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SUMMER 1990

Vol.13 No.6

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FUSE welcomes *letters* to the Editors. All letters are subject to editing.

Erratum

The photograph of bell hooks, FUSE Vol. XIII No. 4 p. 21, should have been credited to John Dawson. At the time of publication FUSE was unaware of the name of the photographer; we apologize for this omission.

Apology

Vision 21's letter to FUSE XIII No. 5 addressed the full text of a letter by Susan Crean, the edited version of which appeared in FUSE XIII No. 4. We hope this clarifies any confusion readers may have had through Vision 21's reference to the full text of Susan Crean's letter.

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Lee Fleming is the editor of *By Word of Mouth: Lesbians Write the Erotic*
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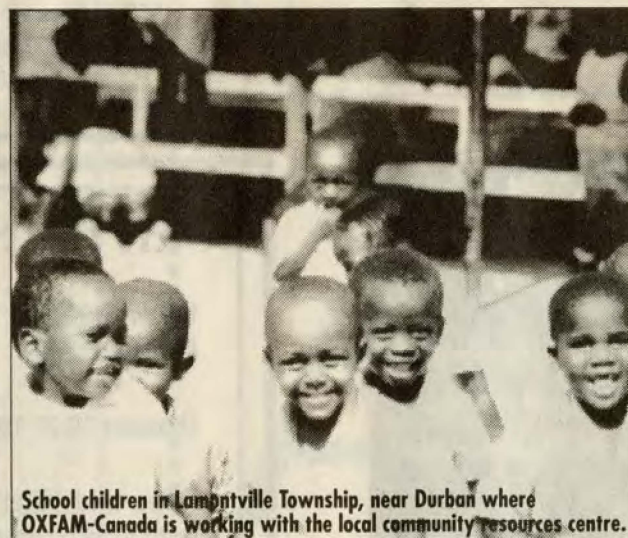
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NEWS & REPORTS



Still courtesy G.I.V.

Sunil Gupta and Stephen Dodd in *Memory Pictures* by Pratibha Parmar.

desh : pardesh

South Asian Culture in the Diaspora

by Amita Handa

Against a backdrop of an increasingly intolerant Canadian mosaic, *Desh: Pardesh*, a festival of South Asian diasporic culture, took place at the Euclid Theatre in Toronto between March 23 and 24. This event signaled an important turning point in the continuing struggle to articulate South Asian cultural identities. The planning for the event started in October 1989 and was co-ordinated through an ad hoc committee set up by Ian Rashid of Khush: Toronto South Asian Lesbians and Gays. This festival featured several of Toronto's prominent South Asian artists whose work over the

past decade has been largely overlooked and marginalized by dominant white society. This celebration of culture comes out of a necessity to search for a self-representative history, to analyze the ways in which our communities have been made invisible and "ethnicized." In this sense, *Desh: Pardesh* was a welcome step toward forging new dialogue on what it means to live as "other" in Canada.

On the first night, readings by Himani Bannerji, M.G. Vassanji and Arun Mukherjee set the political tone for the weekend by touching on issues of displacement, invis-

ibility, racism and sexism. In her fictional work-in-progress, Himani Bannerji described the murder of a South Asian woman by her husband. The dead body on the sidewalk haunts a passing stranger, another South Asian woman, who is forced to confront the eerie similarities between her own life and the imagined life of her unknown sister. Arun Mukherjee addressed similar tribulations in her humorous short story about a woman attempting to rise within the academic hierarchy. The piece discusses the politics of invisibility and the placatory treatment from cohorts and superi-

ors alike which serves to invalidate her experiences. This situation is analogous to the wider experience of working South Asian women who must negotiate a more restrictive field of opportunities and frequently find themselves stuck in the lowest end of the pink collar ghetto. On the same night, *Wallflower*, a film by Gita Saxena, and *India Hearts Beat*, a videotape by Leila Sujir, dealt with the respective issues of coming to voice and coping with mixed identity. Pratibha Parmar's film, *Memory Pictures*, through its focus on the life of Sunil Gupta, a gay South Asian photographer, raises the issues of ra-



Ajnabi panel: H. Bannerji, R. Espinet, M. Mendez, A. Itwaru, P. Ratnam, P. Parmar, A. Kazimi, A. Mukherjee.

Photo courtesy Glace W. Lawrence/Trinity Square Video.

cial violence and resistance in Britain, a longing for home, and issues of race, class, gender and sexuality. There was also a performance piece by Malika Mendez from the works of Suniti Namjoshi. The panel discussion on the following day, addressing the theme of *ajnabi* (stranger at home), provided a forum to further examine some of the issues raised through the films and readings.

Seeing different talents and perspectives from the South Asian community engaged in constructing various critiques of the dominant culture and raising issues of self-identity under conditions of exile was both exciting and stimulating in its possibilities. It is not often that South Asians, of varying ages and backgrounds, come together to share a forum with the "left-wing" arts and activist communities. Although there is some politicization in the mainstream South Asian community in Toronto, except for a few individuals and groups, it is not visibly politicized or known for its en masse organized political resistance to marginalization in the same way as the Black communities. The peak of South Asian opposition took place during the mid-'70s

when violent "paki-bashing" was an organized and prominent feature of Toronto. This crisis served to consolidate objectives for Toronto's various South Asian communities. Amidst the current backlash and anti-Asian sentiment, which is most obvious in Canada's western provinces, the issue of racism has once again become a major political focus. Groups, such as the South Asian Women's Group, and individuals working in the Battered Women's Shelters and in various anti-racist grassroots organizations, and involved in writing, filmmaking and other artistic expressions have, however, been involved in important work for over a decade. Events like *Desh: Pardesh* can provide the impetus needed to coalesce individual and group efforts toward a new wave of organized, en masse resistance.

Last year Khush staged *Salaam Toronto*, an event which also celebrated South Asian heritage. The event, however, differed from *Desh: Pardesh* in its "Caravan"-like presentation of classical art forms and folklore without any overt political content or dialogue. *Salaam Toronto* provided an opportunity for newer immigrants to share with younger

members of Khush expressions of culture indigenous to the diaspora. For the participants, it was a link to the past and, in this way, an empowering experience. Clearly, this year's event reflected a change in Khush's present needs and concerns. The focus was on the problems South Asians face in Canada, rather than a nostalgic call to the past.

Desh: Pardesh emerged partly out of the need to give voice to authors and artists working within the South Asian community. Because many writers within the community face several obstacles in getting their work published or distributed, there is an overriding necessity to locate them and their body of work. Even cultural productions such as *Desh: Pardesh* are difficult to initiate due to the lack of available funds. While the arts councils provide resources for presenting and distributing work by South Asians, Latin Americans, Africans, Asians, etc., they do not target money for its actual production. This problem is one of the many illustrations of institutionalized racism and poses an ironic contradiction for communities and artists who do not have funds to produce their work in the first place. In resistance to

this, efforts such as *Toronto South Asian Review*, whose founder and publisher, author M.G. Vassanji, read at the event, Sister Vision Press and the recent special *Fireweed* Asian Women's issue are critical instruments in constructing self-representation.

Part of the struggle for self-representation involves searching for self-reflective language and images. The term "South Asian" is often used to refer to people whose origin lies in the South Asian subcontinent. Often emanating from this term is a false sense of unity or commonness when in reality South Asians include Caribbeans, Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans as well as people from East Africa. The term "Indian" (sometimes used in place of the term "South Asian" to refer to people who were once originally from India) becomes problematic because it does not take into account the liberation struggles, cultural specificities and sovereignty of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. "South Asian" becomes equally problematic for third and fourth generation South Asians living outside the subcontinent whose cultural roots have fused somewhat with local

customs to create an amalgamation of cultures. This fusion can be seen in the Caribbean as well as in parts of East Africa. Clearly, as was acknowledged by the participants on the panel, there is a need to sculpt an appropriate language in which to articulate our identities, a language which also reflects the schism in our experience of being part of "the homeland" while living out of it and how one's original culture changes, adapts and takes on new forms in foreign countries.

If we do not define "South Asian" in terms of place but displacement, as panellist Arnold Itwaru argued, then, for those living abroad, we can trace a history of permanent resistance which is one of the extended effects of colonization. The panel discussion also revealed the strikingly different experiences between first generation and longer generation South Asians as well as between those who are first time/place immigrants and second time/place immigrants. For example, a lot of people who left the South Asian subcontinent first lived in Africa and the Caribbean and were used for their labour to help build the colonial infrastructures before migrating to North America or Britain.

Politicization for Khush members stems from two kinds of oppression: being gay and being South Asian. According to Ian Rashid, coordinator of *Desh: Pardesh*, because these realities are inseparable in the daily lives of gay South Asians, struggling with decolonization as well as fighting homopho-

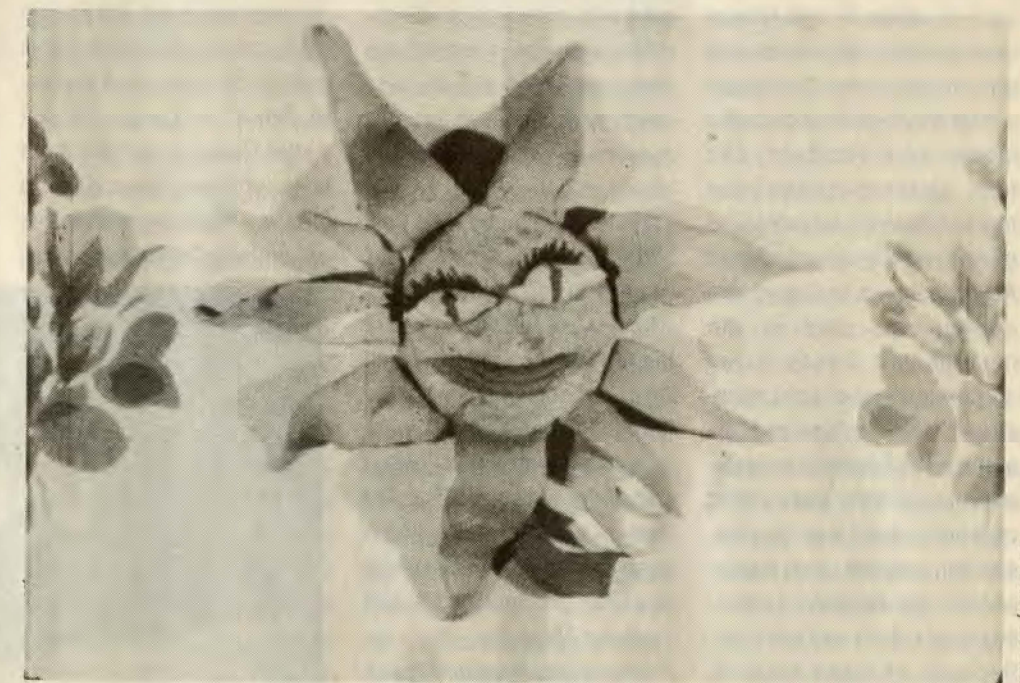
bia and racism have become equally important directives for Khush. As was brought out through panel and audience discussion, being a woman within the community also adds another dimension to oppressions. Although the steering committee was predominantly gay and lesbian, gay and lesbian content did not comprise the central focus of the event. Because outreach to the larger South Asian community forms one of Khush's mandates, *Desh: Pardesh* reflected a broad base of concerns. The ad hoc committee organizing the event felt that providing exposure to South Asian artists, gay or straight, was critical given the way that the few South Asian artists working here have been marginalized. There is an urgent need to locate these artists who have been producing cultural work for

over a decade without adequate recognition. Rashid argues that a sole focus on issues of sexuality would fall into the trap of adopting a white gay and lesbian agenda, which doesn't reveal the contradictions and barriers that impact the lives of South Asian gays and lesbians.

The panellists constituted a myriad of perspectives, asserting various locations within the diaspora. This diversity was deliberately woven to reveal the breadth of South Asian experience and was motivated by a reluctance on the part of the organizing committee to present a monolithic circumscription or definition of what South Asian culture is. Although some viewpoints were controversial and provocative, certain issues and divisions, which are very real and prevalent within the community, would not have

surfaced with an idyllic and "politically correct" content. The panel discussion in this respect served as a catalyst in promoting lively discussion on a range of critical issues.

Both the audience and the panellists emphasized the distinct experiences of women, lesbians and gays who are often silenced within the community. The lack of resources and support available to women emerged as significant problems facing South Asian women, especially those who are victims of wife abuse or are single, widowed or divorced. Panellist Pratibha Parmar, a South Asian activist, filmmaker and author living in Britain, used the notion of exile to examine the lesbian and gay experience of exile within the South Asian community. Similar to all other communities, part of this exile results from a lack of



Still from *Wallflower* by Gita Saxena.

Still courtesy the artist.

Still from *Voice of Our Own* by Premika Ratnam & Ali Kazimi.

acknowledgement of lesbian and gay existence, denouncing it as foreign to the culture and partly from the refusal to take seriously the issues confronting lesbians and gays both within and outside the community. This homophobia is manifested in the community's unwillingness to consider lesbians and gays as part of the South Asian community and results in discrimination, lack of solidarity and refusal to accept men and women who choose to express their sexuality in ways which oppose the mainstream standard. The term "stranger at home" can be used to illustrate a double kind of alienation where South Asian lesbians and gays are neither accepted in the homophobic South Asian context nor in the racist mainstream white lesbian and gay culture. For South Asian lesbians, their gender adds a third component of oppression: sexism, racism and homophobia are tangible and inseparable daily experiences. Because of these reasons, there is a desperate need to recognize multiple locations

within the South Asian community.

The second night's events presented readings by Ramabai Espinet, Krishantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta and Arnold Itwaru. Espinet, an activist, author of poetry and critical essays and editor of a forthcoming anthology of Caribbean women, *Creation Fire*, read a piece consisting of memory fragments which focused on a Caribbean woman's experience of domestic violence. Krishantha, a poet, writer and activist, read poetry which focused on white supremacy within Canada and his life as a Sri Lankan living in Toronto. Arnold Itwaru, a poet and novelist, read from his novel, *Shanti*. Musician Ali Koushkani, whose work fuses the music of the Middle East and the South Asian subcontinent, gave performances between the readings. Also featured was *Voice of Our Own*, a film by Premika Ratnam and Ali Kazimi, which documents the formation of the Coalition for Immigrant and Visible Minority Women. Parmar's film, *Flesh and Paper*, a lyrical documentary about the life and work of Suniti Namjoshi,

a South Asian lesbian writer, was premiered as the final part of the festival.

Throughout the event, alienation, social and cultural displacement, and discontinuous histories emerged as some of the effects of the South Asian diaspora. People at the event searched for an appropriate language to articulate their racial, sexual, cultural and gender identities. And although there is always the dream of one day returning home, Parmar solemnly stated, "Home is not a mythical, far away place, it is racist Britain," or Canada for that matter. There is a need to come to terms with being here and how to form our identities—ourselves without being "other" selves. As a

South Asian woman living in Toronto, I felt that *Desh: Pardesh* crystallized some of the issues I face as an individual on a daily basis. The most basic misconceptions depict South Asians as backward and passive. These serve to single us out at home, at school and on the streets. As Arun Mukherjee argued on the panel, "We are all too visible from home to bus stop to home but all too invisible in positions of power." The festival provided a supportive framework for the expression of these experiences. The more debilitating stereotype of South Asians as passive victims of systematic oppression and as belonging to communities unwilling to participate in political and cultural activism has been revealed by this event as false. Ian Rashid, Khush, and community and festival participants ought to be congratulated for making *Desh: Pardesh* an empowering and unforgettable first step. Further analysis on issues of race, class, gender, sexuality and the barriers that inhibit cultural production are needed. Hopefully, we can use the groundwork of this event to continue the building process. ■

Amita Handa is a writer and activist currently doing a Ph.D. in Sociology at O.I.S.E.

Still from *India Hearts Beat* by Leila Sujir.

Still courtesy Video Pool.



Photo of Pratibha Parmar by Shoheen Haq.

Fuck You, This Is Our Home!

Claiming South Asian Identity in Britain

by Lloyd Wong

Pratibha Parmar, an anti-racist activist, writer, filmmaker and video artist living in London, England, recently visited Toronto as a guest of *Desh: Pardesh—South Asian Culture in the Diaspora*. Screening at this festival were two of her works: *Memory Pictures* is about photographer Sunil Gupta, who explores questions of gay male desire and race; *Flesh and Paper* documents writer Suniti Namjoshi, who revises South Asian mythology into a contemporary lesbian sexuality. Parmar also spoke on a panel that addressed issues of identity, racism, sexism and cultural production. This article originally began as an interview on CKLN Radio's weekly review of film

and video, *Frameline*, with hosts Gillian Morton and myself, and guest host Kaushalya Bannerji.

