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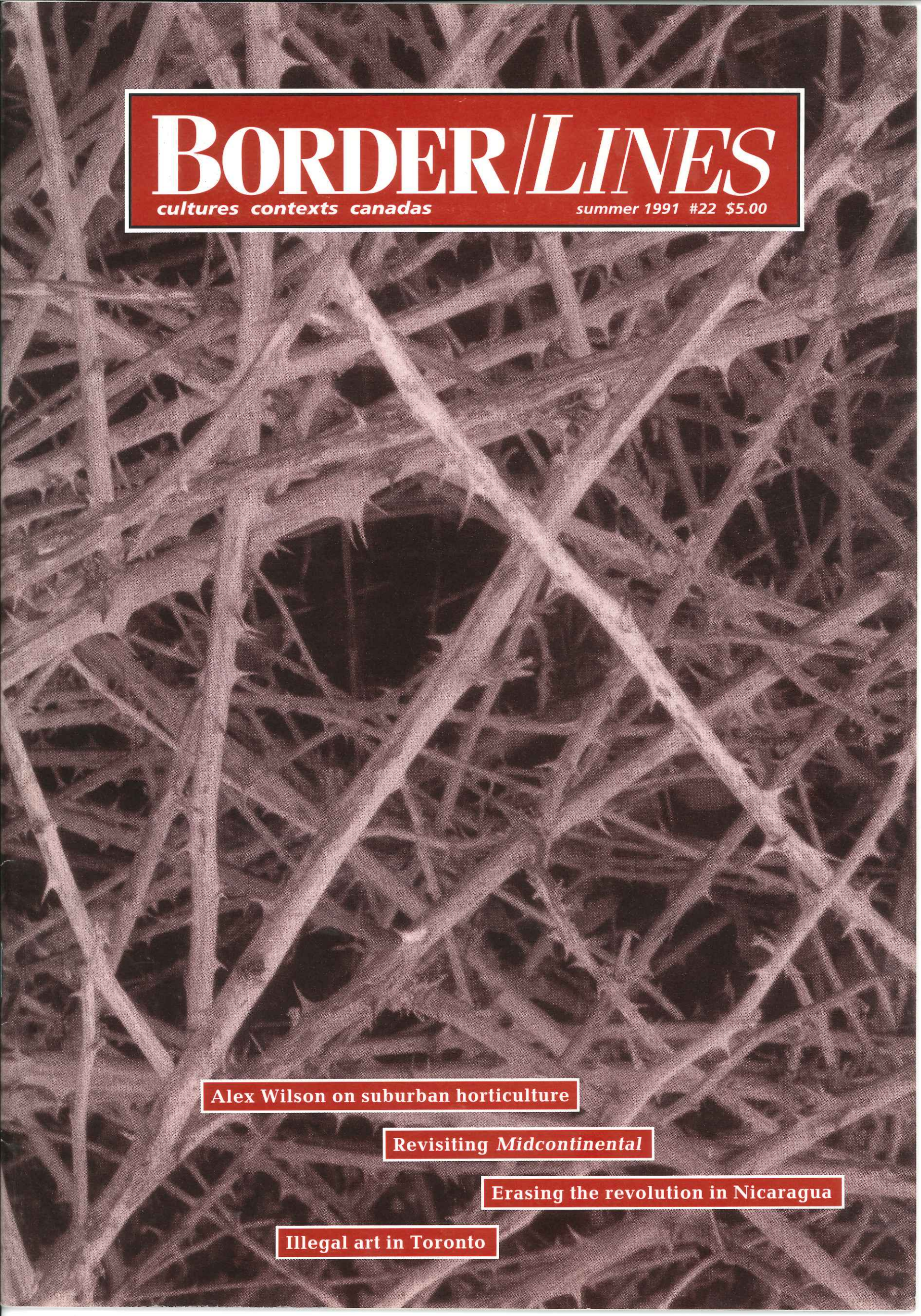
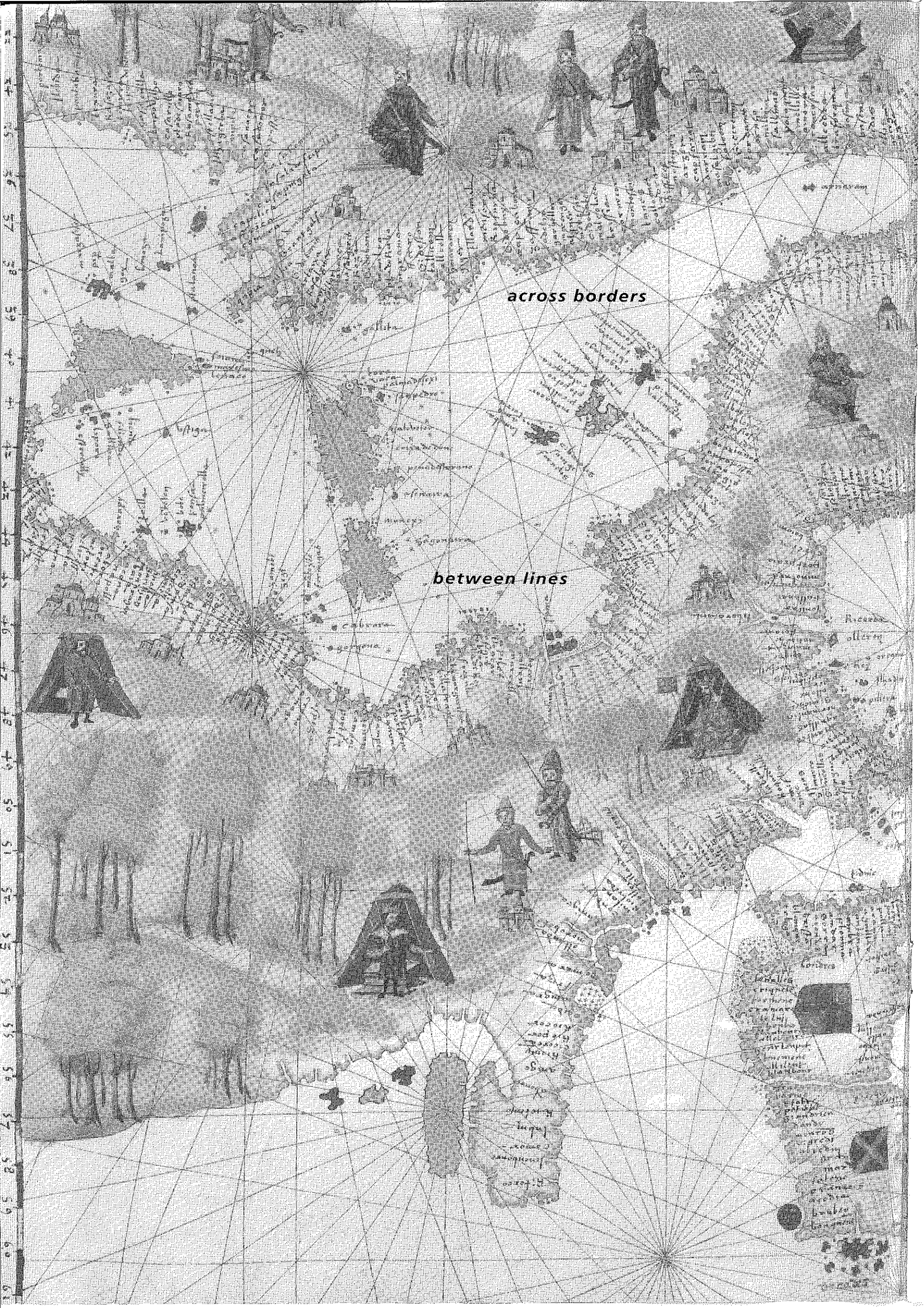


