. This exhibition contained some of the most urgent and often misread voices in the festival.

In one corner hung an untitled street scene in oil paints by Debbie Clarke. Her unpracticed but premeditated brush strokes became storytellers of an everyday scene through the eyes of a woman who works on the street. On the other hand, Georgia's generosity with paint brings the viewer into a disturbing, angry and unresolved inner landscape. Andrew Sorfleet's heavily text based *Work In Progress* offers a sophisticated but detached mélange of images, newspaper articles, diary-like excerpts, washroom graffiti and textbook descriptions of sexually transmitted diseases. He also designed a series of posters countering signs put up by the City of Toronto in Cabbagetown and Parkdale, which say "prostitute free area." Sorfleet's posters resemble traffic signs but feature silhouettes of working girls in classic poses with slogans such as "Support your local prostitutes," "Hookers are safe sex pros," and "A hooker is a person in your neighbourhood." Although prostitution is legal in Ontario, prostitutes are increasingly harassed by the legal system and the police. Sorfleet notes that the lesbian and gay community has not ad-



Untitled drawing, Catherine M., photocopy on coloured paper, from the exhibition "Hey Girl," presented by the Sex Workers Alliance of Toronto.

dressed the effect that the police surveillance, which the community lobbied for, has had on sex trade workers in the Church-Wellesley area.

Jeanne B.'s scratchy video *Chroniques* features a painful drunken self-portrait of Jeanne B. in a repetitive self-absorbed monologue describing his/her night at work and how she/he is upset and angry that she/he has just allowed herself to have unsafe sex. The image of Jeanne B. talking from the bathtub fades as the mirror steams up. What's the big deal in showing this image? Jeanne B. wants to dispel the romance associated with prostitution in "certain privileged circles.... All the usual political, articulated, academic, logical discourses no longer apply when it's four in the morning, twenty degrees below zero, when you've had eight beers and haven't had a trick the whole night."

Possibly the most delightful part of the show was *Urban Suburgency*, Catherine M.'s twenty black and red Xeroxes. She began to make them as a journey of self-analysis after a bad experience with a therapist. But the effect of these images goes far beyond the purposes of art therapy. The women portrayed in her surreal dream-like drawings, mostly sex trade workers, are seen as central and powerful figures

displaying a multitude of emotions and facets: frightening, humorous, sad, loony and joyful, not as victims of the cops, the legal system or a "vicious and hypocritical" society.

The *Mayworks 93* street component instinctively kept up with the times and did not wait around for their audiences to find them. Street sense develops fast, or you don't survive. The work made was accessible, yet did not underestimate the intelligence of its audience, being diverse, engaging and political, as well as fun. Programming of this kind will hopefully inspire others to take their art to the streets, factories and UIC offices, away from sterile galleries and forums for the politically "converted."

Mayworks is one of the only festivals around that recognizes artists as workers. Culture is not seen as "just a frill" but as crucial; it's how we define ourselves and defend our hopes for a future just society. While the union movement has often supported the arts, cultural production is not necessarily the highest priority of the union movement. Rather, the challenge has fallen to artists to find out what those priorities are and to support them.

Gitanjali works as a Toronto videomaker to create movement with grace.

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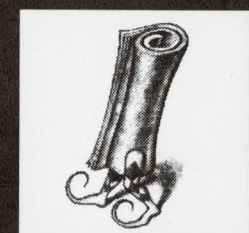


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