Cultural producers in Ontario have come face to face with Ontario's Multicultural Policy. Official reports from the Ministry of Citizenship, which is responsible for implementing the policy, reveal a very nice plan on how the government is going about making opportunities for the diverse population to express its cultures. There was a time when multiculturalism was a progressive idea. Debates recently have shown that there have been some serious oversights in this policy. Parmar's explanation of the realizations in Britain have resonance here in Ontario:

"One of the critiques that many of us had was that multiculturalism somehow assumed an equality between different cultures that quite clearly wasn't there. Instead, there were cultures of dominance and the cultures of different migrant and Black communities that had been, for hundreds of years, colonized and, through the experience of diaspora, disrupted in many ways. . . Multiculturalism didn't acknowledge the fact that there was racism. Racism then became a word that was never used and it was just culture. . . It became that the cultures of different communities became the problems and somehow there were the cultures that had to change to accommodate, to normalize themselves to the dominant white culture."

Parmar offers a strategic use of multiculturalism as a necessary step to anti-racism. She explains that before multiculturalism, there was a complete invisibility and complete marginalization. It was in this absence that Black communities in Britain, especially within education, demanded some acknowledgement of their presence. After a long battle, educational materials began to reflect the diverse population and schools began to celebrate different kinds of cultural holidays. With these changes, many people felt that the battle had been won. But it quickly emerged that these were just cosmetic exercises. Multiculturalism became co-opted into a jargon that people quickly learned and used, when practice actually remain unchanged. Parmar warns that the same insidious process is currently at work within

anti-racist strategies in education and agencies that fund cultural work: "They're not actually doing anything about challenging or changing the balance of power and the distribution of the access to resources that different groups can have."

As children of migrants, the question of identity can be a complicated one. So often, the premise of the question assumes specific ideas about culture, geography, nationalism, sexuality and identity as being a seamless entity that is perfectly packaged, without wrinkles or contradictions. Identity is not like that explains Parmar:

"The question is about the multiplicity of the identities we inhabit as lesbian and gay people of colour, who are involved both politically and culturally with the anti-racist movements and then involved in the actual lesbian and gay movement too. . . Culture isn't static. . . I don't want to go wholesale back to the culture that we 'come from,' because I think there are problems too within our own cultures. As lesbian and gays within the South Asian communities, we are often contradictorily positioned vis-a-vis our families and our communities but at the same time, we're having to experience the racism of the predominantly white lesbian and gay movements and so we're marginalized amongst that community. Also, it's a thing around a certain kind of essentialism and a certain notion of the culture, how culture is perceived as this pure thing that existed before it was colonized or before it was morally corrupted or fragmented. It's this very backward notion of culture

as very static, enshrined in stone kind of idea. It just doesn't exist in that way."

Clearly, it doesn't seem practical or even possible to wholesale reembrace a culture that we believe to be ours. Nostalgia offers a filter with which we can go back to a less complicated place. The process of reclaiming seems to especially be susceptible to this nostalgia. Anyone who has gone through this process recognizes the phenomenon. When asked about how she keeps the nostalgia in check with regard to herself, Parmar jokingly replied, "With great difficulty!" but then pointed out the reality:

"Going through a process of that reclaiming, if your position to that culture is as a woman or as a lesbian, very quickly you realize that there's not a lot that's very positive for you to reclaim in terms of your gender or sexuality. You come up against the contradictions of that kind of looking back to that culture. There are some really exciting things happening in Britain around music, in terms of South Asian young people who have appropriated from house, hip hop and bhangra, which is a very traditional Indian dance music, and created their own fusion and synthesis around that."

More critically she asks, "What is this nostalgia for? After a few generations, it becomes more and more not within reach. I can see that very practically."

Identity becomes a complicated personal and political process, with many fruitful contradictions. Parmar points out:

"It's a double bind. On the one hand, we claim that Britain is geographically our home, but we say that against the racism that says, 'This is not your home.' It's a reactive positioning that you take on, an aggressive thing against that racism because they're always trying to get rid of you. They're deporting people from our communities all the time! It's quite clear they don't want us there! It's against that kind of hostility and against that kind of nonacceptance we say 'Well fuck you, this is our home!' and there's



Suniti Namjoshi in *Flesh and Paper*.

no way we're going to say that India is our home, or somewhere else is our home. Britain is our home and we claim our right to be here. On a political level, one has to say that."

These are the kinds of questions and issues that inform her film and video production. The two works screened at *Desh: Pardesh* both profile artists that take up some of these concerns through the languages of photography and the written word. Parmar's own interest concerns their exploration of new languages to articulate their experiences.

"It's the whole question of language, visual languages and literary languages, and how you actually use the dominant codes of particular languages and how you disrupt them, or appropriate them, deconstruct them and then actually reformulate them to say what you want to say, informed by your own particular sensibilities. . . . We are *not* saying, 'This is what's happening in the centre and that we're at the margin and we're creating our own visual representation and our own modes of expression,' but actu-

ally that the dominant modes are being changed by what we're doing."

In the past, Pratibha Parmar has worked in anti-racist media literacy programs where she workshoped with other Asian women around media images, representation and self-representation. The process of creating one's own images helps the process of articulating an identity. Parmar says, "It is the understanding and awareness of what role images play in how you are perceived by other people and how you see yourself and how the process of the creation of

images informs your identity." Self-representation becomes a form of empowerment and political consciousness.

However, it is not necessarily a simple thing to produce one's own images. As people of colour, we are operating within a dominant culture that has taken the liberty to represent us in various ways. One of the concerns in self-representation is to effectively negotiate the history of exoticism. How can a Black person create images without calling up notions of Blackness formulated by Hollywood's history? How can a Chinese person be represented as a part of the present reality and not as an Other? *Flesh and Paper* includes scenes of a South Asian woman doing a traditional dance in traditional costume. When asked about those images, Parmar acknowledged the difficulties in using them, especially as the film was produced for Channel 4, a British television station, and televised to a mass audience. But she maintains:

I don't want to remain silent around certain areas which are seen to be perpetuating certain racist stereotypes. . . . I want to reappropriate those images for myself as an Asian lesbian. . . . In Suniti's work, she's got this poem to the Goddess. The Goddess is an icon and symbol that comes up quite often in her poetry and in her prose writings too. And I wanted to pick up on that particular icon because Suniti, as an Indian lesbian, is using that coming from her own cultural heritage, but she's using that in a very lesbian way, with a lesbian consciousness and sensibility."

Within the context of *Flesh and Paper* as a whole, the images do function differently than they have in past representations of South Asian women. Parmar says:

"It's going to be the first time on mainstream television that we're going to have an Indian lesbian represented and then we're going to have not only the fact that she's a lesbian, but also that she's Indian and that she's wearing a *sari* and that she's the age that she is and that she's rooted very much within an Indian cultural heritage as well as being part of a lesbian movement."

In response to her editor's query into the possible misreading of the image, Parmar responded:

"Well sure, some people might read it in that way because they bring to that particular visual image their own kind of connotations about it, their own histories of how they've seen those images and how they've framed them before. But, I don't want that to stop me from exploring, trying to find a visual language to say those things and to highlight that Asian lesbian eroticism which is so present in some of Suniti's work."

Memory Pictures incorporates letters from a mother in Canada to her son in London. The female voice-over that represents the mother talks about her loss of pleasure in the new society. When asked about this, Parmar explains:

"The role of mothers, particularly in Asian culture, is as the conduit of cultural continuity of the family, the one person who keeps the family together even if the family is dispersed around the globe. Sunil's story couldn't



Still from *Memory Pictures*.

be told without the fact that it was his mother who instigated the migration because of the dreams for her children. It was the mother who kept the whole thing going while the children were dispersed. But it was also about her life as a woman where she was in this role as the mother, the wife, as a woman who had her own desires and her pleasures which she lost. She didn't have any pleasure in listening to music any more, which was one of the things she used to do. That's about not just her disappointment with the fact that her son is homosexual and not being able to come to terms with that, but the fact that her husband was ill, that he was somebody who had felt completely rejected by Canadian society. He'd been somebody who was middle class in India, come to Canada and the only job he could get was as a security guard doing night shifts. She used to be

a teacher in India. She came here and she couldn't teach because her skill was not seen as something. . . . Those were the details of their lives, but it's also really about the disappointment that parents have about their own dreams and ambitions for their children and also their own lives. . . . I picked those things out because those are the kinds of perceptions I have as a feminist as well and seeing how that woman's life was being circumscribed by her role as mother and as a wife, but also as an immigrant woman definitely."

One final encouraging note is the question of audience response to Parmar's work. It seems that in Britain she is known as a writer and essayist, while here in North America she is better known as a filmmaker and video artist. At the Flaherty Documentary Seminars in New York, a white man criticized *Sari Red*

(an earlier videotape about a young South Asian woman who was killed by three young white men) as having no universality for him. Parmar says:

"For me, I was able to respond to that whole notion of how *Sari Red* didn't have universal resonance by actually feeling much more confirmed and confident in what I was doing. That was his problem that he could not find an access point into it, and I said so to him. I said that I thought that he had to go away and do some work on himself and educate himself because I wasn't going to do it for him." ■

Memory Pictures and *Sari Red* are distributed by:

G.I.V., 3575 St. Laurent, #421
Montreal, PQ H2X 2T7
(514) 499-9840.

Flesh and Paper is distributed by:

Women Make Movies
225 Lafayette St., Suite 212
New York, NY 10012

CENTRAL AMERICA:

On the Front Lines of Non-Violent Action

by Isobel Harry & Rusa Jeremic



The peace brigades concept began with the non-violent army of Mohandas Gandhi, later leading to the formation of the Shanti Sena brigades in India which have been active in intervention and conflict resolution since 1922. The World Peace Brigade (WPB) was formed in 1962. The WPB assisted the Zambian independence movement and the China-India border conflict. Between 1972 and 1974, WPB volunteers carried out reconstruction and reconciliation among Greek and Turkish refugees in the Cyprus Resettlement Project.

Peace Brigades International (PBI) was founded in 1981 at Grindstone Island, Canada by veterans of these and other non-violent social movements as an international support network for non-violent action and reconciliation. PBI team members are volunteers from Canada, the U.S. and many European countries and represent a wide spectrum of ages, backgrounds, and religious and political beliefs. PBI is non-religious, non-partisan and non-violent. To work in Central America, for

instance, PBI volunteers must be committed to non-violence and non-alignment, pass a training seminar in non-violence and have a very good working knowledge of Spanish.

The work of PBI in Central America began in Guatemala in 1983 and later in El Salvador in 1987. In November 1989, five members of the El Salvador team were arrested and jailed; PBI pulled out of that country shortly afterwards. Plans are now underway for the group to re-enter El Salvador.

In Guatemala, PBI provides personal accompaniment for threatened individuals, presence and observation in offices and outside factories, and workshops on non-violent conflict resolution, negotiation and peace education. The PBI team also publishes a monthly information newsletter on its work.

During 1989, PBI accompaniment work in Guatemala provided an international presence as a deterrent and witness to aggression directed at popular organizations, such as GAM (Mutual Support Group of the

Families of the Disappeared), UNSITRAGUA (Office of the Union Federation), UASP (Coalition of Unity and Popular Action), CUC (a peasants' rights group), CONAVIGUA (National Coordination of Widows), CDGH (Guatemalan Human Rights Commission in exile), and refugees living in Mexico who wished to come to Guatemala to participate in the National Dialogue', as well as members of the official Guatemalan Opposition, RUOG. In addition, PBI maintains a house in El Quiche, a highly conflicted rural zone in the west, where team members escort CERJ (Council of Ethnic Communities), an indigenous group which opposes participation in army-imposed civil patrols.

In 1989, the PBI team suffered a series of intimidations and attacks. In January, PBI was accused in the media of being a guerrilla-controlled organization; in May, death threats were received by telephone at the PBI house in Guatemala City.

During that period, several individuals the team was escorting also received death

threats. In August 1989, the PBI house was bombed, as were the GAM headquarters where two PBI volunteers were present. Luckily, no one was hurt. However, on December 20, two Canadian² PBI members and one American member were knifed on the street near the PBI house. In situations like this, Peace Brigades International calls on its Emergency Response Network to help team members and the people they work with. Thousands of supporters worldwide are encouraged to write letters, send faxes, telexes and telegrams expressing their concern and focusing world attention on human rights abuses as they occur.

The recent attacks against foreigners in Guatemala and El Salvador point to an escalating violence against the citizens of those countries. If internationalists are present, the task of eliminating the "leftist threat" becomes difficult for governments and the military. On November 3, 1989, Sister Diana Mark Ortiz, an American, was kidnapped, tortured, receiving



150 cigarette burns on her back, and sexually assaulted by two men. Guatemalan authorities have since downplayed the incident, demanding that the Sister cooperate directly with them in their investigation. To this day, she is still unable to hold a press conference or speak in public.

On December 21, the Second Secretary of the Nicaraguan Embassy was assassinated. The International Red Cross building was bombed December 27. On January 12, 1990, Dr. Hector Oqueli, a prominent socialist party member from El Salvador, and Gilda Flores Arevalo, a Guatemalan socialist party member, were kidnapped in broad daylight and assassinated. This confirmed, for many people, the connection between Salvadoran and Guatemalan death squad activity. Guatemala had supplied El Salvador with Guatemalan elite fighters, or "kaibiles," during the November offensive.

On February 21, the ambassador of Sweden to Guatemala, Ulf Lewin, received telephoned death threats at his home. On February 28, a security guard in the Swedish Embassy was found beaten

and shot to death in an embassy washroom. Sweden is but one of many countries pursuing talks on Guatemala at the United Nations.

The present period of violence and repression in Guatemala began in 1954 when the CIA orchestrated the overthrow of the popularly elected government of Jacobo Arbenz. Since then, Guatemala has become "a place where the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is violated more brutally and more consistently than anywhere else on the planet," according to a Guatemalan daily newspaper. A campaign of ethnocide has been waged on the indigenous population, with villages razed, groups massacred and men forced to participate in civil defence patrols.

Thirty-two years of military rule and four years of civilian rule have seen 100,000 Guatemalans murdered, more than 40,000 disappeared³, 440 indigenous communities decimated, 1,000,000 displaced, 200,000 refugees, 250,000 orphans and 45,000 widows. Targeted people have been trade unionists, university staff and students, indigenous peasants, lay church workers, clergy and mem-

bers of popular human rights organizations.

The current situation in Guatemala is at best frustrating, if not disheartening. Since the May 1988 and 1989 coup attempts, there has been a sharp increase in violence and a steady deterioration in the human rights, economy and morale of the nation. Sources have stated that the military was granted even more liberties with each coup.

Upon being elected, current President Vinicio Cerezo stated that he would govern with "perhaps 30 per cent of the power." This has clearly been the case throughout his term and some feel that in the last year this percentage has dropped drastically. A United Nations Human Rights Commission delegation to Guatemala in 1989 declared that Cerezo's government lacked the "force and power necessary to guarantee the free exercise of human rights in the country."

Another factor adding to the turmoil is the devaluation of the national currency, the quetzal. Inflation continues to affect the prices of water, food, medicine, bus fares and electricity. Fuel went

up in December; in February there was an acute shortage of cooking gas and gasoline. None could be bought anywhere at any price. Reactions have been slow to manifest themselves as the popular movement enters a more cautious phase.

Election years in Guatemala have always proven to be bloody and this year is by no means an exception. There appears to be a subliminal campaign to destabilize the government in order to strengthen the insecurity of the people, creating the illusion that only a hard-line, far-right government can restore order.

The Secret Anti-Communist Army (ESA) a notorious ultra-right death squad from the early '80s has also reappeared. The ESA has claimed responsibility for the deaths of two unionists and a grenade attack on the house of the Minister of Foreign Relations. Police found a note signed by the ESA that said they had returned to punish "pro-communists and admirers of Daniel Ortega."

Another major factor in the latest crisis in Guatemala is increased guerrilla activity. The URNG, the umbrella organization for all guerrilla movements, has become more active with surprise attacks and public announcements. The MLN, a right-wing party, declared that urban civil patrols should be established in Guatemala City to undermine possible guerrilla attacks. These would act much like the rural civil defence patrols (PAC), where civilians, pitted against each other, end up in the line of fire between guerrillas and the army—a well-known counter-insurgency tactic. The MLN has called for a return to the policy of "National

Security," in order to prevent an all-out guerrilla offensive such as the one in El Salvador in November.

Election campaigns are in full swing in anticipation of the November vote. Given the economic crisis, with its huge price increases and wage freezes, the average Guatemalan cannot stretch his or her money any further. Within the popular movement, there is the increasing pressure of political intimidation as many groups prepare to go through their first electoral process.