Alex Wilson on suburban horticulture

Revisiting *Midcontinental*

Erasing the revolution in Nicaragua

Illegal art in Toronto



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BORDER/*LINES*

EXCURSIONS

JUNCTURES

ARTICLES

REVIEWS

VISUALS

DAVID KATTENBURG

Criole Stew

Walking down from the Ministry of Education in Managua, then left towards the Plaza Espana, I paused to buy a "quesillo" – one of those drippy Nicaraguan meals in a plastic bag consisting of a cheese crepe wrapped in a tortilla with shredded cabbage and cream – and was about to walk on when I was suddenly transfixed.

I was standing in front of a school. Through a fence and the open door of a classroom, I could see a teacher talking to his class about the Literacy Crusade of 1980, in which a hundred-thousand high school and university students flush with the memory of the Sandinista Triumph trudged through rural Nicaragua teaching campesinos to read and write. These were the foot-soldiers in the Frente Sandinista's "New Education" program, in which the history of Augusto Cesar Sandino's anti-imperialist struggle would be revived and revolutionary doctrine instilled.

Someone made a noise. There would be a quiz, the man said calmly, so people should listen. Several giggling adolescents peeked through a back window. Nicaragua had done what many other countries take for granted, the teacher resumed, and had ended up winning an award from UNESCO. He wrote the letters of the UN organization on the chalkboard.

I felt amazed. Here was a teacher, obviously Sandinista, talking about one of the so-called "logros" or accomplishments of the Revolution that may or may not have been put on hold with Violeta Chamorro in power. Was he risking his job? The new government is all gung-ho to "depoliticize" education. Several hundred teachers have already been fired or transferred for political reasons, says the Sandinista teachers' union, ANDEN.

What struck me was not just amazement that he would risk his job sympathizing with the Revolution, but a sense of epiphany too, as if I had been watching someone try to dampen the plunge of a dialectical pendulum. The Chamorro government has been accused of trying to eliminate "everything that smells of Sandinismo," including art, literature, language, norms of social behaviour, interpretations of history and, most particularly, discussions about the Revolution in schools. Sheer paranoia? Judging from their rhetoric, the new mandarins of Nicaraguan culture and education would wipe out Sandinismo if they could. Pablo Antonio Cuadra, co-director of Mrs. Chamorro's newspaper, *La Prensa,* refers to the Literacy Crusade as "a global swindle." Gladys Ramirez de Espinosa, Minister of Culture, says the Crusade was "distorted and manipulated," but that a "new balance of power" exists in Nicaragua now that the Sandinistas have been "abolished and pulverized by history."

The first engagements of the Chamorro government on the field of cultural counter-revolution amounted to frivolous tinkerings with the trappings of etiquette. Mrs. Chamorro's inaugural party was held at a former gathering place for the filthy rich that had been converted by the Sandinistas into a leftist convention centre. Government figures rechristened it "The Country Club." The office of the presidency let it be known that employees would be asked to address their bosses not as "companero" or "companera," but as either "senor" or "senora," or by academic rankings such as "ingeniero" or "licenciado."

Cardenal Miguel Obando y Bravo quickly emerged as a proponent of moral and cultural restoration. In his Sunday homilies broadcast live on state television, he has emerged as a spokesman for law and order too. "The ecclesiastic ideology of reconciliation developed particularly by Cardenal Obando coincides perfectly with the discourse of the bourgeoisie and serves the same interests," wrote angry liberation theologists. In one of his most transparent sermons shortly after the Sandinista strike in July, Obando explored the biblical parable of tares sown maliciously in a field of wheat. "We have slept, while the enemy and all those who serve him have been moving ceaselessly," said Obando. "The authorities have to be vigilant. They cannot sleep or cross their arms, permitting evil ones to sow tares in the field of wheat." Obando cited "the mysterious provisional permission by God for evil and for its definitive extirpation," not by man, but by God himself. Across from *La Prensa*'s customary résumé of the sermon, a cartoon showed Daniel Ortega, shovel in hand and malignant snear on his face, burying a writhing body. "I love to plant," the caption read.

Not everyone has the patience to wait for the tares and wheat of the Nicaraguan

field to distinguish themselves, nor to allow God to do the extirpating. Last June, Managua mayor Arnoldo Aleman Lacayo extinguished the flame on the tomb of FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca. When Sandinistas set up their "Popular Cultural Council," hoisting billboards around Managua with the words "Viva Nicaragua!" splashed over Sandinista red and black, he ordered them ripped down. UNO legislators proposed a law to remove the names of Sandinista "heroes and martyrs" from public places. The elementary school textbook *Los Carlitos*, which took its name from Fonseca, is being replaced by another called *Blue and White* (the national colours), with financing from the US Agency for International Development.

Names and symbols were just the beginning. The municipal librarian in Leon burned some 50 volumes of poetry and prose by Sandinistas like Omar Cabezas, Giaconda Belli, Ernesto Cardenal and Sergio Ramirez. "There are obscurantists and retrograde forces that believe that the disappearance of the Frente Sandinista from government opens the doors to the past, opens the doors to cultural repression," former vice-president and novelist Sergio Ramirez told me. In October, municipal workers in Managua obliterated three murals with dark grey paint, "the colour of fascism," Ramirez pointed out. The government has a "schizophrenic desire to make all artistic manifestations of the Revolution disappear," he said. Part of one mural, a work by Chilean artists tracing the history of America from pre-Columbian times to the Sandinista Triumph, was spared when the paint ran out. "Now you can see," Ramirez ruefully remarked, "as a demonstration of the retrograde violence they want to impose on us, what survives of that which creative hands painted and which the enemies of liberty eliminated." Another mural, a polychrome image by Nicaraguan artist Alejandro Canales of indigenous women cavorting in bright print dresses, was painted over entirely. Large works of graffiti that added colour and exuberance to Managua's bleak landscape have been painted over too, such as the warning from the Nicaraguan Association of Plastic Arts across from the German embassy on the Avenida Ho Chi Minh: "We're waiting for you right here, Yanqui son-of-a-bitch!"