Despite the negative predictions for the coming months, the spirit, determination and energy to confront and persist is ever-present in Guatemala, as the country continues the struggle for peace with justice. ■

Rusa Jeremic has worked as a PBI team member in Guatemala. She currently works as an administrative assistant in the PBI Toronto Office.

Isobel Harry is a photographer and writer. A former member of the FUSE editorial board, she now works as Field Volunteer Coordinator with the Central America Project Office of PBI in Toronto.

ENDNOTES

1. The National Dialogue was begun by Catholic Bishop Quezada Toruño when the Central America Peace Plan accords were signed in 1987. These accords emphasized the need for dialogue to achieve reconciliation and peace in Central America.
2. Rusa Jeremic was one of the three PBI workers stabbed in the attack.
3. The term "disappearance" first entered the international human rights vocabulary as a result of events in Guatemala. . . . [The vast majority of the "disappeared," when located, are found to have been the victims of violent death. Many are found with signs of torture or mutilation along roadsides or in ravines, floating in plastic bags in lakes and rivers or buried in mass graves in the countryside. . . . (Guatemala: The Human Rights Record. London: Amnesty International Publications, 1987.)]

Winnipeg photographer and video artist Carol Pickering has a long track record as both producer and curator of art that deals with sexual politics. In 1988, Pickering curated and coordinated a series of gay and lesbian films and videos entitled *Counterparts II*, which was well-attended and generally seen as a success. In 1989, Winnipeg artist-run centre Plug-In accepted her proposal for another series, *Women and Desire*, which was to deal with gender politics and the effects that feminism is having on current art practice. Plug-In and the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG) co-sponsored the project, with the WAG providing its Muriel Richardson Auditorium as the venue. Six screenings and one video installation were to take place there in the fall of 1989.

The first screening consisted of three artists' videos. Two bore warnings by the artists and the distributor that they would not agree to previewing by a censor or classification board.

In Manitoba, film and video is regulated under the Film

Classification and Licensing Regulation section of the Amusements Act. Current interpretation calls for all videos and films to be previewed by the Film Classification Board, regardless of venue or intended audience.

Pickering had dealt with similar circumstances with the 1988 *Counterparts* series when a video had arrived too late for previewing. At that time, she gave the Board a written synopsis. An "R" rating was issued and the screening took place. In planning the *Women and Desire* series, Pickering felt she had developed a working relationship with the Board and that they would accommodate the special limitations associated with the artists' videos.

When the three tapes for the September 15 screening finally arrived on September 14, Pickering contacted the Board. However, as the provincial government had changed from the New Democratic to Progressive Conservative in the interim, so had the Board's membership. In Pickering's opinion, the seats on the Board

had become Conservative patronage posts. While she had made arrangements with the former chair, the current director, Jorge Rusewinkle, could find no reference to them in the minutes. The new Board would not consider compromises: all tapes had to be previewed and classified or the proposed screening would be breaking the law.

Pickering decided to honour the video artists' and distributor's wishes and refused to submit the tapes for previewing, a move that was supported by the Board at Plug-In and the WAG's director, Carole Phillips. The public screening took place. However, the WAG's administration was annoyed at being put in this position and accused Pickering of incompetence for advising them of the situation at the last minute.

Rusewinkle attended the screening and the Film Classification Board served notice of possible prosecution to Pickering and both galleries. The office of the Minister of Culture also contacted Carole Phillips. According to Deputy Minister Tom Carson, the call

was simply for information purposes: if the law had been broken, charges would be laid and if those charges included obscenity, action would follow from both the federal and provincial governments. More calls of this nature to the WAG and the Manitoba Arts Council from the Department of Culture (DOC) followed.

What remained to be seen was whether the two institutions would stand behind Pickering. Whatever the intent of the Ministry's calls to the WAG, Carole Phillips saw them as a threat. The DOC does, after all, not only oversee the granting of film classification licences but also controls a large portion of the WAG's budget. By the third screening, which included more tapes with a proscription against classification, nothing had changed. Plug-In Director Wayne Baerwaldt offered to host the screening at the gallery, possibly reasoning that

the DOC had never shown much interest in Plug-In before and wasn't likely to then. Notices were posted at the WAG one hour before the screening, re-directing the audience to Plug-In, thereby allowing the WAG to opt out of their co-sponsorship. About 80 per cent of the audience turned up at Plug-In, including Jorge Rusewinkle, and that screening was also followed by more threats of prosecution.

At this point, the legal and personal confrontations had become so acrimonious that Carol Pickering resigned, cancelling the last three screenings in the series.

So what's to be learned from this sorry tale? While the Manitoba Film Classification Board appears to be one of the most progressive systems on the continent, it is still liable to be used for rewards and punishments and too, that governments are, by their very

nature, hardly likely to refrain from using it for this purpose. Interestingly, the Deputy Minister of Culture called a meeting when he learned that one of the authors of this report was going to deliver a paper on the affair. When questioned about the charges pending on Carol Pickering, he admitted that they had been dropped some time ago as "everyone had learned their lesson." Ironically, Pickering herself had never been informed of this. Was this simply bureaucratic inefficiency or a case of keeping a troublemaker on the hook?

What is clearer from this incident is the vulnerability of cultural institutions to threats (even implied ones) to their funding and the manner in which they tend to slough the pressures downward onto others, such as cultural producers. It is interesting to note that, of all those involved, Pickering was the only one

personally threatened with prosecution. And even though both galleries formally supported her, the pressures she endured in behind-the-scenes meetings made her position untenable.

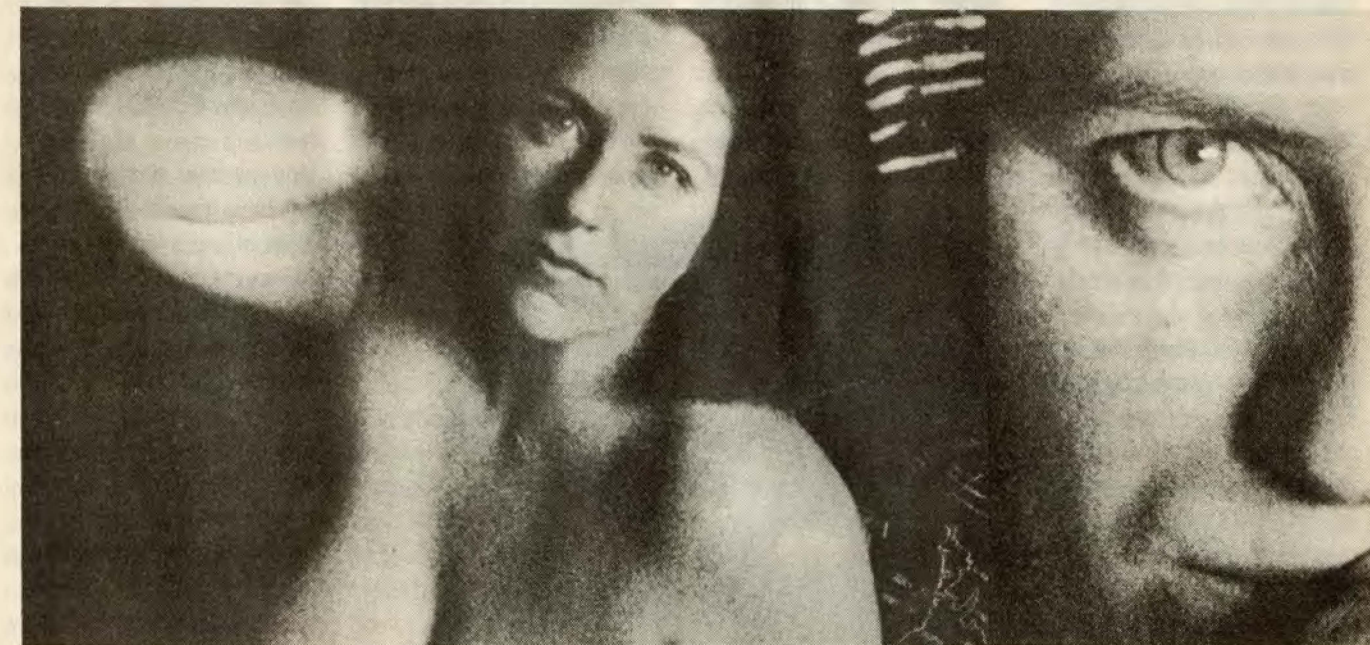
Finally, the whole fiasco points out how ridiculously inadequate instruments such as the Amusements Act (which was originally enacted to deal with vaudeville shows) are in dealing with work that, by its intent, challenges mainstream public mores. Galleries need a licensing system that allows those marginalized voices to be heard. ■

Jack Butler is a visual and performance artist and educator based in Winnipeg.

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Behind-the-Screen Juggling Acts

by Jack Butler and Scott Ellis



Butch/Femme in Paradise by Lorna Boschman from the "Women and Desire" series.

Photo courtesy Women in Focus.

short fuse

In May, Manitoba artists, filmmakers, musicians and publishers were shocked to learn that some of the federal contributions to the Canada-Manitoba Cultural Industries Development Office (CIPO) were being cut in half. Over the last three years the office, which was established in 1987, has awarded \$6.8 million in grants to Manitoba artists. For 1990, however, CIPO will only receive \$874,000, a cut of some \$932,000 from last year's contribution.

The worst, however, is yet to come. A spokesperson for Communications Minister Marcel Masse indicated that next year *all* funding to the organization would cease. The funding agreement between Manitoba and the federal government had expired in March and the current allocation was only intended to keep the program alive for another year.

Manitoba Culture Minister Bonnie Mitchelson, taken by surprise by the federal move, is not sure how the province will respond. They have already approved \$1.8 million for CIPO this year and expected the federal government to contribute an equal amount. ■

Since the opening of *Into the Heart of Africa* at Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), dissension has arisen in the Afro-Canadian community.

The exhibit, which opened last November and is scheduled to run until August 6, depicts life in Central Africa under the imperialist system during the 19th century. The ROM's collection of weapons, jewelry, clothing and artifacts—which had been stored in their basement for over 50 years—are depicted as "souvenirs" brought home by Canadian soldiers and missionaries.

While the museum insists that the purpose of the exhibit is to provide "thought-provoking insight" into Canada's colonial past, the show has been characterized by mem-

bers of the Black community as "racist and offensive."

Since March, a newly-formed group called the Coalition for the Truth About Africa (CFTA) has staged weekly protests outside the museum.

During one of the protests in May, police attempted to arrest a man wanted for allegedly assaulting a police officer during a previous demonstration outside the museum. A scuffle erupted and 20 patrol cars arrived on the scene, translating into a ratio of 35 officers to 50 demonstrators. Eight people were arrested while a number of protesters and three police officers sustained minor injuries. Seven of the protesters were charged with assaulting a police officer while another was charged with obstructing the police after the protest moved to the downtown police station. Two women who were arrested intend to launch a complaint with the Police Complaints Commission for the treatment they received as a result of the incident which, they say, was incited by the police.

Following the incident, 25 activist groups threw their support behind the coalition

and promised to join in the weekly Saturday protests. One group, the Usafiri Dance Ensemble, cancelled their upcoming performance at the ROM.

For their part, the ROM began court proceedings to obtain an injunction preventing the protesters from demonstrating within 50 feet of the building, citing that the CFTA had caused the museum to lose \$160,000 in lost revenues as a result of their demonstrations. While the ROM obtained the injunction on May 16, the following day, a series of newspaper reports stated that the ROM was suing the coalition. A ROM spokesperson said that this tactic had been cited for legal purposes and that, in fact, the ROM had no "intention of prosecuting."

To many visitors, the organizers of the exhibit relied too much on the ability of viewers (regardless of age, culture or ancestry) to read between the lines of irony, presupposing an audience that is both knowledgeable about and possesses a sense of empathy with Africa's peoples.

Meanwhile, museum officials have hired two part-time police officers for weekends and beefed up security inside the exhibit. ROM officials have consistently refused to meet with the members of the CFTA to discuss the issue. Said museum official Linda Thomas, "We don't feel any one audience sector will dictate a necessity to change the exhibition which the museum knows is historically accurate." ■



Don't Tax Reading!

how the GST will kill the small press

by Daria Essop

The Conservative government's Goods and Services Tax (GST), to take effect as of January 1, 1991, will not slide by unnoticed by book producers and consumers. In Canada, books, magazines and newspapers have traditionally been exempt from taxes at all levels of production. The maximum effect of the new tax will be felt by writers, readers and producers of literature, resulting in diminished sales and output of material.

The negative effect of the GST on reading material will be greater than on any other commodity and could possibly mean the death of the small press. Books and periodicals are critical to literacy, as well as to economic, cultural and spiritual growth. The proposed nine per cent Goods and Services Tax will tarnish this ideal and perhaps even kill a vital part of our culture.

Through a number of studies, the Canadian government has been made aware that the book and magazine industry currently operates on minimal profit margins. In fact, exclusive of grants, most presses run at a loss, with the hardship most concentrated among smaller publishers. The fragile nature of the publishing business means many companies will be unable to adjust their profit

margins to maintain sales and will not be able to pass the tax on to the consumer as a price increase. Consumer resistance is inevitable and the consequences will be devastating for producers of literary material.

Ironically, the decline will be most conspicuous in those areas where the government has targeted its cultural and social policy priorities: writing by Canadians, on subjects of interest to Canadians.

Book retailers will be paying a tax on top of the retail sales tax which will translate into at least a 10 per cent drop in sales. This of course will cause great damage to the smaller publishing houses which will have to cut costs to compete, suffering greater than usual monetary losses.

This scenario undermines the nature of the small press and the impulse underlying its development. Small press publications cost very little to produce—the publisher is usually self-sufficient, fulfilling all tasks from photocopying to desktop publishing. "The costs for small presses are relatively low, but the new tax is going to change that," says Daniel Jones, coordinator of the Small Press Book Fair held annually in Toronto. "It also means more pa-

perwork for smaller presses which aren't prone to this in the first place."

"The small press will probably survive under any political climate anyway. The GST may mean a bit less independent activity, with prices becoming prohibiting," senses Jones. Retailers will be less likely to stock small press publications in stores. As it is, retail supports small press on principle, rather than to turn a buck.

With the GST making consumers more cost-conscious, they won't be as willing to spend money on small press publications. This is where it will hit writers and publishers. People working for the small presses don't make much money to begin with and we will be hit with a double dose of bad medicine, getting burdened with the tax, both as producers and as low-income consumers.

Small press has become synonymous with inexpensive or free distribution of literature. The GST will destroy this notion. It will hurt our pocketbooks in numerous ways, from low cost activities such as poster-making to more expensive ventures like organizing and producing literary events. All aspects of the small press will suffer with this new tax.

Book rates, paper costs and other supplies will all increase as a result of the GST, further cutting the small press' livelihood. "To break even in a year is good for us," says Ian Rashid of *Between the Lines* (BTL), a political and academic press in Toronto. "We have begun focusing more on trade oriented books, appealing more to the 'lay reader.' But people aren't necessarily buying these books, so really it's not happening. With book buying down in general, the GST may just bury the concept of purchasing literature." Rashid feels that BTL may have to change their editorial policy. "We may have to start thinking more commercially in terms of what we produce, but if that happens we may as well shut down."

Sadly, books in Canada are already price sensitive. A full 75 per cent of all books sold in Canada are imported from elsewhere, primarily the United States. Of these, almost half are imported directly by end users, not by exclusive Canadian distributors.

In addition, literally millions of books are shipped across the border to book clubs, direct marketers, publishers and retailers through mail or by courier. Most of these are valued at

under \$40 and would fall within the existing postal and courier remission orders. It is clear that existing mechanisms for collecting taxes would be overburdened by announced plans to exempt books from these remission orders and domestically produced books (along with imported books) sold through formal Canadian distribution arrangements would be at a price disadvantage.

Consumers of books will find it cheaper to purchase material in the U.S. market, thus avoiding the GST altogether. A small press in the U.S. can already print and sell more copies of a given title than even a larger Canadian press, giving the U.S. market a distinct advantage over us. Further, almost 60 per cent of magazines sold in Canada originate in the States. Approximately 45 million periodicals are imported directly by individual Canadian subscribers. Although a large portion are shipped in bulk and mailed here, several million cross the border as part of the general mail.

Highly unlikely is the prospect of U.S. originating publications collecting and remitting the tax from their Canadian subscribers. Typically, they don't collect sales tax from any states outside the one in which they publish. The administration costs of enforcing a tax on subscriptions mailed from the U.S. will be prohibitive. Thus, U.S. publications will have a new nine per cent advantage over their Canadian competitors. This adds to the significant economics of scale they are already enjoying.

We are witnessing the disappearance of many small press

periodicals, ones of great political and historical value such as *Broadside*, the feminist newspaper, and *Healthsharing*, a women's health magazine, which recently received a federal budget cut of 100 per cent of its funding. (And this is pre-GST Canada).

In book publishing, current annual federal direct assistance totals some \$18 million. These funds apply to publishing sales at about \$250 million or \$400 million retail value, which raises approximately \$36 million in tax revenue. Most of these gains would have to be offset in new aid, unless the government intended to effect a decline in Canadian publishing by means of the GST.

Because it has the potential of inhibiting freedom of expression and making the industry retrogressive, increased dependence on direct support from government by publishers and writers should be avoided when other means of relief are available. There can be no doubt that the Tory government fully understands the implications of price increases on the industry, yet chooses to ignore the impending havoc the GST will create.

The Don't Tax the Reading Coalition of Canada has been actively opposing the ridiculous tax. The coalition has gained wide support from many communities. Regardless of this, they have yet to make a dent in the federal government's tax plan. The Coalition believes we should continue to enjoy tax-free reading in Canada. The GST will be a disincentive to reading. Studies have shown that consumer resistance to price increases in books and magazines is very strong.

It should also be noted that the move to tax reading stands in contradiction to the government's ambitious attempts at improving literacy in Canada. Taxation of reading material is also contrary to its so-called policy of encouraging a "distinctive" Canadian culture. By implementing the GST, the government is discouraging reading and education, pulling us backward not forward. The government has cited, among its goals in introducing the GST, "fairness, simplicity and compliance, balance and stability, international competitiveness and economic growth." Yet the effect of the GST will be the direct opposite of each of the objectives stated above.

"Civilized countries don't tax books, and Canada is the last country that should. It's shocking because Canada has gone to such extraordinary lengths to have a book publishing industry and worked for decades to build the sector. It's a tremendous betrayal of Canadian cultural policy," says Margaret McClintock, publisher at Coach House Press in Toronto. "We know Canadians care about their culture and those of us who are slogging away on the front lines and struggling to develop writers and support our literature are being given yet another handicap, this time by our own government. The government says there won't be price resistance. It's simply not true. We in the publishing industry know a lot more about price resistance on books than does the federal government."

In Ireland, book sales dropped 10 per cent when the government tried to impose a tax on

books. The tax had to be dropped. The one thing even Britain doesn't tax and holds sacred to educational and cultural growth is books. Will the Canadian government breach this code of respect of literature and educational material?

Obviously, the GST is going to hurt both producers and consumers of reading material. For small presses, the integrity of a given book may suffer and the whole concept of the small press could be altered. Public opinion suggests that the GST is the most unpopular measure implemented by any federal government in the last 20 years. The Tories have placed themselves in a very vulnerable position. By uniting with unions, coalitions and other community movements, we can stop the GST from taking hold. Given the reserved nature of Canadians, we may not be driven to rioting in the streets but we should be moved to mobilize (as we did with the Free Trade issue) and make our anger and disgust known to the federal government. The government has to know that it cannot take away our right to books and that the GST is an insult and a cruel blow to the Canadian people. If our cultural, educational and spiritual growth is to be maintained, books must maintain their zero tax rating. ■

Daria Essop was born in South Africa. She came to Canada to study and get away from apartheid, but thinks it followed her here. She currently does promotions for Sister Vision Press.

video news

by Kim Tomczak

Over the last few years, the positive contribution of the print media, both mainstream and alternative, to discussions on AIDS and related issues has been well recognized. However, the independent video sector, which, despite on-going problems of access and marginality, has produced and continues to produce cultural works of tremendous importance, has never been given its just due.

Video artists, since the mid '80s, have produced provocative and empowering tapes dealing with activism, resistance, women and AIDS, media representation and loss and mourning. Many of these works form the basis of the 1989 six-hour video compilation, *Video Against AIDS*, curated by Toronto video artist and filmmaker John Greyson and American curator Bill Horrigan. *Video Against AIDS* is distributed in the U.S. by: Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 280 South Columbus Drive, Chicago, Illinois, 60603 and in Canada by: V/Tape, 183 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2R7.

Recently, a new project that both challenges the dominant idioms of video and the landscape of mainstream TV was initiated on cable TV in Toronto. *Toronto Living With AIDS*, which began in June on Rogers Cable TV, was organized by video artist Michael Balser with an advisory board comprised of artists, AIDS

activists and health professionals. These include John Greyson; Ed Jackson, director of the AIDS Committee of Toronto; Linda Gardner, Women's Hassle Free Clinic; Richard Fung, video artist and AIDS activist; Wendell Block, physician and community health activist; Almerinda Travassos, video artist; Sean Hosein, AIDS activist; and Andy Fabo, artist and AIDS activist. Their weekly cable cast addresses AIDS issues currently ignored by the media and its pundits. Executive producer Balser combines commissioned works with existing tapes to produce provocative, informative and timely shows. Considering that Rogers Cable reaches a potential audience of 275,000, the impact of this project cannot be underestimated. The show is being bicycled to another cable system, Maclean Hunter, which will carry the program in July and August of this year. Funding for this important show came from the Community Based AIDS Prevention Projects of the City of Toronto Board of Health, AIDS Education and Support Program of The Ontario Ministry of Health, and Health and Welfare Canada. *Toronto Living With AIDS* is a satellite project of Trinity Square Video. In order to ensure that the show reaches the widest community possible, the group will make the programs available to health organizations, AIDS support groups, hospitals and AIDS

hospices across Canada. If this is the kind of show you would like to see on your community cable channel, write to: Michael Balser, Toronto Living With AIDS, c/o Trinity Square Video, 172 John Street, 4th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1X5.

Another artist's project which focuses on AIDS and community education was *In Public About AIDS*, a computer-based video installation by Bill Leeming, recently exhibited at A Space in Toronto.

In May, the Independent Film and Video Alliance (IFVA) held its annual general meeting in Toronto. The IFVA, Canada's national body representing over 50 groups engaged in the production, distribution and exhibition of independent film and video, celebrated its tenth anniversary this year. This celebration was highlighted by a brilliant series of independent film and video from across the country entitled *Showcase*. The various programs and curators included "A Decade of Feminist Film Practice," Kass Banning (Toronto); "Silent Bodies/Disembodied Texts: Feminism and

the Politics of Location," Christine Conley (Ottawa); "Absolute Dispersion Infinite Dissidence," Claude Forget (Montreal) and "Affirmative Action: Humour in Documentary," Jeanette Reinhardt (Vancouver). It was refreshing to see curators mining the wealth of work produced over the years without the usual fetishistic concentration on what's "new."

Edward Riche of the Newfoundland Independent Film Cooperative (NIFCO), last year's dynamic and articulate president, has been succeeded by Claude Ouellet from Main Film in Montreal. Mr. Ouellet brings years of production and distribution experience to this position. Most recently he juried film works for the Images 90 Film and Video Festival. New Alliance members include Toronto's Black Film and Video Network.

For all those involved in film and video, I highly recommend the *10th Anniversary Showcase Catalogue* as essential resource material. You can order it from: The Alliance of Film and Video Producers, 397 boul. St-Joseph, #1, Montreal, Quebec, H2V 2P1. ■



"Medicine Show" in Toronto Living with AIDS.

right wing arithmetic

TRANSGRESSIVE SPEAKING = ECONOMIC SILENCING

by Marusia Bociurkiw

One can almost hear the sound of chainsaws. Losing no time before they get voted out of office, conservative governments are cutting deeply and painfully into the cultural forest. Who needs a censorship bill when you can get away with so much more by simply cutting back? A moral panic gets together with a deficit and the final result (in right-wing arithmetic) is economic silencing.

The right-wing knows almost as much about culture as we do. The right-wing is *about* culture. It's about changing the means by which we communicate and the ways in which we organize ourselves from family structures to what appears on our gallery floors, walls and video monitors.

The cutbacks in the February 1990 federal budget—\$50 million from Native and Inuit programs and \$2 million from women's programs (some of which was restored for a year following protests across Canada)—are just one part of a disturbing trend. South of the border, an economic rampage sparked by some Robert Mapplethorpe photos and spearheaded by U.S. Sena-

tor Jesse Helms has led to a dramatic re-working of American arts funding criteria. In the fall of 1989, the U.S. Senate passed the Helms Amendment: a ban on National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding of "obscene art," which it defined as "sodomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sexual intercourse." Public funders in Canada have been swift to get on the obscenity bandwagon. Saskatoon's Mendel Gallery, for example, is facing a review of its exhibitions policy by one of its funders, the Saskatoon City Council. The gallery had received complaints regarding an exhibit of photo works by Canadian gay artist Evergon which depicted, among other things, bondage and gay sexuality. The Winnipeg City Council has threatened cuts to the Winnipeg Art Gallery over an exhibit of work by American Hispanic artist André Serrano. Serrano also helped inspire the Helms Amendment by displaying a photograph of a crucifix in a jar of his own piss. And then, of course, there's Otto Jelinek who reads the right-wing, racist, anti-

gay National Citizens' Coalition newsletter and decides that the Canada Council granting process needs cleaning up (from homosexuals, that is).

For people who speak from marginalized positions—people of colour, poor women, the disabled, lesbians and gays—these recent developments threaten the survival of alternative voices and venues. But, they also interrupt the emergence of a discourse, the beginnings of speech where statements of presence, rather than absence, can be made. By placing certain communities in a defensive position, they threaten to rework the terms of a debate that had begun to change.

When armours and defence mechanisms are removed, when new awareness of life is brought into previously deadened areas of the body, women begin to experience writing/the world differently. This is exciting and also very scary, for it takes time to be able to tolerate greater aliveness. Hence the recurrence of musts and must-nots. As soon as a barrier is destroyed, another is immediately erected...

—Trinh T. Minh-ha,
Woman Native Other.

Illustration by Tony Hamilton.



One of the most significant barriers to the development of marginalized voices has been their singularized positioning, which only perpetuates a disempowering discourse of absence. Art communities often operate like small towns: there is room for difference, but only in its individual (and therefore eccentric) form. British writer Kobena Mercer, speaking at the *How Do I Look* conference on lesbian and gay media held in New York in October 1990, spoke to "the notion that there can only be 'one at a time': a notion that constitutes the minority subject," and asserted that this notion would only change if a "plurality of voices" could emerge. And as lesbian activist Sunday Harrison notes in "Poor Women Organizing: Up for the Fight," the introduction to the 1991 *Everywoman's Almanac* (Women's Press), "That sort of tokenism is actually more damaging. It's not that it just doesn't solve the problem, it gives the impression that there is no problem. So it ends up being worse."

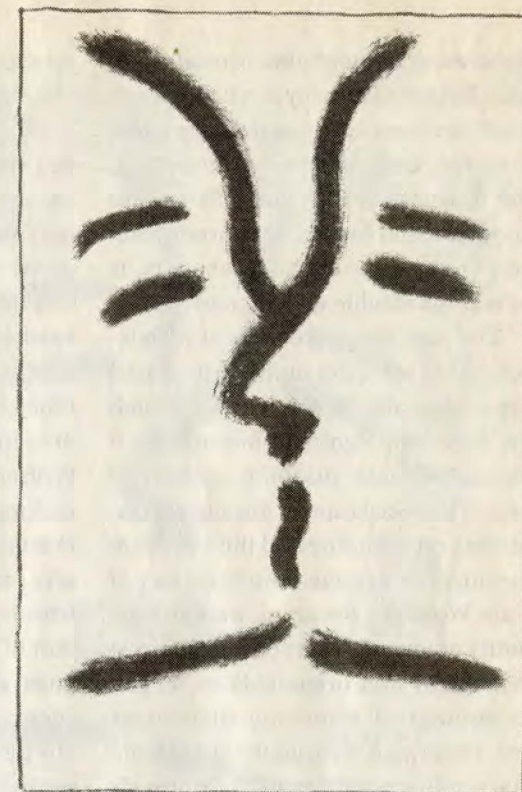
The artist who is the only "other" of her kind risks speaking in a voice

strained with the uncertainties of mistranslation. In such a position, it is impossible to speak as though one were in the foreground. It has only been through autonomous organizing and the forming of caucuses (of importance have been such groups and events as Vancouver's *In Visible Colours festival*, Toronto's Black Film & Video Network, and lesbian/gay and women's film festivals in Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver), as well as sheer individual determination, that the margins have become the primary site of radical discourses—which is why they've become embattled territory. As Leila Sujir remarked in the Spring 1990 issue of *FUSE*: "There is a sense of the colonization of the marginal position. I think that is a dangerous politic, one which has nothing to do with making community or making meaning, but which has everything to do with power..."

Mapping out the terrain of presence is a risky but necessary business and represents an important moment in the development of marginalized cultures. Alluding simultaneously to

the marginalization of Québécois and lesbian cultures, writer Nicole Brossard spoke powerfully at last year's PEN Conference of the presence that experiences of colonialization can create: "a very full collective memory that results in the constant need to tell stories." In doing so, she said, "we are creating a mental space within which we can live and breathe." Because of the ways in which we are being strategically re-organized by the Right—economically and socially—this act of re-presenting becomes both a matter of transgression and survival.

As a child growing up in an immigrant family, I learned about the relationship of language to survival at an early age. Language was a potent symbol for cultural existence: stories of war, torture and death began with the fight to speak one's mother tongue. It was not without some sense of recognition that I recently noted a spokesperson for the anti-French movement in Ontario comparing the "spread" of the French language with the AIDS virus. Not only did he unwittingly reveal his own organization's links with



right-wing homophobic crusades, he also illustrated the way in which speech itself can come to mean transgression. Inverted, the equation is compelling: the language of the body, in disease and in sexual health, in reproduction and in non-reproductive sexuality, is as communicable as language.

The new Right is obsessed with issues of the body, not simply in its sexual aspect but also in the ways in which the body can signify difference, be it through disease, disability, gender or race. The legislation of discourses impacting on sexuality and the body is at the top of its agenda. The Secretary of State Women's Program, though currently notorious for its cuts to feminist magazines and organizations, began its strategy of economic silencing a few years ago by quietly stipulating that funding would cease for women's groups that organized around lesbian or pro-choice issues. These funding criteria were not picked up as news by either dominant or alternative news media, though they represented a proscriptive measure that rivalled Britain's Clause 28 in its de facto attempt at silencing lesbian and feminist discourses.

The anarchic and potentially transgressive nature of sexual language resonates within the conservative desire to limit (conserve) speech and eliminate difference. American lesbian author (*Sex & Germs*) and AIDS activist Cindy Patton attaches great significance to what she calls the "erotophobia" of the Right and places some responsibility on the shoulders of activists and artists for turning this around. She makes a plea for more diversified representations of sexuality, and for a "reassertion of the body as the site of human subjectivity, as the locus of the variety of features that shape identification with a particular race, class, gender, etc. Strategically, it is this body which holds the most promise for interrupting the seamless

articulation of ideas that perpetuate oppression."

Sometimes, alternative communities attempt to reproduce an ideological seamlessness of their own, which only works to stunt the growth of minority discourses within them. The continuing centrality of white, heterosexual, middle class biases and sensibilities within alternative arts communities continues, despite the window-dressing of one-by-one inclusion. Without real changes to decision-making and policy-forming structures, change is painfully slow. "Policy" in arts communities covers both administrative and aesthetic areas: the notion of artistic freedom can often disguise situations in which the internal silencing is significant. Aesthetic canons develop "in camera" and the consensus that forms around them becomes buttressed by administrative decisions.

Avivid example of internal silencing is provided by lesbian feminist writer Judith Mayne who delivered an unpublished paper on lesbian film within feminist film criticism at the *How Do I Look* conference. She talked about Dorothy Arzner (a lesbian director who worked in Hollywood from the '20s to the '40s), whose image was appropriated in an almost fetish-like manner by feminist film theorists of the '70s and '80s without any mention of her lesbianism or, indeed, of almost any lesbian cinema (or cinematic subtexts). Mayne described how "feminist film theory has scorned the subversive potential of [lesbian] appropriations." She claims that "lesbianism re-situates the positioning of gender in cinema and... has a strategically important function in disrupting cinema's seamless mainstream 'fit'."

Such a claim defiantly repositions the lesbian subject, placing her on the forefront instead of at the standing-

room-only place at the back. It's a disorienting transformation of otherness; a move into the terrain of presence. But when terrain is limited, the foregrounding of one can displace another. For artists in positions of privilege, the importance of standing aside cannot be underestimated as a crucial step towards the larger goal of creating more space, more creative terrain. In times like these, standing aside can be a radical alternative.