Are the hundreds of thousands of young people due to vote in 1996 – the flower of the Sandinista Revolution's second decade – opening their arms to capitalist fashion and consumerism?

Sandinistas, it seems, should have nothing to fear in the realm of music. Last July, government officials launched a media campaign to convince people to avoid the eleventh anniversary celebration of the Triumph. There would be violence, they warned on the TV program *Democracy on the March*. Close to a hundred thousand showed up. Soaked in a cold, driving rain, they sang the words of Carlos Mejia's song "La Consigna" while Carlos, brother Luis Enrique and Norma Elena Gadea raised their fists on stage: "This is the struggle unleashed, the popular and prolonged struggle against the oppressor."

The new government cannot deny the appeal revolutionary music holds, and sometimes even lauds Sandinista musicians. What it can do is introduce changes in the educational process, within which Sandinista music has always situated itself. "The New Music" has served as a vehicle not simply for entertainment, but for teaching, uniting and raising cultural and historical consciousness. During the Literacy Crusade, "brigadistas" sang songs about Sandino's struggle to campesinos, many of whom had their own to share. This was what Dona Gladys Ramirez de Espinosa had in mind when she referred to "distortion and manipulation." This is what turned the Crusade into a "global swindle" for Pablo Antonio Cuadra. Ramirez de Espinosa now calls for the promotion of "the true Augusto Cesar Sandino." Education chiefs say they will discontinue literacy work in the countryside, cut back on adult education and develop curricula "free of distortions caused by ideologies subject to historic obsolescence."

"The government of the UNO wants to bring about a regression of values within society," wrote Darwin Juarez during one of the most heated ideological clashes with Chamorrists, which had to do with Columbus's so-called "discovery of America," celebrated in Spain and much of Latin America as "El Dia de Raza," or "Race Day." The premise behind "Race Day" is that in 1492 Spanish and indigenous cultures "encountered" each other and that things proceeded from there in a

The "criole" spirit, Sandinistas say, is the spirit of the white Nicaraguan, the "chele." It's the "my empire right or wrong" spirit of deference towards Spanish culture that deep down symbolizes deference towards the US.

beautiful and often harmonious fashion. The Sandinistas boycotted "Race Day," arguing that the Conquest was an act of genocide, not an "encounter." The Chamorro government revived it, announcing it would also celebrate the 500th anniversary of Columbus's landfall.

At the heart of this debate lie issues of more contemporary thrust than whether Christopher Columbus was indeed a "genial Genoan," as one Chamorrist says. Essayist Norman Miranda condemned the "cunning and hypocritically humanist idea, inoculated in many minds, that the good, poor little indian was annihilated by the greedy Spaniard," ascribing such analysis to the "petrified, orthodox left," the "adversaries of the benefits of benign western colonialization" and to "the straightjacket of official culture." Education officials voiced a similar line, instructing teachers to explore "the positive values that came about from colonization," to "exhalt the heroic prowess" of the Spanish, "the flaws and successes of our fathers the conquistadors" and the "admirable and holy labour of the missionaries" who bestowed upon indigenous peoples "the gospel of Christ, the fundamental rock of culture and human relations of the new man."

This wasn't the "New Man" admirers of Che Guevara had had in mind at all. "Why not occupy themselves with the prowess of contemporary adventurers, like Reagan?" retorted Darwin Juarez. Sandinistas condemned the spirit underlying "Race Day" as "criolla." The "criole" spirit, Sandinistas say, is the spirit of the white Nicaraguan, the "chele." It's the "my empire right or wrong" spirit of deference towards Spanish (as opposed to indigenous) culture, say Sandinistas, that deep down symbolizes deference towards the US.

Hispanofilia does seem to be a redux for Chamorrists, who are less interested in posthumous Habsburg favours than in exchanging the cold shackles of Marxism for the warm embrace of US-sponsored entrepreneurialism. In occult defense of landowners seeking to recover farms confiscated by the Sandinistas, Norman Miranda argued that Nicaragua's native Nahuas had been ignorant of private property, and thus fell prey to "the ferocious disgression of the caciques." The education ministry's "Race Day" statement condemned "the premeditated forgetfulness of Sandinismo," and its "sectarian interpretations of Marxist sociology." While lauding the 1992 celebrations, culture minister Ramirez de Espinosa rejoiced that Nicaragua finds itself "in the heart of America, incorporated once more into the American ideology, in permanent struggle for the common ideals of America, with our territory as a bridge of friendship between north and south."

The *Weltaunschung* of Nicaragua's new cultural and educational mandarins gazes back farther than the Somocista days of economic integration with the US. "They're trying to impose a regime that in ideological terms I situate in the epoch of the 30 years of Conservative government (late 19th century)," says Sandinista legislator Doris Tijerino. This was a time not only when Nicaragua's links to Spain were exhalted, but when priests like Pablo Antonio Vega – the Bishop of Juigalpa, Chontales province, who helped organize the November uprising of contras and UNO mayors – wielded political power. Chamorrists have called for the forging of a new alliance between church and state since the electoral campaign, when Mrs. Chamorro was herself forged into a surrogate "Madonna" for "humble" Nicaraguan Catholics. Such an alliance is now most evident in the education system. Education Minister Sofonias Cisneros is an ex-official of the Association of the Family of Christian Colleges. He and Vice-Minister Humberto Belli are members of the "City of God" group and Belli belongs to something called the "Sword of the Spirit." Education guidelines state that "to confuse a lay education with an atheist one would be a serious mistake." It would be equally erroneous "to suppose that a scientific education must imply the negation of God or of Christian values or morality." The guidelines warn against "an alienating and materialist vision of man" which ignores "the transcendental and Christian vision."

Sowing Christian and "criole" perspectives in the schools goes hand-in-hand with the rooting out of references to Sandinismo. Banishing *Los Carlitos* came first. In the new textbook, almost everyone is pink and dressed like a gringo. Visual references to Atlantic coast blacks or indigenous people are virtually absent, and the patronizing and unusual word "pastorcito" is used instead of "campesino" – which may be seen as a tainted term by Chamorrist educators. To buttress curricular reforms, the posts of principal and superintendent of education have been declared "positions of confidence," over protests that experience and accomplishments should be the sole prerequisites.

Sandinistas are resisting. Some teachers still use *Los Carlitos* and keep Frente slogans posted on walls and chalkboards. When the dismissal and transfer of teachers and the appointment of UNO principals – one of them a priest – began to accelerate, Sandinistas chained the front gates of their schools while police, ministry officials, journalists and the occasional infuriated priest milled outside. With the end of the school year in sight, Sofonias Cisneros ruled that graduating classes would be asked to dedicate their commencement ceremonies to parents, not political figures. Many defied "Don Sofo." In Matagalpa, students at the Eliseo Picado National Institute split in two: 120 from the day session dedicated their commencement to parents, while 180 from the evening session held theirs three days later, in honour of Daniel Ortega. This was the first time in the school's history that two commencements were held, one sanctioned and the other not.