Notions like "alternative" and "political" have completely different meanings now than they did 10 years ago. As artist-run centres and feminist organizations juggle huge deficits, damage control can begin to take priority over progressive internal politics. The pressure from without to conservativize has been subtle but persistent, with the funding agencies becoming a kind of cultural International Monetary Fund. None of this gets documented or, sometimes, even talked about. But when lesbian and/or Black artists get told that what they do isn't really art or when a major left/feminist/third world film and video distributor gets denied core funding for the fourth year in a row or when a community-based film/video theatre has to go begging, some connections must be made. The arts councils peer assessment system is an ingenious method for both dividing and silencing protest. It is also a place where the powerful codes that determine representations of people of colour, gays and lesbians are reproduced again and again. "Acceptability" is bequeathed to certain, but certainly not all, activist artists so that the "outlaw" status of the artist can have a few visible outlaws to make the whole thing look believable. The demanding, all-consuming nature of art practice and its distance from feminist, lesbian or left cultures can mean that activist artists must make a choice between staying community-based or having a "career."

Backlashes and cutbacks can make things stunningly clear: they show a community's weaknesses and strengths; they break, and build, alliances. For it is not all, but some of us who have been targetted. The hard truth of who is and isn't oppressed within cultural communities means that those of us who are white, but fall into other marginalized categories like woman or lesbian, are just beginning to see the meanings of our own white skin—and hopefully, of the importance of building alliances based on a sharing of resources. A serious time-lag exists within the visual art communities in particular: debates about anti-racist hiring and programming policies, representation and appropriation are progressing at the proverbial snail's pace. Little solidarity has been formed with groups that are dealing directly with these issues, like Vision 21 or the Women's Press.

As the Canada Council gets dragged before the carpet of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee this year (in the past, the Canada Council has been largely exempt from such scrutiny), phrases like "artistic merit" are likely to be thrown around by guys in suits who wouldn't know a lesbian video if their limousines drove over one. Nice words like "money," "budget" and "deficit reduction" will take the place of not-so-nice words like "homophobia," "racism" and "right-wing backlash." Indignation over the NEA cuts and the Otto Jelinek outburst has been easy to locate. Everyone agrees it's scary situation. But what theoretical, critical and structural apparatus do cultural communities possess to really fight back? Where is the political will? How deep does commitment to difference go when there's so little of the pie to be had?

Illustration by Tony Hamilton.



It will take a lot more than indignation to fight this recent right-wing cultural backlash. It may or may not be possible to form a solid community of activist artists to fight back because community depends on shared ethics and a network or support, and the system we work under does everything it can to prevent that. Imagining an effective activist stance against economic silencing requires a kind of "ecology" of action that recognizes the delicate interconnectedness of marginalized communities, one more developed than the anti-censorship movement of the '80s and more genuine than the "shopping list" politics of too many left and feminist coalitions. And it will mean fighting tooth and nail for space for transgressive positions—theoretical spaces, social spaces,

physical spaces—that allow for difference and, as Kobena Mercer put it, "collective subjectivities made up of manifold differences." But as push comes more and more to shove, it's easy to see who's going to get shoved out first. It's not as easy to see who is going to organize on their/our behalf. ■

*Marusia Bociurkiw is a video artist and writer active in cultural and feminist communities. Her most recent video, *Bodies In Trouble*, will be released in the fall.*

This article is based on a paper given at the Heart of the Heart of the Regions Film and Video festival in Calgary in 1989.



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employment equity & the ontario college of art

⚖️ IN November 1989, the Ontario College of Art approved Equity 2000, a policy to increase the representation of women on the faculty of the College. The policy has provoked an incredible backlash both within the College and in the media.

NUMBERS

by sue findlay

Charging power-hungry feminists and an incompetent administration with manipulating the decision-making process of the College to produce a policy that advantages women at the expense of men and other "disadvantaged" groups, anti-Equity forces within the College launched a battle that has captured national attention. ➤

The proponents of Equity 2000 at the College were not prepared for such a backlash. As Lisa Steele, co-chair of the Status of Women Committee, commented, she had "suspended disbelief" about a possible backlash to Equity 2000. Not only was the policy modelled after a similar one introduced at Ryerson with relative ease, but it is the product of years of negotiations and compromises among the various interests within the College. Sensitive to resistance against a rigid policy, Equity 2000 emphasizes the need for a flexible response to the realities of particular departments within the College.

The Ontario College of Art (OCA) has had a formal commitment to increase the representation of women on the faculty since 1985 when fourth year General Studies student Renée Long documented the lack of female representation at the College and requested that the chair of OCA's Governing Council initiate some form of affirmative action. The Council responded immediately by striking a Task Force on the Status of Women "to investigate the issue and advise them on policies and strategies for ensuring equity for women at the College, which might serve as a basis for concerted action, or as models for consideration."

Between 1985 and 1988, the Task Force held workshops on the issues of affirmative action and employment equity. It applied for



and received \$53,000 from the Ontario Women's Directorate Employment Equity Incentive Fund for an employment equity co-ordinator who produced the *Preliminary Report on the Status of Women in Teaching and Related Positions at OCA* in January 1987. In 1988, a permanent part-time employment equity co-ordinator was hired to produce a final report by December 1989, as specified by the Ministry of Universities and Colleges in their funding criteria. Equity 2000 is the final distillation of a policy process that included first a small working group, then a more representative Equity 2000 committee, and finally the President's Equity Review Committee.

Phase I of the policy was approved by the Governing Council in November 1989. The second part of the policy, Phase II, will address the under-representation of Natives, other visible minorities and the disabled on the faculty and staff, and launch an Educational Equity program to address the under-representation of these groups within the student population.

The heart of Equity 2000 and the target of the backlash is recommendation 17:

THAT the Council earmark all continuing periods (i.e., courses) vacated by retiring faculty over the next ten years as periods to be filled by qualified women... and

THAT the President and the President's Equity Review Committee meet with department chairs to discuss the means of filling the retirement periods as well as setting additional long and short term goals for hiring women and for increasing the percentage of periods allocated to women for each year to the year 2000.

What this means, in concrete terms, is that 175 courses will be made available only to women between 1990 and 2000—a strategy that will increase the representation of women on faculty from 24 per cent to 38 per cent. Fifty of these courses will be filled this summer for the upcoming academic year (1990/91). One thousand women from across Canada have applied to teach these courses, a response that decisively lays to rest the arguments that women's lack of interest in teaching at the College accounts for their under-representation.

Illustration by Gail Gellner



Anti-Equity forces like to give the impression that Equity 2000 is the first step in a take-over of the College by feminist hordes. They have gained a lot of sympathy with their contention that "men need not apply" for positions at OCA in the next ten years, arguing that men are paying the price of women's historic under-representation at the College. What they fail to mention is that the courses set aside for women only represent less than half of the courses available to both women and men each year. According to President Timothy Porteous, in addition to the approximately 18 vacancies created by retirement each year, 22 to 24 courses are available due to resignations and newly funded periods.

However, if Equity 2000 promises an increase in the number of women on faculty, it

does not promise a real shift in the balance of power between women and men at the College. Access to the decision-making process, for faculty, rests on gaining full-time status—holding four day-time courses and after a two-year probation period. Only full-time faculty can vote for nominees to or be elected to the Governing Council or serve on its committees. Of the women faculty at OCA, currently 81 per cent are part-time and over half are on contract.

Equity 2000 also includes a recommendation to encourage the College to hire women as probationary, as opposed to contractual, faculty. This would give them access to full-time or part-time status, but would not guarantee that they would be elected to the Governing Council. Stressing the need for the

flexibility that part-time positions give to both the College and faculty, the policy also recommends changes in College legislation to give those with part-time status access to the decision-making process. Until the changes to the legislation are approved however, the power that women have depends mainly on their participation on departmental committees (really voluntary work), the perspectives they bring to their students in the classroom, and constant surveillance of College decisions that affect their working lives. Their power depends on their ability to be everywhere at once: a very exhausting requirement.

Some feminists explain the backlash as a continuation of struggles that began with challenges to "malestream" theory and practice and the emergence of feminist perspectives on art in the late 1960s. At that time, there was little space in the institutional structures of the art world for the expression of this perspective—in either the teaching or the making of art. The 1970s were characterized by the development of feminist alternatives to these institutions. The 1980s, on the



other hand, reflected a greater determination by feminists and a demand by students for the integration of feminist perspectives into mainstream art institutions like the Ontario College of Art. This determination has been met by an equally forceful opposition mounted by the male-dominated art community and by male artists whose practices rely largely on the notion of a universal (male) subject as creator and the objectification of the female form. Equity 2000 gives feminists a new advantage in this struggle by overriding the exclusive control of the "old boys network" over who teaches the core courses and allowing more space for feminist perspectives to be taught at the College.

The struggle between competing perspectives on art is not a new one at OCA. According to one former student, this employment equity struggle is just another example of philosophic splits that have always marked the introduction of new perspectives at the College. OCA's development since the '60s can be seen as a dialectical process in which the old and the new are forever clashing in a struggle over what art is and how it should be taught. This inevitably includes a struggle, not only for the representation of new perspectives, but for the restructuring of faculty to include those people whose practice reflects the new perspectives. The transcendence of particular struggles has been achieved by creating new departments, thereby incorporating the new perspectives into the College structure rather than resolving the battle. Over the years, what has been created is an "unequal structure of representation," that is, a structure characterized by a hierarchy of perspectives and personnel. It is this structure that guarantees the domination of the old over the new rather than a pluralism or an equality among different interests. Feminist perspectives may be integrated into the Ontario College of Art and cause some irritation to traditional male artists but with this structure in place, it is unlikely that they will seriously threaten male domination of the definition of art.

Illustration by Gail Gellmer.



Less visible in the struggle, but more threatening to the old guard than visions of a take-over by feminists or the domination of feminist perspectives, is the fact that Equity 2000 challenges the control that faculty have historically exercised over College appointments. The designation of retirement periods for women only merely disrupts the ability of the "old boys network" to hire whom it wants and essentially gives the administration the right to intervene in the planning, hiring and evaluation of faculty. Also, Equity 2000 does support the introduction of new perspectives into OCA's curriculum, a step fundamental to the process of revitalizing and restructuring the College and one that is high on the President's agenda.

Overturning the rights of the faculty is not a conspiracy of the OCA administration, however. The capacity to regulate the representation of workers is built into the definition of employment equity as legislation and policies developed in the 1980s. Many feminists are very critical about the wide-spread use of employment equity policies as they are

currently defined, seeing them as a way of containing our demands and disorganizing our struggles. They argue that these policies are the end result of a process of institutionalization that has drawn our issues into a conceptual framework and a set of practices that limit the development of reforms to those that are consistent with management needs to regulate our labour. Lost in this process are our original demands for the integration of feminist perspectives and the direct participation of feminists in the decision-making processes that shape our lives.

Since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1967-70), Canadian feminists have sought ways to put the representation of women in the workforce on the political agenda. Beginning in the early 1970s with the relatively passive and voluntary Equal Opportunity Programs for women in the federal public service, we have moved through "active" and "pro-active" variations of these programs in both the public and private sectors to arrive at mandatory programs in the 1980s.

Mandatory programs originally appeared in the United States in the 1960s as Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action at that time was defined as a comprehensive package of measures including training, counselling, child care and reform of personnel practices to increase the representation of Blacks and women at all levels of the workplace. In 1983, the Abella Commission's *Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report* successfully steered Canadian policy-makers away from the perceived perils of mandatory affirmative action for "designated groups" (women, Natives, the disabled and visible minorities). Replacing "affirmative action" with "employment equity," the Commission argued that "No great principle is sacrificed in exchanging phrases of disputed definition for newer ones that may be more accurate and less destructive of reasoned debate." But, in fact, this shift in language reflected a definite shift in strategies away from those that stressed the rights of workers to those that stressed the needs of management. Employment equity was defined by the Com-



mission as "a function of an employer's human resource and strategic operations." The Commission emphasized that "employers be given flexibility in the redesign of their employment practices." (p. 4, General Summary, *Equality in Employment*) While the need for education, training and child care was addressed by the Commission, it was effectively separated from the employment equity package and shifted to other terrains of struggle. Basing its recommendations on a belief in legislative strategies and the willingness of employers and government policy-makers to respond to "reasoned debate" and policies grounded in "fairness," the Commission sacrificed the more comprehensive measures that would have strengthened the role that women themselves could play in the process of changing structures and increasing their representation.

The "making" of employment equity by the Royal Commission was a splendid display of how a consensus on government policy is created. In this case, the consensus obscures the contradictions between political commitments to the rights of individuals or groups and how the implementation of these commitments to equal representation reinforces employers' ability to determine (that is, limit) this representation.

The language and arguments of the Commission are echoed in the "Discussion Paper on Employment Equity in the Broader Public and Private Sectors" issued by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship in July 1989 which reviews the relative merits of the two main approaches to employment equity: "a persuasive non-regulated one, and the regulatory one." Like the Abella Commission, the emphasis is on flexibility and fairness:

The challenge in Ontario is to develop an approach to employment equity that will be effective in changing the status of disadvantaged groups, that will not impose an unfair burden upon one or more sectors, and that can ideally secure the support of those affected by the issue.

(p. 3, General Summary, *Equality in Employment*)

Ontario employment equity legislation will be introduced in the near future.



Illustration by Gail Gellner.

Employment equity is now about numbers, about numbers of women. There is no hint at all of our demands for the representation of *feminist* perspectives. Women candidates for the 50 courses available this year at the Ontario College of Art were not necessarily assessed on their understanding of feminist perspectives on the subject they would be teaching. With this limited model of employment equity in place, it is hard to define the backlash in terms of a reaction against power-hungry feminists. What is at stake is who controls the College and their vision of art and of art education.

The struggle for control of the College is not new. It was particularly visible in what are referred to as "the Ascott years." Roy Ascott, lured from England to be the Presi-

dent of OCA in 1970, was described as a breath of fresh air by many of those involved with his attempts to bring new perspectives to the practice and teaching of art at OCA and to restructure the faculty. Ascott was charged by the Governing Council with proceeding without due process to change the College and turfed out in 1971 by the "old guard." This faction considered him to be "quite ruthless," stripping securities from the faculty and generally making students and faculty nervous, angry and depressed. (from *Art Creates Change*, videotape by Margaret Moores, 1983)

The tone and language used by the anti-Equity forces to describe the impact of Equity 2000 sounds much the same as that used by opponents of Ascott's proposals for restructuring in the 1970s. While they refer initially to democratic principles and the social injustice of being denied their individual rights to compete freely for whatever position they want, the language of power dominates their arguments in the end, shattering the gloss of reason and exposing their preoccupation with questions of control rather than those of individual rights.

Greg Damery, an instructor in the Fine Arts department, describes Equity 2000 as a power-play by a group of women who have



more interest in politics than they do in producing art. Damery sees no impediments to the representation of women of "his generation"—that is, women who have graduated in the last five years—who apply for positions, and concludes that those who are behind Equity 2000 have power in mind, not representation. And men are not to blame.

Getting closer to the real threat, Damery attacks the administration. The under-representation of women on faculty is due to administrative mismanagement, rather than individual or systemic discrimination against women by men. According to Damery, the numbers of women were increasing through "normal" hiring practices until 1986 when the President cut three per cent of the faculty to cover the expense of an unnecessary management cohort.

Summer may produce a lull in the struggle over Equity 2000, but anti-Equity forces are still committed to overturning the policy. One member of the Governing Council dismisses the backlash as "silly," expressing a certainty that Equity 2000 will survive the fray. Approval of Equity 2000 by the Governing Council and the Faculty Association should theoretically have put an end to the battles that have plagued the development of the policy since 1985. But, the vote is not the final word in the democratic process. Opponents to the policy are not only challenging the decision at the level of the Governing Council, but have lodged complaints with the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Media coverage of the backlash continues to put public pressure on the College to modify its policy.

The Governing Council is virtually split on its support for Equity 2000: seven of the eight faculty and student representatives are anti-Equity and the nine government appointees are pro-Equity. Control of the Governing Council is central to the struggle between pro- and anti-Equity forces and, at present, the anti-Equity forces control College representation on the Council. John Grube, spokesperson for the anti-Equity faculty representatives on the Governing Council,

recently referred to the policy as "this ugly piece of racism and homophobia" from "white middle-class feminist sponsors." (letter to *Rites*, February 1990) In March 1990, he challenged the policy by introducing an amendment that called for it to be applied simultaneously to all "designated" groups: women, Natives, visible minorities and the disabled. Approval of the amendment would have reopened the debate on Equity 2000 in the Council, giving the anti-Equity forces another chance to defeat it. Chairman Jim Coutts's (a government appointee) proposal for a year-end evaluation defeated Grube's motion, but only because the government representatives voted in a block to support Coutts's motion.

Externally, public support for Equity 2000 has been drowned by nation-wide media coverage that has been overwhelmingly anti-Equity. The College has to take some of the blame for the media's distortion of the policy—the press release announcing the approval of Equity 2000 did give the impression that *only* women would be hired over the next ten years. But it was a segment of *The Fifth Estate* on CBC television (January 9, 1990) that capitalized on the controversy and drove it to new heights. Taking up the complaints of the Equity 2000 opponents (mainly in the Fine Arts Department of the College), *The Fifth Estate's* "Men Need Not Apply" culminated a media response that has had all the sensitivity of a witch hunt—fuelling fears about reverse discrimination that both distort the realities of the reforms proposed and obscure the real nature of women's under-representation at the College. This kind of coverage validated the backlash against Equity 2000 by linking it to the more general anti-feminist sentiments reflected in the recriminalization of abortion and cutbacks in funding to women's centres and other women's services introduced by the federal Conservative government and in neo-conservative groups throughout the western world.

But, anti-Equity forces are not relying solely on the Governing Council to overturn Equity 2000. They believe there is a good chance that the Ontario Human Rights Commission will rule that Equity 2000 is discriminatory when it responds to OCA President Tim Porteous' request for an Order to establish the legality of Equity 2000 as a special program under Section 13 of the Ontario Human Rights Code.¹

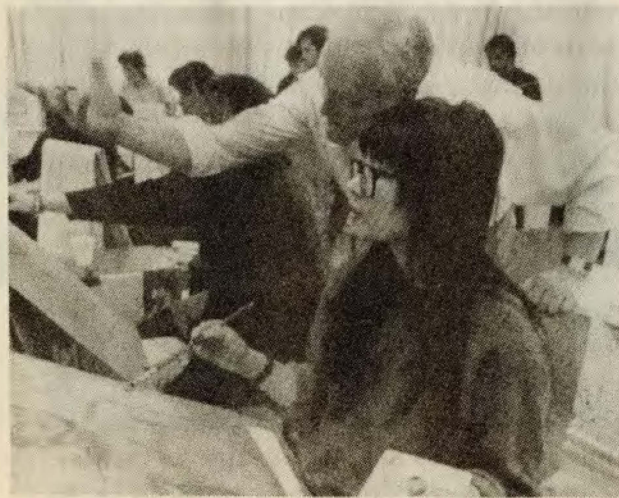
Representatives of the "old guard" are clearly accustomed to victory in struggles that threaten their control. But on this issue, the balance of power is tipped against them by government policies designed to increase the representation of women, Natives, visible minorities and the disabled. As Anita Dahlin, Director of the Systemic Investigation Unit of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, reminds us, we need policies like employment equity because the "playing field itself is uneven." Experience in fighting for equality and freedom from exploitation and oppression over the last three decades has given us more insight into how pervasive and deeply-rooted this system of privilege is. We know now that lining everyone up at the starting gate is not enough to ensure equality. White, anglo-saxon, able-bodied men continue to dominate our institutions and control the decision-making structures under the policy framework of equal opportunities. And yes, in the first instance, the balancing of representation will mean by definition that the dominant group will lose its position of privilege.

It seems unlikely that the Commission will find Equity 2000 discriminatory with this perspective in place. However, as employment equity policies now place an emphasis on the simultaneous treatment of all of the "disadvantaged" groups, it's possible that the Commission will recommend that OCA combine Phases I and II to make Natives, other visible minorities and the disabled eligible for the retirement periods earmarked exclusively for women. OCA might welcome such

a recommendation. The exclusive focus on women in Phase I is as much a product of government policy as it is the policy-making process at the College. Grants from the Ontario Women's Directorate Employment Equity Incentive Fund that OCA received were allocated only for policies to increase the representation of women.

Equity 2000 will likely survive as a policy, but is it likely to encounter the kind of resistance that employment equity co-ordinators throughout Ontario are experiencing in their attempts to implement similar policies? There is enormous resistance in both the public and private sectors to increase the representation of women in any way that conflicts with the main business of their organizations. In the private sector, managers find commitments to increase the representation of women in conflict with both the primary goal of maximizing profits and the sexism of a male-dominated management. In the public service sector, the resistance is more subtle—reflecting a conflict between political commitments to representative structures and the sexual hierarchical division of labour that characterizes large public bureaucracies.

In the federal public service, for instance, the representation of women has increased,



but it has increased in a particular way. The findings of the Task Force on Barriers to Women in the Public Service are that women now represent 44 per cent of the labour force in Canada and in the federal public service, but that "beneath the veneer of representation lie the problems of compression and concentration." (volume I, p. 123) Sixty per cent of these women are still in the clerical and secretarial categories and "representation of women is very low (single digit percentages) in 20 of the 72 occupational groups." (volume I, p. 37) The retention rate for women entering traditionally male categories is also low—caused in large part by their reaction to male resistance or what the Task Force calls the "lack of comfort" men feel with women in leadership positions. In the end then, bureaucratic rules and regulations combine with male privilege to maintain the existing hierarchy and limit the representation of women to traditionally female categories.

At OCA however, the pattern of resistance is less familiar to us. While the battle over male privilege is more overt, the particular beliefs and interests of the President and government appointees to the Governing Council are more compatible with feminist demands for representation than those of the anti-Equity forces. Unlike managers in the public service sector, OCA's President is aggressively pursuing the implementation of Equity 2000. Equity 2000 will definitely increase the number of women on the faculty at OCA. More spaces will therefore be available for women to talk about feminist perspectives on art—if feminists are hired. The College has agreed to sponsor a "Women and the Arts" lecture series with a \$15,000 grant from the Ontario Women's Directorate. The increase in numbers may provide the basis for new challenges to the male-dominated decision-making structure and the struggle for Equity 2000—torturous as it has been a good deal of the time—has politicized faculty and students alike.

There are distinct limits to the reforms won, however. A 14 per cent increase in the representation of women on faculty is minimal and Equity 2000 makes no proposals to increase the representation of women in the decision-making processes of the College. There are proposals to change the composition of the Governing Council to give more access to part-time faculty, the status of the largest percentage of women faculty, but there is no guarantee that women will be elected to these positions. Despite the increase in numbers, the representation of women within OCA will still be shaped by a sexual hierarchical division of labour that relegates them to part-time and/or temporary positions. At OCA, this barrier is obscured by the relative autonomy individual instructors have in relation to the courses they teach and the apparent collegiality that characterizes the unequal relations among them. It is a barrier then that is held in place by our own beliefs and practices as well as by the rules and regulations of the institution. Lastly, Equity 2000 does not reflect the differences among women in terms of race, or political or sexual orientation. Will representation increase in a way that maintains the privileges of white, middle-class, heterosexual women—a group that is probably least threatening to male-dominated institutions?

The proposed development of Phase II of Equity 2000 may provide more openings for radical alternatives that address some of the limitations of Phase I. Although racism is certainly as entrenched as sexism in our institutions, visible minorities and Natives may be more critical of employment equity policies than feminists. They have not been part of the same kind of consensus-building processes that have made it difficult for feminists to consider alternatives to the government policies that emerged as responses to their demands. Participants in the debates over Phase II may find themselves engaged in policy struggles that go well beyond the question of numbers that, in the end, dominated Phase I. Particularly articu-

late about the issue of representation are the Native students at OCA who rightfully argue that their interests are not represented in Phase I of Equity 2000. Implicit in the Native students' struggles is a focus on changes in curriculum as well as on the under-representation of Natives on faculty. The newly-formed Native Students' Group has successfully argued for a new course in Native Studies and won the right to have a Native instructor teach the course instead of the "logical" choice of an anthropologist already on faculty who has taught Native Studies at another institution. The College has also found funds to hire Reona Brass, a Native student, to gather background material for the course. This is bound to threaten some of the more traditional faculty who have resisted demands for instruction grounded in different histories, current experiences and perspectives on art. This issue will undoubtedly be debated in the development of Phase II of Equity 2000. Let's hope it will not be reduced to simply the clash between race and gender that has dominated other institutions in the recent past, nor to the blurring of differences that has weakened government commitments to specific groups. May Phase II emerge as a celebration of differences that will speak to and for the many diverse groups at OCA, reflecting not just the distinctiveness of gender, race and ability but of class and sexual orientation.

In the face of the limits to Equity 2000—and the limits we have experienced in relation to most other policies that have emerged as a response to women's demands since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women—it is sometimes difficult to see the value of our struggles to define policies. Since both the framework and the legislation to establish employment equity exist, wouldn't Equity 2000 have been established without our struggles? The answer is "yes." But with any equity policy, the means by which it is established will vary according to the particular focus within the specific institution and, more importantly, by women's ability to

influence the policy-making process. Granted, openings exist in this process—indeed, there are requirements to include the participation of women on decision-making bodies—and we really have no choice but to pursue them. We have the formal political commitments to reform for most of our issues; now we are faced with how these commitments will be implemented. The terrain of struggle for the most part has shifted to the institutional level where we are negotiating for power. The issue for us today then is how to maintain our feminist perspective in this process and how to develop effective strategies to negotiate for our perspectives within the unequal structure of representation that characterizes our institutions.

Equity 2000 has limited demands for representation, but it may also have shaped our practices in a way that limits our capacity to negotiate effectively. The most obvious problem is one of burn-out on the part of the pro-Equity forces. Women at the College have put endless energy into this issue for over five years, taking risks both personally and professionally. More disruptive to our ongoing struggles, however, may be a dangerous complacency induced by the alignment of feminists, administration and government appointees working together to produce an apparently successful policy. It is important

to remember that the policy represents an alignment of interests in a particular moment, an alignment that is possible because of a compatibility of different interests rather than a commitment to the same interests. As such, Equity 2000 is an unstable equilibrium of compromise that is vulnerable to changes in the issues facing any of those who have negotiated the equilibrium. While the current administration and government appointees support Equity 2000 because they believe in women's rights to more representation, they also support it because the feminist agenda is compatible with their interest in restructuring the College. However, they may not support any further demands and they may be forced to withdraw their support from the policy should it conflict with their responsibilities to the overall management of the College's resources. What will happen to Equity 2000 if the College deficit continues to mount?

Equity 2000 gives the College a mandate to regulate the representation of women, men and minority groups on the faculty. While faculty still controls the appointment process, these appointments must conform to College commitments to representation that are shaped by the administration and the government appointees on the Governing Council who hold the balance of power at the College today. They may try to go beyond a policy that is inherently limited, but continued reliance on them to represent the interests of women as defined by feminists is unrealistic.

And, finally, not to be minimized as an impediment to further struggles for representation is the impact of gender conflict on our understanding of how our representation is limited. Male resistance to increases in the representation of women—while quite real and significant—has too easily turned our attention to gender conflict as *the* explanation for our under-representation and made it difficult for us to address the fundamental contradictions between a feminist definition of representation and the definition expressed in current policies. At OCA, male

resistance has also consolidated a “contradictory unity” of pro-Equity forces that obscures the long term differences in interests between the administration and the faculty. In so doing, it has strengthened the pro-Equity forces. But it has also weakened the ability of the faculty to negotiate with the administration on issues of representation in the future. Instead of undermining the struggle for Equity 2000, the backlash has prompted an alliance that almost guarantees its success.

EQUITY 2000 is necessary in women's struggle for representation at the Ontario College of Art and, given the limits of the policy framework of employment equity and the resistance of the anti-Equity forces, it must be regarded as a “good first step.” The next step is to move beyond the definition of representation based on numbers to one that challenges both the sexual and racial hierarchical division of labour that defines our status in the workplace and the control that men continue to exercise over the decision-making process. This is the more difficult stage in the process. We don't have too many examples of success in breaking these barriers in our struggles on other issues. The struggle must be one that recognizes the specific demands for the representation of visible minorities, Natives and the disabled. Organization is essential, as is our ability to maintain an oppositional perspective on our demands and our practice in the face of inevitable resistance from the dominant interests at the College. Autonomous organizations (e.g., Native Students' Group) may be the focal point in defining demands for representation but victory will depend on alliances that link the common interests of students, faculty and administrative workers in the direct representation of their interests in the management of the College. Pro-Equity forces have made a strong commitment to these kinds of alliances in the past year. Real representation depends on making these alliances a reality. ♪



Martha Judge
performed at an
OCA pro-Equity rally,
April 1989.
Photo by
Cheryl Rondeau-
Hoekstra.

SUE FINDLAY is a feminist activist engaged in analysing how government policies and the participation of feminists in their development and implementation limit the reforms necessary for women's liberation.

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I would also like to thank: Peter Douglas Findlay for his inciteful criticisms of an early draft of this article; Sandra Haar and Jane Springer for their expert editing.

ENDNOTE

1. On June 26, 1990, the Ontario Human Rights Commission approved the employment equity program at OCA. The Commission said it “welcomes the comprehensive approach of OCA's program” and stipulated that, after the first year, the College provide the Commission with a detailed progress report on both phases. Section 13 of the Human Rights Code permits employers to voluntarily offer special programs to alleviate economic or social disadvantage.



ADA

STOP RACIST POLICE

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606-87 report on activities and
paper clippings, newsletter, program
and an opportunity to fill
TAC form

note that we have not had an opportunity to fill in the appropriate information on the 1988 TAC form as yet. Our audited statement is now being completed and we do not have this financial information at hand. Please be assured that it will be forthcoming in the future.

would like to direct your attention to the attached executive summary
lines our program of activities for the coming year. You will note
have expended mainstage theatrical activity over a period of time in
that we may carefully assess our present condition and future needs.
this very important for us to do at the present time.

in the process of scheduling several meetings with
regarding our current state of affairs and I expect
to be one of the participants. We have

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**STOP
RACIST
ATTACKS**

SEP 2002

...to individual visual artists

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individual artists are available for other projects which we have not yet had time to publicize. You require additional information. Want to know more? Call the CAR office at 416-593-8888. We are planning to publish the application and to update the deadlines have not changed. With CAR's new newsletters.

COUNCIL GRANTS

or the Film, Photography and Video Office for detailed information, grant levels and a
Arts Council,
or Street West, Suite 500,
Ontario, M5S 1T6
(416) 961-1660 Toll-free

Individuals

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publish + be damned

If our voices are heard, it makes the concept of color obsolete. This has to be the inevitable result.

— James Baldwin

by Marlene Nourbese Philip

In literary circles, there is an argument making the rounds, from the letters page of *NOW Magazine* to the "notes from the inner circle" of *Books In Canada* to the panel discussions at the PEN Congress held last fall in Toronto, the substance of which is that minority—read Asian, African and Native—writers have difficulty getting their books published because there is too small an audience and market for such writers. Being essentially business people, publishers are, therefore, unwilling to publish such work. The factors at work here, however, have less to do with audience and market forces and more to do with racism.

The argument outlined above assumes that the publishing industry in Canada is market driven. It is not. Apart from foreign controlled houses, the Canadian publishing industry is heavily subsidized by various levels of government—either through arts council assistance or through the direct transfer of funds. In 1989, subsidies from the federal government, through the Canada Council and direct transfers,

amounted to some \$15 million; while on the provincial level in Ontario, there was some \$2.5 million in guaranteed loans and interest payments and just under \$1 million in arts council assistance. Market forces do not determine the publishing activity of those publishing houses receiving subsidies; if they did, these houses would not be in business.

The assumption that if you are a Canadian writer of Native, Asian or African background, the only possible audience for your work is one comprised of individuals of the same ethnic background is erroneous and narrow-minded. While writers like James Baldwin, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Joy Kogawa and Austin Clarke may have written their works with audiences from their own particular cultures in mind, their success beyond those cultures clearly belies the argument that writers are limited to audiences of their particular ethnic or racial group and that, therefore, their work can only be marketed within that group.

A frequent explanation for the success of such writers is merit: that because the books written by these writers are good books, everyone (and if we are honest, we must admit that "everyone," in this context, means the white mainstream audience) can read them. However, these books become, by definition, "good" books because the white mainstream audience reads them. The argument, refined, would go something like this: Canadian writers of African, Asian or Native backgrounds have a difficult time getting their work published because of the small size of their respective ethnic audiences, except if their works are "good" enough to appeal to a white audience.

While quality is an important consideration in the publication of any work (and the talents of the writers mentioned above go a long way in explaining their success), as important is what South African writer J.M. Coetzee describes as "that vast and wholly ideological superstructure of publishing, reviewing and criticism" which, together, all work to market books within the dominant culture.