If Sandinistas aren't being paranoid when they scream cultural counter-revolution, then they may be comforted by these events and by the victory last summer of Sandinista candidates in high school and university elections. However, other signs suggest that the cultural tide, or the swing of the dialectical pendulum – not just a handful of reactionary education officials – is against them. Nicaragua is experiencing a brutal recession, but kids seem to have the cash (certainly the desire) to buy BMX bikes, ghetto blasters, chic jewelry and stone-washed blue jeans. Ralph Macchio-style hats are all the rage among young men, as are knapsacks covered in fake US military insignia. Many high school graduates want to go into law and business administration. Universities find it hard filling enrollment quotas in the social sciences, arts and education.

Are the hundreds of thousands of young people between ten and 15 years of age due to vote in 1996 – the flower of the Sandinista Revolution's second decade – opening their arms to capitalist fashion and consumerism? Are they succumbing to the avalanche of advertising, including pitches for rum and beer, now burying over a goodly half of Nicaraguan TV and radio time? If so, then the big fight to be fought by teachers like the grey-haired man who enthralled me with his exposition on the Literacy Crusade, as I ate my drippy quesillo out on the street in downtown Managua, will not be to defend their jobs from revanchist bureaucrats stalking the bloody warpath of cultural counter-revolution. Their fight will be to inspire students whose minds have wandered, who want to go out and get a bite to eat when class is through – not a traditional Nicaraguan quesillo, but a hamburger at the new Burger King. ◆

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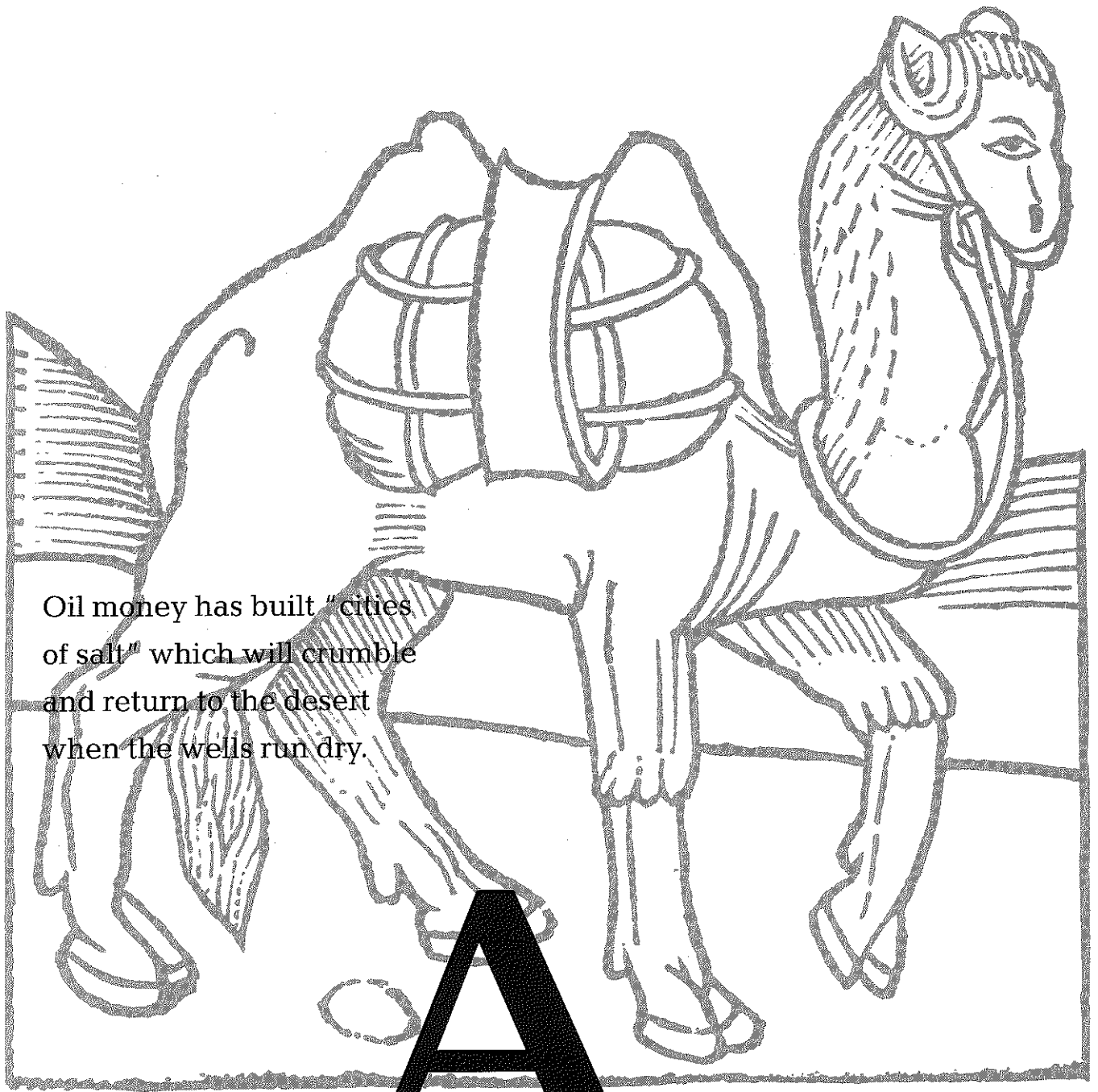
RACHEL ARISS

GARY GENOSKO

Oil Culture



Oil money has built "cities of salt" which will crumble and return to the desert when the wells run dry.

If I have sailed into your eyes searching for spring, I have not cast anchor yet. My camel is still waiting, standing at the gates with eyes still unblinded by the airport lights.

Muhammed al-Thubaiti, from "A Page from a Bedouin Notebook"

Although the literary achievements of the Saudi author Abd al-Rahman Munif are less well-known than those of the Egyptian novelist and Nobel laureate Najib Mahfuz, Munif's work provides a counterweight to the Gulf war-inspired proliferation of images of "Arab realities" in popular North American culture.

Munif was born in Saudi Arabia in 1933, although his country later stripped him of his citizenship. His date of birth coincided with the signing of the Concession agreement between the Saudi government and the California Arabian Oil Company, which became ARAMCO in 1944. Munif's life parallels Saudi's oil life. Indeed, Munif spent much of his career in the oil business before devoting himself to writing.

Munif's remarkable novel *Cities of Salt* – this first volume of a projected trilogy was published in Arabic in 1984 and translated into English by Peter Theroux in 1987 – renders the moral, cultural and political degeneration of Saudi Arabia which came about as a result of the development of an international oil culture. Oil money has built "cities of salt" which will crumble and return to the desert when the wells run dry.

Edward Said, in an article in *The Nation* (Feb. 11, 1991), singled out Munif's novel as an exception to the rule that "there is still hardly any literature in Arabic that portrays Americans." What makes this exception particularly relevant is the way

What Arab and American workers have in common is that they are both enslaved by the well-oiled American (endo)colonialist machine.

in which the novel unambiguously connects oil development with an American occupation of the desert. Oil culture and armament culture are effects of "diabolical" American incursions. By the end of the 1970s, Saudi Arabia, one of the richest OPEC states, had joined the elite club of the top ten international military spenders. The discovery of oil has been, as the critic Rasheed al-Ehany has remarked of Munif's portrayal of this development, a curse.

We do not claim to have any special knowledge of Arab culture and therefore we accept the general cultural authenticity of the literary perception until corrected; we cannot speak for Arab readers. We find in Munif's work, however, an insightful representation of the American oppressor's long-standing economic occupation of "the desert." These Americans in the desert are strange, opaque creatures, all of whom are fundamentally other to most of the Arabs – familiarity between Arab and American characters comes in the forms of capital and ambition, yet even these are not enough to bridge the gap more than momentarily. Still, Munif successfully builds a bridge between the North American and Arab cultures through the workers' struggle. Of course, what Arab and American workers have in common is that they are both enslaved by the well-oiled American (endo)colonialist machine.

In the initial scenes of *Cities of Salt*, and with an equal amount of prescience and nostalgia, Munif relates the transformations which the oasis of Wadi Al-Uyoun undergoes when the Americans establish a fenced encampment. At first, the people of the Wadi were puzzled by these foreigners: "They certainly didn't come for water - they want something else. But what could they possibly want. What is there in this dry desert besides dust, sand and starvation?" The technological instruments of the initial exploratory phase of this extractive colonialism were simply unintelligible for the Bedouin. This puzzlement reached comic proportions when the Americans' calisthenics were understood as morning prayers. Even the assurances of the Emir that the "godless machines" which flattened groves of trees would bring riches and happiness by extracting oil from beneath the people's feet brought solace only to those who were prepared to betray tradition for profit; for many of the people, trust in the Emir was the only recourse against the new and deep bitterness which arguments over the Americans had brought to the Wadi. The Wadi was eventually emptied by the Emir's "Desert Forces" who either euphemistically "relocated" the inhabitants or used them as cheap labour. As Miteb al-Hathal, the Wadi's most doom-saying (and as it turns out, accurate) foreseer of cultural carnage by the Americans put it, "from the first day they came to our village life has been camel piss." This colloquialism may surprise those American GIs for whom the racist slur "camel jockey" exhausted the field. And like oil, uranium too, plays a game of hide-and-seek beneath the shifting international view of Iraq's reconstruction. But uranium has always been as shifty as a dune of pure sand.

One of Miteb's sons finds himself living in the workers' barracks in what is now called Arab Harran. This small, seaside town was appropriated and transformed by the Americans' into two quarters - American and Arab Harran. American Harran is a showcase of air-conditioned bungalows and swimming pools which stand in stark contrast to the workers' tin-roofed (and therefore unbearable in summer) barracks. The men in the workcamp were photographed, fingerprinted and forced to carry identification cards. The Americans even stole the "best and fastest camels," thereby depriving the workers of any means of transportation. After the bungalows were built, they were no longer allowed in American Harran without special permission.

The new Emir of Harran, a seemingly mild but strongly traditional man when he arrives in Arab Harran, is progressively seduced and driven mad by the array of technological "toys" offered by the Americans and by a cosmopolitan Harrani returnee. With his new telescope, the Emir sees for himself the bikini-clad women brought into American Harran on their noisy "King Solomon's Ship." The incomprehensibility and shock of the women's lack of clothing and the familiarity with which the American men and women mingle is the beginning of his obsession to see them again and again and his descent into madness. With the later introductions of a radio, telephone, western medicine and rides in the Americans' machines which seem bent on killing their passengers on land and in the water, he becomes incapable of understanding or representing the people of Arab Harran.

Following the workers' threats to withdraw their labour after their humiliation at the hands of prying American bureaucrats, the Americans mount an Arab (but not Bedouin) Desert Army to police them. Further insults, including the Americans' failure to pay compensation for a fellow worker killed on the job to his aged father and their reluctance to bring to justice the murderer of an outspoken traditional doctor, led to the strike action which is not only an act of revenge, but a sudden insight into their no longer complete subjugation:

> Why did they have to live like this, while the Americans lived so differently? Why were they barred from going near an American house, even from looking at the swimming pool or standing for a moment in the shade of their trees? Why did the Americans shout at them, telling them to move, to leave the place immediately, expelling them like dogs?

The general strike brings the first volume to a close. It serves as the moment of awakening and has two related effects: it provokes the formation of a committee to study the violence perpetrated by the Desert Army and, having sunk further into madness, the Emir leaves Harran.

Although Munif's *Cities of Salt* may serve as a cultural and political counter-representation to the electronic "theatre" of the weapons systems-propelled "new world order," it has been virtually weightless. No one should be surprised by this. But this does not mean that this situation should be tolerated.

Munif's work is a complex parable of intra-Arab relations and American intrusion. It treats sardonically American sponsored Desert Forces and Armies which exploit cultural differences between Arab peoples. Indeed, although it is class struggle which transcends if only momentarily some of these differences, there is no solution to the American problem. Moreover, while Munif prepares us for the return of Miteb on his white Omani she-camel from his self-imposed exile in the desert, he does not return, not in the first volume at least. His presence does, to be sure, manifest itself in the forms of rumour, the vicissitudes of collective memory, and the occasional "sighting." His resistance takes the form of nomadism and his spiritual connection with monkey-wrenching operations on the oil pipeline.

Upon his arrival in America in the spring of 1946, Albert Camus described one of his impressions in this way: "An enormous 50-foot-high Camel billboard: a GI with his mouth open blows enormous puffs of *real* smoke." In America, a camel is a smoke and the GI's mouth, like his gun, smokes. By contrast, Al-Thubaiti's complex image of the camel with which we began expresses a tension in the lover's desire: it awaits him faithfully, unseduced by the light shows, but in order to carry him away from them. The camel is the anchor that is cast to the lover's desire and already weighed against the lover's fascination. The camel is the cultural animal the loss of which signifies the Bedouin's enslavement. It is through this vehicular substance that al-Thubaiti and Munif render the misfit of imported technology and morality and Bedouin craft and faith. ◆

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STAN FOGEL

Israeli Arabesques

Israelis are edgy at intersections. In traffic an instant before red changes to green, drivers, insistent they be free of synapses, press on their car horns. No one gives an inch: a driver uncertain of direction or timid to enter the fray will sit until sundown Friday, or longer if the traffic jam is in secular Tel Aviv. The labyrinthine intersections are not only vehicular ones, motorized traps; they work as a metaphor, too. Palestinian and Jew, orthodox and secular, past and present do not mesh easily in Israel.