Often work by writers from other cultures succeed in the publishing world of the dominant culture, not only because they may be well-written, but also because they satisfy certain ideas already in existence in the dominant culture. Authors like V.S. Naipaul and his nephew Neil Bissoondath are both examples of writers who catapulted to fame on the savage and, at times, racist critique of the "Third World." In the former's case the talent is indisputable; in the latter, debateable. Alice Walker's mega-success and position as Queen of Black womanist writing in the United States is in no small way based on her work, *The Color Purple*, tapping into certain deep-seated traditions in America. Celie and Shug eventually become small entrepreneurs, pulling themselves up by their own effort. Not to mention the theme of lesbianism which is much more acceptable with the white feminist movement than in African American communities. Compare her work with Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, which is far more seriously

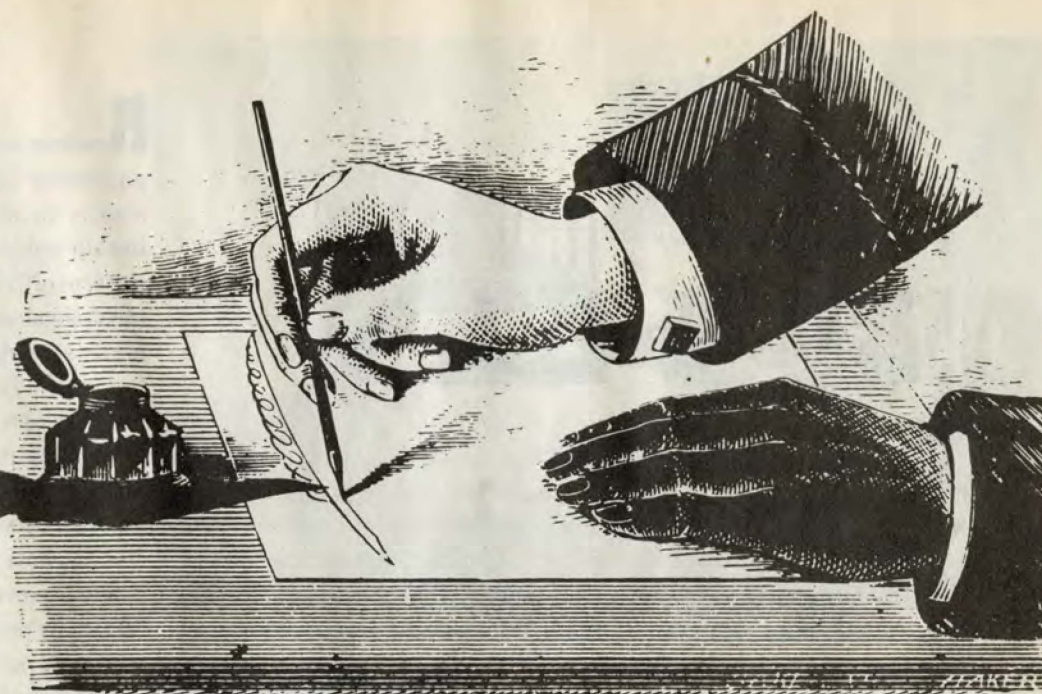
contested by the dominant, white racist culture of America. Morrison, until very recently, had never won a major literary prize in the United States, a fact which generated a letter of support by fellow African American writers (which appeared in the *New York Review of Books* in 1988) for her contribution to African American letters.

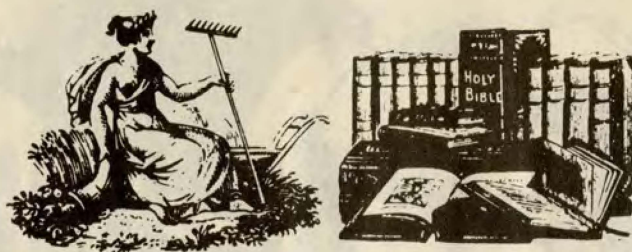
One unfortunate result of the workings of the "superstructure" is the one-only syndrome—at any one point in time there can only be one great African American writer, while many other equally talented writers languish in relative obscurity. One could argue that the price for the admission of one or two is the exclusion of all the others.

Publishing, reviewing and criticism are not unbiased activities; individuals who work in these areas reflect and represent certain political and social attitudes, which in turn affect which work will not only get published—this is often the easiest part of "publication"—but also reviewed and criticised. This does not mean that an evaluation of a book is a purely political act bear-

ing no relevance to its quality nor does it mean that a work by an African Canadian author which is rejected by publishers is necessarily bad. Doris Lessing's "experiments" with her Jane Somers novels, which saw her own publishers rejecting work by her under a different name, should put an end to such assumptions. It does, however, mean that an important part of the assessment of value and quality of a work is a judgment that is all of a piece with wider political and social values.

It should be recognized that white Canadians do not only read works about their own cultures. English literature is replete with subject matter and characters taken from other cultures and races—written by white authors. In a recent piece that appeared in *Books in Canada*, Governor General's Award winner Erin Mouré writes that such a position—that the only possible audience for a Black writer is a Black audience—"covers up and renders silent the influence (when they're allowed to be heard) minority writers have within our culture(s) on the ex-





perience and perceptions of all (including white) writers." What appears indisputable, however, is that the only audience that matters in Canada is the white audience and how members of the "ideological superstructure"—reviewers, critics and publishers alike—interpret the interests and needs of that audience. Clearly this superstructure sees the Canadian audience as narrow-minded, provincial and unable to read and enjoy anything but work written by white writers, with the odd dash of ethnic literary spice proffered by one or two carefully chosen writers.

What is, however, more disturbing about the arguments suggesting that certain writers write only for their specific ethnic and/or racial audience is that the proponents of these arguments are often the very ones who argue for the untrammelled nature of the writer's imagination and his or her right to enter any culture or society imaginatively—in particular minority cultures such as Native cultures—and write about it. But for which audience? The white or Native audience? Pushing the argument to its logical conclusion, it would proceed as follows: A white writer may use any aspect of any culture—in this instance, African, Asian or Native—in his or her writing because the imagination is free. Such a writer can write about those things for white audiences. When a writer from one of those cultures writes about it, it can only be for his or her own particular cultural or racial audience. Because

this audience is so small, the likelihood of a writer from one of these minority cultures getting his or her work published is understandably very small. Whites, however, are interested in reading such material, provided it is written by one of their own.

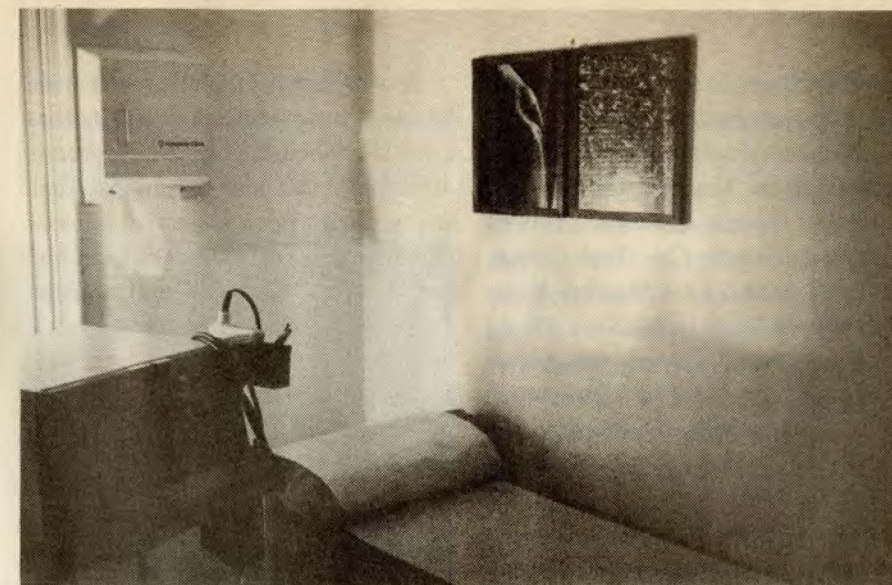
There exists, however, a historical example which damns this narrow-minded approach even further: the spread of English literature throughout the Empire and, more recently, the Commonwealth. Without an inkling of English life, Black and Brown subjects of the English Empire were expected to ingest its literature, unmediated by any lived experience of the culture. The entire livelihood of Black and Brown subjects often depended on understanding daffodils, nightingales, fogs and winter, while living with constant sunshine, hummingbirds and poinsettias. These subjects successfully grasped many, if not all, of the nuances of English literature. That experience could be described as one of the most successful examples of readers reading across boundaries—albeit in one direction and as a direct consequence of imperial power. As an approach to the study of literature, the imperial model is not to be recommended; we must, however, question whether Canadian readers are unable to do what readers with a lot fewer material resources have been doing for the last few centuries. Or is it that publishers and reviewers aren't giving them half the chance?

Readings is essentially a profoundly anarchic act, particularly if readers have access to material that challenges hackneyed and stereotypical ideas and patterns of thought. However, the wholly ideological superstructure of publishing, reviewing and criticism in Canada has failed to take up the challenge that the presence of other voices in Canada offers. The reason why African, Asian and Native writers have difficulty getting published has little to do with audience and markets and much to do with racism and power: power to exercise that racism by deciding which books ought and ought not to be published, reviewed and critiqued. Fear is the other important variable at work here: fear, as James Baldwin wrote, on the part of those who hold power at "being described by those they've been describing for so long."

It was also Baldwin's opinion that the inevitable result of Black voices being heard was that the concept of colour would become obsolete. A large part of the current debate over the writer and voice has to do with certain voices—certain Canadian voices—not being heard. Publishers, particularly those who have the luxury—albeit a dubious one—of not being driven by market forces, can play an invaluable role in beginning to treat all Canadian writers equally. There is a challenge to marketing books in cultures that are strongly and traditionally oral. The challenge only becomes an impediment if the will is lacking. As has been noted in the marketing of books by Black writers in the United States, one good review by a preacher is worth ten *New York Times* book reviews. In taking up the challenge, Canadian publishers could, in the '90s, give new meaning to the expression "publish and be damned." ■

Marlene Nourbese Philip is a Toronto writer and poet, and founding member of Vision 21. She was recently named a fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

WARD GETS HER ART



Artwork by Mindy Yan Miller in the ultrasound room of the clinic.

visual art

Healing Hands

FOR THE WOMEN
Morgentaler Clinic, Halifax
Permanent installations
From March 8, 1990

by Allison Lewis

On International Women's Day, a permanent installation of art entitled "For the Women" opened at the Morgentaler Clinic on McCully Street in Halifax, Nova Scotia. "For the Women," organized by Andrea Ward, an MFA student at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), opened coincident with the trial of Dr. Henry Morgentaler in the week of March 6. Dr. Morgentaler was charged in violation of the Provincial Medical Services Act which outlaws abortions performed outside of a provincial hospital. On the first day of the trial, the case was postponed by Judge Archibald until June 4, 1990 due to the abundance of evidence and the lack of time in which to review it. This deferral, perhaps strategically, extends the length of time in which abortions will not be performed at the clinic as it will remain

closed until a decision has been reached and the constitutionality of the Medical Services Act has been determined.

Andrea Ward developed the idea of permanently installing works of art made by women in the Halifax clinic from a project Anna Gronau, Carol Laing and Elizabeth MacKenzie had undertaken at the Morgentaler Clinic in Toronto over two years earlier. The intent of both projects was to show support for the clinic and to affirm women's right to full reproductive choice. Ward says of "For the Women": "We are optimistic that our work will serve the double purpose of aiding the opening of the clinic as well as giving comfort and support to the women who will pass through it." The atmosphere created in the clinic by the artworks is certainly one of calmness, care, comfort and support. The different works

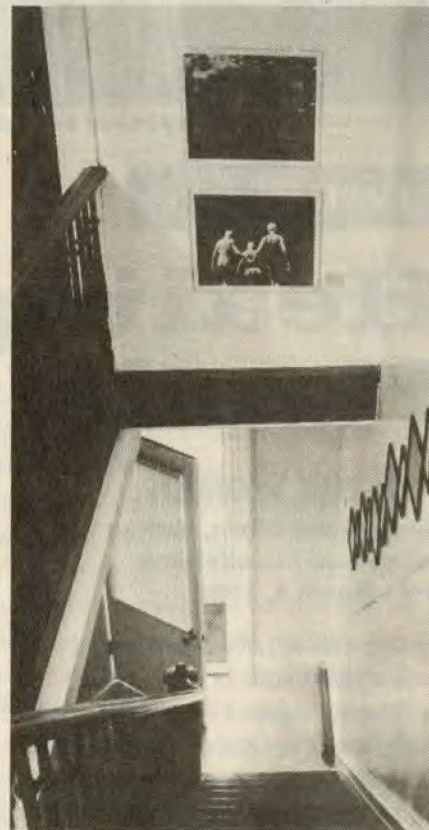
together convey a feeling of women's solidarity and empowerment.

Sixteen local women artists, Barbara Badessi, Susan Cunningham, Maureen Donnelly, Tamar Drushka, Dawna Gallagher, Michelle Gay, Beth Gibson, Barbara Louder, Lani Maestro, Susan McEachern, Marilyn McKay, Mindy Miller, Jan Peacock, Cheryl Simon, Andrea Ward and Christy Wert, participated in the show, donating works in different media. Consisting of students and faculty at NSCAD and other women working in the Halifax community, these artists have, in common, a commitment to women's right to control their own bodies. Their work ranges from a ceramic vase with photographs to image/text work and video stills.

Andrea Ward's own contribution, a colour photograph of two women holding hands, is central to the overall theme of the installation. The image of the two pairs of hands, one white and one Black, seems to represent the joining together of women of different racial and cultural backgrounds in mutual support and friendship. Ward says of her work: "I wish this to be a consoling image to the women that come to the clinic; an image that invites you to enter into it, holding you, just as the hands gently hold each other." The placement of this photograph in the waiting area is crucial to the intent of the exhibition; the women who go to the clinic will need similar support from their friends and relatives as is portrayed in the image on the wall.

Jan Peacock, a video artist and instructor at NSCAD, contributed a black and white video still that is also centred around ideas of comfort and assistance. The image conveys the strength and understanding that women have and can give to each other. According to Peacock, "the real shame is the failure of some women to empathize with the experiences of other women—to recognize the social, emotional and economic trauma of an unwanted pregnancy and to allow women a degree of human dignity in the difficult choices they must make."

As with many of the artists in "For the Women," Susan McEachern and Barbara Louder are both mothers and instructors at NSCAD in addition to being full-time artists. Their work is known for its focus on political issues, issues of gender and for its critique of popular culture. Both McEachern and Louder present their work in a very immediate and direct way. McEachern uses large colour photographs with text to address issues of domestic work, child rearing and the ideologies as-



Photos by Cheryl Simon in stairway of Morgentaler clinic.

sociated with domesticity and security in our culture. Louder uses various media to discuss her political and feminist concerns focussing on the peace movement and women's solidarity. For this exhibition, however, both made site-specific pieces, resulting in works which are different from the more literally political art which they usually produce. McEachern submitted two small photographs of flowers and plants that are suggestive of life and regeneration.

Louder's submission consisted of seven watercolours of flowers and plant growth. Combined, their work emphasizes life and hope, an important though often neglected aspect of pro-choice philosophy.

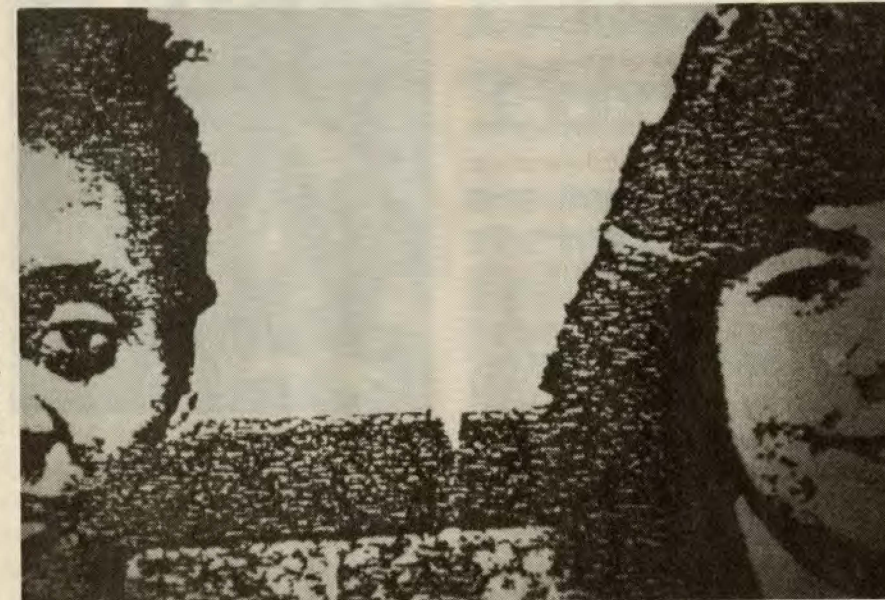
In another approach to the affirmation of life, the collaborative work of Susan Cunningham and Lani Maestro conveys a feeling of self-empowerment and personal strength to the viewer. Repetitive images of water alternate with framed texts which read: "The desire to analyze takes us beyond our ignorance. The desire to know takes us beyond our fear. The desire to rebel takes us beyond our corruption. The desire to speak takes us beyond our rhetoric. The desire to protest takes us beyond our imposed immoralities. The desire to choose takes us beyond our anger. The desire to acknowledge pain takes us beyond our weakness." Giving inspiration and helping to reconfirm decisions made or contemplated, this reassurance is emphasized by the calming images of water.