Before traffic jam testiness, before I arrived in Israel even, I experienced a borderline battle. It took place in Vienna at the El Al office and afterwards at the airport. Scheduled to fly from Austria to Israel on El Al, my companion, Julie, and I ambled over to El Al's office with nothing in mind but a perfunctory confirmation of our flight plans. Up a flight of stairs stand a door and a plate glass window. The door is locked and a man behind the window stares at us at length before we are permitted in. Immediately after the first door is a second locked one. Wedged between them we are again scrutinized before being admitted to the El Al

Although Israel has absorbed Jews from all over the world, it is a country founded with a concrete identity, Jewishness, at a specific time in history, after the Holocaust.

office. Used to laconic, stylish women at other airline offices, we realize that the men here are not ornamental. We're now aware in a minuscule personal way of the way Israel lives in the rest of the world (especially Vienna where some travellers to Israel were once massacred). After checking on our flights and casually, again, heading for the door, we are startled by the man manning the door who abruptly leaves his post and dashes over to our place at the counter loudly demanding whether we had left a bag behind. All three of us return to the place where no bag is found. Either everyone appearing at El Al's office is subjected to such a rigorous examination or our appearance alarms the agent. We are a guy with spiked platinum hair and a woman with gentile clearly written into her physique and colouring.

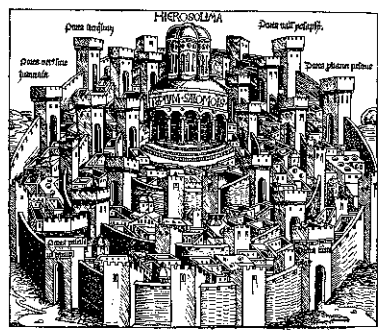
We seem, also, to perplex the man who interviews us at the airport prior to our departure. Passengers on El Al flights are directed to a remote area of the airport where singly or in couples or families we are isolated even further. A polite but restrained man asks my friend and me why we are going to Israel and for how long. "A visit" and "duration unknown" do not please or placate him and he asks us repeatedly for more details. Given the names and addresses of two Israeli acquaintances of mine, he disappears again for some time, then resumes asking what our motives for the visit are. Neither flippancy nor belligerence deters him from his careful, circuitous questioning. He repeats his puzzlement over the lack of a return ticket. The sweat stains under the armpits of my t-shirt have expanded enormously and my curiosity at the intensity of a procedure designed to combat terrorism has turned to anxiety. Finally, flippancy resurfaces with "to see the tree planted in honour of my Bar Mitzvah" in response to the question yet again asked as to the purpose of my visit. With my Jewishness suddenly peeping out as dramatically as the roots of my dyed hair, the tone of the interview shifts. "Is this your first visit to Israel?" "Yes." "What took you so long?" A thorough but now convivial inspection of our belongings follows and we are raggedly and unevenly through our first Israeli intersection. On the plane, incidentally, we are shepherded by the same man who first buzzed us into the El Al office and who looks even less like a desk-bound airline employee than he did then.

Unfamiliarity with Jerusalem's roads led quickly to another snafu. I had booked a room at the Hotel Reich in Jerusalem on our arrival in Israel. It was an odd name I thought for a hotel whose kitchens were strictly kosher, but the advertisement in *The Jerusalem Post* promised a reasonably priced hotel without North America stamped obtrusively on its architecture and staff. I had a slight feeling on arrival of bonding with a homeland I hadn't inhabited, as the beaches of Tel Aviv came into view as we flew overhead. That gave way to touchiness as smokers and starers – my head seemingly as much a provocation as I thought keffiyes would be – interrupted my scripted reverie. The "homecoming" gave way more dramatically as we erred egregiously by losing our way and arriving at the Reich after the sabbath had commenced on Friday evening. Brusquely the Reich hotelier directed us to our rooms and insisted we quickly get to the dining room or we would not eat that evening.

We rode up the elevator with its self-activated Sabbath buttons that stopped us at each floor allowing orthodox Jews to avoid operating it, deposited our bags in our room and, not bothering to change from the soiled t-shirts first ruined in our encounter with the Israeli agent in Vienna, we returned to the main floor one floor at a time to stride hurriedly into the dining room. All of my mother's carping over the years about my bizarre hair styles and colours should have prepared me for this. None of my experiences as a middle class North American Jew had prepared me for this. A room full of orthodox Jews, having just embarked on the eating and praying that constitute the sabbath meal, stopped and stared at our arrival. Aliens in their gefilte fish we seemed to be. Seated in a corner of the room we promptly got up and joined the queue around the buffet only to have our server rush over and guide us back to our seats and to the only familiarity that I was to encounter there: the soup, over-cooked meat and mushy vegetables that I remembered from the days my bubby and zaida stood guard over me while I ate, gobbling my overly large portions out of fear that even a momentary break in the utensil to mouth activity would signal to them that they should begin to worry about my appetite, my career and my social life. Julie, whose jaundiced view of all religions was ecumenical, was saved from loathing not by the force feeding of her past but by the cultural forced feeding of her present which included, most notably, the wigged orthodox women whose own hair is exposed only to their husbands.

It would have been easier, I am sure, travelling with a Jewish woman. Maybe instead of a lesson about foreskins the lively old lady would have with even more kindness helped me through an intersection. My heritage would have looked stronger in my partner's refracted company. I had tried. As a commitment to

a room full of orthodox Jews, having just embarked on the eating and praying that constitute the sabbath meal, stopped and stared at our arrival. Aliens in their gefilte fish we seemed to be.



something greater than the personal, as an appeasement to my parents, I had from time to time hastily and intellectually decided historical and religious forces were ones I should be recruited by. Those whom I wooed ardently as a result of my zeal, with whom I sought an intangible – though some were wealthy – Israeli bond, accepted my track record and idiosyncratic portfolio because of the blue chip nature of two items: my Jewishness and my profession, professor. I also had no kids cluttering (scattering and probably losing) the dossier, though I'd had a brief marriage once to a student whose bicycle I one day had helped to fix. My once in a lifetime mechanical bent occurred when I was 30 and ready, I thought, to be scared into the prospect of something mature and future orientated. Where it occurred was Newfoundland, Canada's remotest province, where I'm sure no Jew ever wedded before, nor in all likelihood has since. My then teenage non-Jewish bride was and remains non-Jewish. Thus, it has been in the many intervening years, when promiscuity has momentarily been suppressed by a less self-indulgent focus, that I have thought to wed myself not only to a Jewish woman, but to an expansive cultural and tribal milieu already disposed to have me. That milieu would even include my own family. After hearing of my precipitous marriage in Newfoundland my father banished me from all family practices until four months after the wedding when I was startled and pleased to receive a "come home" to me and my bride. The latter, alas, had gone home one month before.