"For the Women" has created a welcoming and caring environment for those women who will eventually be able to pass through the clinic's doors. The installation is successful in its attempt to provide support and positive media coverage for the opening of the Morgentaler clinic in Halifax and in furthering the struggle for women's rights in the Maritimes. At this time, the exhibition is not accessible to the public. The decision to make this show accessible and to open the clinic for service rests in the hands of the Nova Scotia government—a thought that is not all too comforting. Presently, the clinic is being used only as a referral centre for Maritime women seeking abortions. Yet, even as I was writing this review, Dr. Henry Morgentaler announced that the clinic in Halifax will close as he can no longer afford to keep its doors open while it is not in full use. ■

Allison Lewis is a fourth year student at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Photo by Andrea Ward.

Photo courtesy the artist.



From *Lesbians Get AIDS Too* by Karen Augustine.

exhibitions

Purple Haze

**IRREVERENT VISIONS:
AN EXHIBITION OF LESBIAN ART**
**Shonagh Adelman,
Karen Augustine, Amy Gottlieb,
Nina Levitt, Karine McDonald,
Ingrid Macdonald, Janet Porter,
Ruthann Tucker.**
**A Space, Toronto
March 3 - 31, 1990**

by Martha Judge

It was a friend who said that she could understand why lesbians are always defining their culture in much the same terms as dominant culture. There is this notion that certain names, places or events

need only to be mentioned and our common links are immediately articulated. Unfortunately though, the links have often not played a significant role in the formation of our identities. By our overwhelming concentration on sameness, a culture is created through denial of difference and exclusion. Ironically, in a world that only acknowledges a singular identity, it is our need for representation and empowerment that has promoted single-mindedness.

As the first exhibit organized by A Space's Queer Girls/Lesbian Art Committee, "Irreverent Visions" was as diverse as the "dominant" lesbian community. The show included painting, photography, video installation, illustrations and performance. In an obvious desire to include every art medium, this diversity only draws attention to what the show didn't include: a focus around the distinct issues related to lesbian existence and a real representation of the diversity of culture in lesbian communities. It is not enough to present work in various media done by self-identified lesbians.

As someone who is tired of reading the subtext and more interested in work dealing directly with identity, I'm always confused when confronted with work that does not identify a lesbian perspective at a lesbian show. Most evident of this were the Neo-Expressionist paintings of Janet Porter and Karine McDonald. The historical roots of this kind of painting are located in an ideology that denies the material conditions of existence. In the quest for a universal language of form, there is little room for the subject, lesbian or otherwise.

The history of painting is burdened with hundreds of years of male-dominated practise and the lesbian painter has the opportunity of finding gaps to subvert that tradition or the tools from within it to use to her advantage. Ingrid Macdonald's humorous watercolours attempt to uproot those patriarchal structures with subversive word and visual play. For example, in locating her friend in a place and stylistic time, she makes reference to a lesbian historical continuum and claims modernist culture as part of her history.

Amy Gottlieb's video installation *Tempest in a Teapot* is a tribute to her dead mother. Gottlieb searches for identity through a personalized history of the relation between mother and daughter. Her mother's "un-American" activities can be seen as a metaphor for the "out-law" existence of her lesbian daughter and by extension all lesbians, but this

analogy isn't explored. As it stands, the video sits in its isolation, a tempest in a tape.

There was work that was critical of notions of identity and history based in our relationship to dominant culture. Shonagh Adelman's series of black and white paintings used appropriated images, primarily from Hollywood stills, of women who might be... (only the lesbian knows) and Nina Levitt created a narrative in *Think Nothing Of It* (Dorothy Arzner and Joan Crawford) by singling out certain gestures in the re-photographing of a single image, well-known among those whose (lack of) identity was formed by television and the silver screen. Both seemed to be concerned with the mythology (created mostly by gossip) of the

hidden sexual identity of iconicized women.

The knowledge that our history is erased by or hidden within dominant culture forces us to embrace even the subtlest gesture as a signifier of lesbian existence. Levitt's re-photographing of the image of Dorothy Arzner (an "out" lesbian Hollywood film director) with her arm around Joan Crawford deconstructs our desire for representation in dominant media by exaggerating its meaning. The five large photos, several extreme close-ups, allow only a hint of the total image at one time. The images lined up read as a narrative of increasing disclosure/revelation, with the emphasis on the larger-than-life image of Arzner's hand on Crawford's shoulder.



Photo courtesy the artist.

Painting by Shonagh Adelman.

Whether or not the women (Jodi Foster, Joan of Arc and others) in Adelman's portraits were/are lesbians is inconsequential. The consensus in the lesbian community is that their identity represents another fact hushed by the most threatening and colossal of ideological apparatuses: Hollywood. By including such women as Grace Jones—a Hollywood cult icon packaged for our consumption—in her discussion of the construction of mythology, Adelman inadvertently confronts the issue of why these women take on such importance when they give/gave nothing back. On the other hand, our knowledge of their closeted sexuality lends to the discourse on visibility and empowerment.

The discussions around representation, visibility and empowerment are implicit in Ruthann Tucker's work, both as a founding member of the Queer Girls/Lesbian Arts Committee and as a lesbian porn photographer. Her explicit sexual images explore identity through desire and challenge the community politics of sexual representation (not to mention state censorship). This can be said of any sexually explicit imagery whether in the centerfolds of behind-the-counter porn or in

a Renaissance painting. (I, for one, prefer the rags to the riches of art.) However, Tucker's images, while definitely pornography, are for a lesbian viewer in a lesbian-specific art show. Her work references lesbian-specific erotic images, codes common in contexts like *On Our Backs* that deal specifically with sexual practice and desire. In most contexts, lesbian identity is defined often by desire alone. Tucker's work, in this show, reinforced that view: neither "Irreverent Visions" nor the images themselves provided a framework for discussion around desire and sexuality.

Karen Augustine's opening night performance/slide show *Lesbians Get AIDS Too* proved refreshing in its direct approach. Taped text integrated the disturbing poetry of Burroughs, Ginsberg and her own with information on women and AIDS. Slides alternated between warm images of women and poetic text with gestural splashes of red paint (blood). Oppressive ideologies connecting gay men and lesbians could be read in very literal terms. Not only are we linked by the extreme homophobia created by AIDS hysteria or by the loss of friends, but our connection is stronger than that: lesbians get AIDS too. Sexual and other activities are too often confused with cultural identity. Lesbians may sleep with men and may use drugs intravenously. Most importantly, since lesbians are women, this makes AIDS as much our concern.

The sharing of information and the acknowledgement and promotion of difference create understanding. "Irreverent Visions" represented a fairly singular view of lesbian experience, without any discussion of cultural difference. It is through a recognition of diverse experience and an understanding of difference that we develop a strong personal sense of identity and begin to create an understanding among ourselves, and develop a strong network of communication and a political force based on solidarity. ■

books

Resistance from the Tongue

SHE TRIES HER TONGUE, HER SILENCE SOFTLY BREAKS

Marlene Nourbese Philip
Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1989.

by Rozena Maart

The manuscript version of Marlene Nourbese Philip's fourth book, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* won the Casa de las Americas prize in 1988. A collection of poems, it provides readers with an enormous amount of insight, knowledge and understanding of the history of the black female experience. Nine very powerful poems form the framework of this collection. Prefaced with an introduction called "The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy," it tells of the life experiences of Caribbean women, in particular, and women and men, more generally as part of the African diaspora.¹ *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* is a political statement of the coming to power of voice and the passion and persistence of black female resistance in all of its mouthy forms.

The book is a collage of voices embroidered with words that echo the finest, most reverberating messages of Black, African livelihood.² Nourbese Philip's choice of words reflects a deepness that is often frightening since it poses several questions about the construction of our identity—who we are, what we are and why we are who we are.

In the introduction to the collection, Nourbese Philip addresses crucial concerns about language, writing and the need

to write for the sake of our continuity, for the joys of savouring the memories about our history:

For the many like me, black and female, it is imperative that our writing begin to recreate our histories and our myths, as well as integrate that most painful of experiences—loss of our history and our word. (p. 25)

As we have seen with the advent of the Women's Movement, black women were interviewed, reviewed and written about. Our words were prefaced with the words of white women who recreated a new framework for white colonial missionary education. Our words were legitimate only when reproduced through and by white women. A challenge for the next decade, the words of black women and the re-creation of this history are certainly evident in Nourbese Philip's work.

In the first set of poems, "And Over Every Land and Sea," Nourbese Philip addresses the experience of being from the Caribbean and living in Canada. The poems are titled, "Questions! Questions!," "Adoption Bureau," "Clues," "The Search," "Dream-skins," "Sightings" and "Adoption Bureau Revisited." The consequences of these events, as described by Nourbese Philip, lead to pertinent questions about culture and identity. It speaks about being Black in Canada and being confronted with difference, differ-



Detail from *Think Nothing Of It* by Nina Levitt.

Photo courtesy the artist.

ence that is met with resistance since acquiescence means to devalue Black culture. Crazyness, of which the naming process is always the prerogative of the dominant when describing the nameless processes of the dominated, is evident throughout:

grief gone mad with crazy—so them say.
Before the questions too late,
before I forget how they stay,
crazy or no crazy I must find she. (p. 28)

The search for the identity and a sense of being is continued in the poems which follow. In "Dream-skins," we experience the Elements of the Earth as they shape the identity of the black female: the mentioning of the Earth, the Sea, Blood, the thought that it brings joy, that it brings memories of the experience of menstruation unlike the silence of it in Canada, where its flow is prevented, tamponized, thinly rolled and tucked away, made invisible like the people who reproduce the wealth of this nation. The blood-cloths ring with reminiscence of presence, of belonging, of the assertion that menstruation, that blood and the way we bleed are different.

This is followed by "Cyclamen Girl," where we, through Nourbese Philip, are conscientized about the centrality of Christianity in the black female experience. The teachings of Christianity accompanied by all its contradictions are met with the earthly power of black femaleness. The recurring themes of vibrant sexuality and the experience of the worth of one's own blood as opposed the belief that the blood of Christ is sacred are interwoven throughout. The poem "African Majesty" discusses art and art forms as they pertain to the African continent, along with the images created by Braque, Picasso and Brancusi, where the African influence can be observed. This is followed by "Meditations on the Declensions of Beauty by the Girl with the Flying Cheek-bones," where the concept of beauty as expressed through a language is discussed.

Nourbese Philip clearly demonstrates the interwovenness of her African verbal tradition. The verses which form her poems never stand alone. They are supported,

linked and intertwined with one another giving structure to the true verse of the African tradition. In the poems titled "Discourse on the Logic of Language," she tackles the many ways in which the tongue has been used. Along the left side of the page in capitalized print we read, "When it was born the mother held her newborn child close: She began then to lick it all over. The child whimpered a little, but as the mother's tongue moved faster and stronger over its body, it grew silent. . ." In the centre of the page, we follow the words of the poem about a mother tongue. Here, Nourbese Philip brings to voice the various methods of coercion used in forging a language for dispossessed African people. Along the right side of the page, we read "Edict I": "Every owner of slaves shall, wherever possible, ensure that his slaves belong to as many ethnolinguistic groups as possible. If they cannot speak to each other, they cannot foment rebellion and revolution." Overleaf, readers are taken along the trail of oral coercion in the same linear representation of the ensemble on the previous page. The capitalized print along the left side tells the story of the mother touching tongues with her daughter—blowing hereditary words of wisdom, words of the past to be spoken again in the present. "Edict II" is placed strategically where "Edict I" was placed. We are reminded of the consistency of colonialism, of its method and madness, of the pillars upon which the strength of colonialism was and is built upon. "Edict II" reads, "Every slave caught speaking his native language shall be severely punished. The offending organ, when removed, should be hung on high in a central place, so that all may see and tremble." The same poem documents in detail the characteristics of the tongue, of it being a "tapering, blunt-tipped, muscular, soft and fleshy organ." To this description, Nourbese Philip mentions the physical similarity of the penis. I am suddenly jolted by the description of political similarity. Two organs used for different purposes, sometimes for the same. Both fleshy and with their flap-like nature

can and have been used to forge an identity of domination. I am reminded of the history of sexuality, the penis as an instrument of male sexual pleasure, an instrument of domination, and instrument by and through which male domination is perpetuated, maintained and reproduced. Several thoughts pass through my mind. It occurs to me how central to male identity the penis is and how central to female identity the tongue is.

She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks is a political statement of the tenacity of black female livelihood, of our rebellion against our colonizers, of our defiance through speech, of our commitment to talk and verse and the continuity of our history through the verbal tradition, of our clenched fists raised in salute to the continent which gave birth to human life and civilization, of the uncut umbilical cord with the continent from which we were forcibly removed, of the knot tied tightly and still bursting with speech: speech which claims every domain of the experience of being Black with or without the chains; speech which rises above the chattled millions of dispossessed Africans. ■

Rozena Maart is a black South African feminist scholar-cum-activist in the areas of Black Consciousness and violence against women, and advocates a feminist agenda for anti-apartheid and anti-capitalist politics in South Africa.

ENDNOTES

1. "Diaspora" is used here to express the forced removal of African people from the continent, and the subsequent scattering and dispersal. It is also used to express the horror and savagery of the Holocaust of 100 million Africans. In conversation with Nourbese Philip, we both agreed that the term "diaspora" was not a holistic term to describe the nature or extent to which the continent and its inhabitants were physically and psychologically dismantled.

2. "Black, African" is used here not as a redundant coupling but as an affirmation of the two (very needed) linked named identities. To name ourselves as Black acknowledges that racism takes place on the basis of skin colour and that racism works for the governing body called white supremacy. By naming ourselves as African, we speak of our history, our place of origin and the place to which we can link the various similarities we as Black, African people have in common.

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Cassette Launch

Wednesday, August 8, 9pm

Identification a cassette-compilation of radio and audio art, produced by Christof Migone

Workshop

August 7 – August 9, 7 to 10pm
\$50/\$65 non-members

The Referential in Sound a theoretical and technical audio workshop that includes a historical overview of phonography, a survey of contemporary practitioners, the basic tools to create an art of sound, techniques of composition, environmental versus studio recording and the opportunity to construct a short audio work. Instructed by Dan Lander

The workshop for Touch That Dial is made possible by a grant from the City of Ottawa and is co-sponsored by SAW Video. The symposium is made possible by a grant from The Canada Council, Media Arts Network. SAW acknowledges assistance from The Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council, Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton and the Ministry of Culture and Communications of Ontario.

SAW Contemporary Artists' Centre

67 Nicholas Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1N 7B9 (613) 236-6181/6183

Saturday, August 11, 11am to 6pm

Radio as Art: Issues of Creation; Issues of Regulation

Gilles Arteau (Québec)
Chantal Dumas (Montréal)
Andrew Herman (Boston)
David Moulden (Winnipeg)
John Oswald (Toronto)
Patrick Ready (Vancouver)
Claude Schryer (Montréal)
Dot Tuer (Toronto)
Gregory Whitehead (Philadelphia)
Moderated by Jody Berland

Broadcasts

Sunday, August 5, 1 to 4 pm

Tony Daye Exhibition Preview
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Thursday, August 9, 6 to 7pm

Pangaea Performance Preview
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Touch That Dial is curated by Christof Migone and Jean-François Renaud

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Touch That Dial

Creating Radio Transcending the Regulatory Body

August 8 – September 12, 1990

Exhibition

Opening: Wednesday, August 8, 8pm
Through September 12

Installations

Nicolas Collins (New York)
Marguerite Delher (Ottawa)
Kim Sawchuck/Nell Tenhaaf (Montréal)

Radio Art

Jacki Apple (Los Angeles)
L'ACRIQ inc. (Montréal)
Black Humour (Vancouver)
Flag Air Base (Toronto)
Andrew Herman (Boston)
Hildegard Westerkamp (Vancouver)

Video

Dewayne Readus (Illinois)

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Performances

Friday, August 10, 8pm
\$4/\$5 non-members

Muss Muss Hic! Bruire (Montréal)
Plunderphonology, A Polystomatic Dissertation John Oswald (Toronto)
Terror Glottis Gregory Whitehead (Philadelphia)

Symposium

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