The only glimpse of a war I witnessed was a demographic one. Babies were everywhere and always the focal point of attention. The statistics for children per Israel Arab household appear to regulate Israeli Jewish life. Bars are non-existent. Family life dominates. The only idling, strolling Jewish youths one sees are off-duty soldiers, guns strapped to their backs. One soldier we gave a ride to propped his gun casually by the gear-shift; had it gone off my punk hairdo would have been in fearful as opposed to stylish disarray. Our own idling in Jerusalem's old city drew hordes of "professional" guides who competed with each other to offer the litany of the tour guide book and to drag us around a city we didn't want turned into a monument. As a consequence, our glimpse of the Wailing Wall had us secularly wailing (and almost whaling away) at a particularly bothersome reciter of history who despite our disgruntlement managed to finish his spiel and offer us a bill for his enlightenment. The only charm from and insight about the old city came from a book, *Jerusalem: City of Mirrors,* in which is recounted the story of George Adam Smith who gave a lecture in Jerusalem's old city on its topography, then had to get help finding his way home. Having lived there for 40 years he had not mastered the old city's intersections.

Although Jerusalem's claustrophobic alleys can threaten danger, other intersections have their own need for traffic cops. In Har Nof, a suburb of Jerusalem, trouble developed while I was nearby over the issue of driving through the district on the Sabbath. Har Nof is largely populated by ultra-orthodox Jews who throw rocks at cars whose drivers don't share the ultra-orthodox prohibition against driving on the Sabbath. Seeking to bring perspective to the issue, Joel Rebibo, a member of the editorial staff of *The Jerusalem Post,* wrote in that paper, "I don't believe in coercion, but when 98 percent impose their will on two percent, that isn't coercion it's democracy." Wrong, Joel, it's totalitarianism. Although Israel has absorbed Jews from all over the world, the ashkenazi from Europe, the sephardim from North Africa, the falashas from Ethiopia, it is a country founded with a concrete identity, Jewishness, at a specific time in history, after the holocaust. Thus, it is resistant to miscegenation which literally means the mixing of races, but can be expanded to include the dilution of any firm, fixed identity. Political and social voices and styles in Israel may seem raucous and cacophonous to North Americans; however, they yield to greater entities which are ultimately subsumed in the largest unit of all, the Jewish state of Israel.

Even in the so-called major industrial countries, confusion and anger are occurring where visible minorities appear to alter a country's perception of itself. In Israel, smaller, denser and more acutely aware of its *raison d'être,* cultural intersections are more crowded and more combustible. Israelis cannot think of their country as able to countenance decadence, a decay of its strongly rooted image of itself. A purist in no sense of the word I find it difficult to be absorbed in such a broad, such an absolute state.

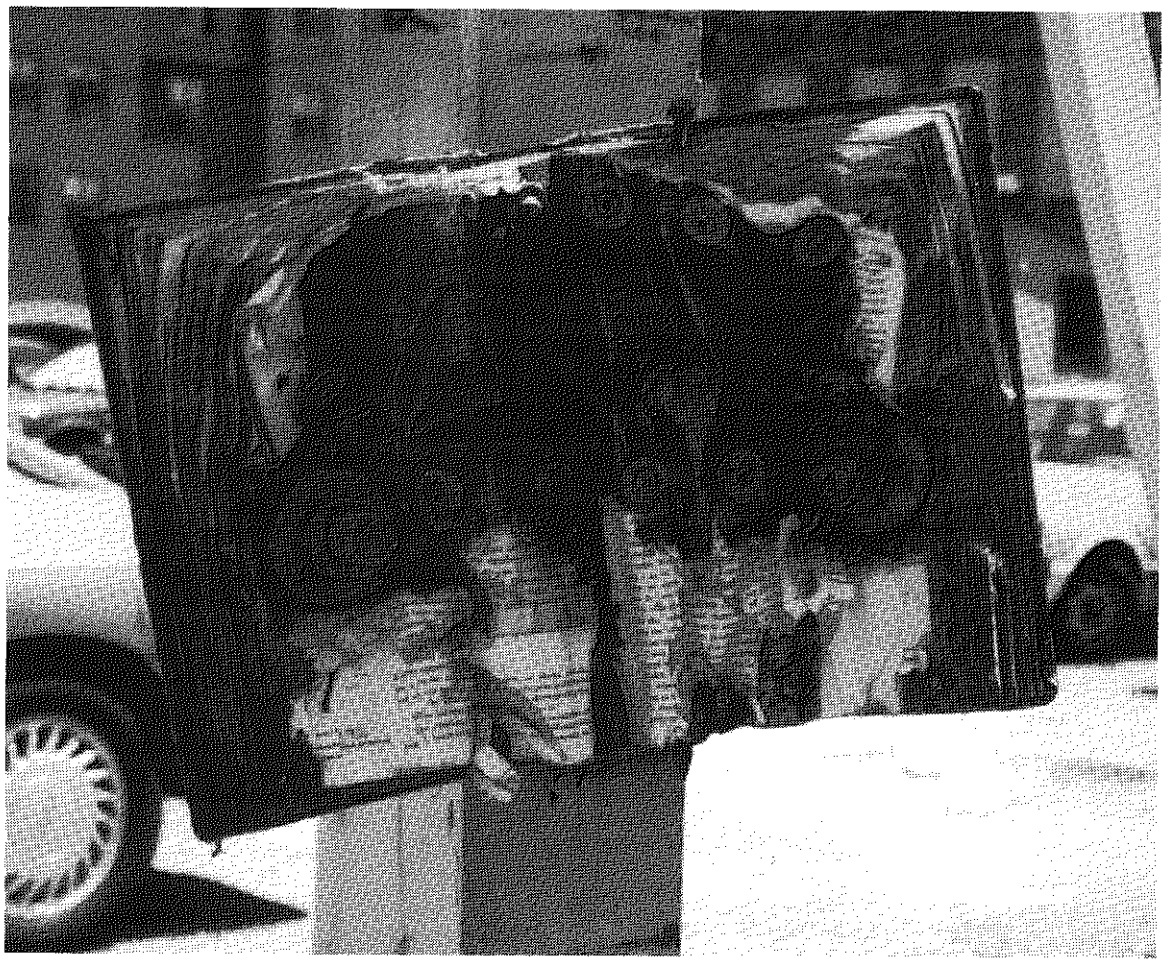
The literary critic, George Steiner, sensed the incompatibility of rich, ironic meanings produced by Jewish scholars and inflexible meanings required by a nation or state. An essay of his, entitled "Our Homeland, The Text," and published in the journal *Salmagundi,* extols a punning, playing, slippery language that bulwarks no political program. Another interesting experiment in miscegenation, literary this time, is that of Anton Shammas whose 1986 novel *Arabesques* contains more intersections than Manhattan. Arab and Israeli, the most dangerous and estranging Middle Eastern mixture of all, Shammas has been published in both Arabic and Hebrew though *Arabesques,* his first novel, is written in the latter language.

"Novel" is itself a site of conflict and an unsteady definition, for Shammas chooses as his epigraph a quotation from *Unreliable Memoirs* by Clive James: "Most first novels are disguised autobiographies, this autobiography is a disguised novel." The narrator and leading character is blatantly called Anton Shammas, who tells a two-tiered story of his family's history and his odyssey as an adult and a writer. On the Sea of Galilee, actually in the sea in a half-submerged *chaise longue,* at the kibbutz resort Nof Ginosar, I loll with this book *Arabesques* reading of a family that moved in the early part of the 19th century from a village in Syria to "the remote village of Fassuta in Galilee." The lyricism of olive trees and youthful memories abuts on political realities. British soldiers and Israeli ones come and go and come again rewriting history, changing the names of places and the people in them. Shammas is careful not to allow the poetry of his prose to overwhelm the reality of displacement, the danger being that to make his memories beautiful and give them unrestricted vent would be to accommodate himself to a purely literary transformation of Galilee's political landscape. That landscape is one which has seen the life of his family and those of the other inhabitants of Fassuta dominated by occupying forces. This *realpolitik* affects their relationships, their jobs, all aspects of their existence. *Arabesques* would be a book about wandering and procreating, a slowly unfolding account of generations, if it were not for those looming forces that are armed and that hold power to decide who moves through which intersection and on to where. ◆

Our idling in Jerusalem's old city drew hordes of "professional" guides who competed with each other to offer the litany of the tour guide book and to drag us around a city we didn't want turned into a monument.

***Stan Fogel** teaches English at the University of Waterloo.*

PHIL KUMMEL



◀ Queen Street West near Garnet Press Gallery

Beyond Performance and Permanence

I'm walking along Queen Street West in Toronto, putting up these posters, and I notice after a few blocks that this guy is following me, pulling them all down. He works for the city, and the new by-law is that I have the right to free expression by posting advertisements for my band, and he has the right to take them down.

This is the kind of progress you have to settle for in the street gallery. My band may be a talentless bunch of dorks playing shit venues, but we still want to advertise, here in the free market economy of our northern banking mecca. The idea of immutable forces, such as for example city buildings, street grids, or council secrecy, seems to preclude the serious proposal of a more dialectical, creative dynamic in this city. By this I mean a dynamic of activity in at least the artmaking community, in which certain unseen possibilities are regularly unleashed, and new ideas for presentation are recognized as part of the intrinsic nature of the activity.

Resisting the idea of immutable forces calls for a different creative process from those involving regular institutions and prestructured time-frames. Most importantly, it calls for a reassessment of issues of priority and whether one can influence the development of issue-related events (leaving aside the question of whether there can be issue-related events).

Doesn't this bring us back to the hard reality of the street and public space? The pragmatic reality of city by-laws? The deplorable public sculpture in your face? I mean, what's all this dialectic stuff – this is the birthsite of hard-nosed Canadian banking realism!

I will describe the performance/permanence dialectic. The artist under discussion produces relatively permanent sculptures which make a striking contribution to new creative (and direct) action, as dynamic activity in the public sphere. The artist installs a sculpture; the sculpture has a "shelf-life" of a few months to a year or so (i.e., much longer than a private gallery show); the sculpture is eventually removed or destroyed (there are several acquisitive suspects); and as often as not, the sculpture is replaced with a new one, installed just as securely as the last.

Thus, the artist is also involved in an ongoing performance of surreptitiously

mounting these pieces in the public theatre. Passersby become familiar with the objects in this performance, and come to appreciate the changing set or scene. Even absent pieces are still demarcating a new cityscape.

This process has been going on for at least two years. When I walk along Queen Street, I enjoy the expectation of an on-going synthesis of street and art. The mild tension of discovering a moderately transgressive and usually beautiful object heightens the effectiveness of the message of resistance, and legitimates the installation/removal/replacement of the piece as a real public dialectic over and above the perceived immutable forces.

The series of sculptures fall into at least two main thematic lines. On the one hand there is the body of work which addresses Western failings; and on the other hand there is the supply of artworks which themselves critique artmaking and evaluation as we know them through the institutions and galleries. Both categories, the socio-political criticism and the criticism of the institution of art, insofar as they are separable, carry the conviction of an activism which achieves an insight into the global city which no amount of city festooning could approach. In the context of this ongoing effort toward social justice and aesthetic freedom, projects like the cultural subdivision of Toronto into neighbourhoods with names like Bloordale Village and Little Portugal and Fashion District, or the ridiculous eyesore which is the proliferation of newspaper boxes, appear as they really are: pathetic freeze-frames of the static quo in an unaesthetic and failed attempt to control even that facet of society which was formerly created fluently from inside of the cultures themselves.

NEWORLDORDERNEWORLDORDER NEWORLDORDER … reads a book-sculpture bolted open to the middle, shellacked into a rock-hard object, and machined into a telephone pole. The image is two fat men wrestling in competition. Further east on Baldwin Street are two more books – the books are always painted, shellacked and bolted open, silent except for the hand-brushed texts addended over the glazes: AFTER YEARS OF TIGHT-FISTED COLONIALISM, NOTHING TO SMILE ABOUT. A hideous pair of lips form a mock Mick mouth paying service to the corporate transnationals whose interests are met by continuing colonialism. Could it be you this is addressed to? Other books along Queen Street display postcards of mounties, anachronistic fashionable couples, suits doing corporate handshakes, and more male bodies wrestling. Pedestrians exiting storefronts are faced down by strange objects, with no commodity value, confronting them with terse messages informing them (illegally) of the gross misdemeanours of their own society. SO I SEZ TO MYSELF, I SEZ, I SEZ TO MYSELF SO I SEZ TO MYSELF … (picture of a baby reading).

▲ Outside A Space, 183 Bathurst Street

Another aesthetic is the plaque, the vehicle of authority. The artist permanently attaches iron plaques to concrete walls in high-traffic areas. These pieces are difficult to detect if you are not on the lookout, because they appear, more than the books, to belong in the hodge-podge of stuff found in the street. One of the oldest pieces (which itself replaced another) is on the west side of the building which houses Pages bookstore. Etched onto its surface is a crude drawing with instructions towards making a Molotov cocktail. At Dovercourt, on the east side of the building housing the former cinema, a plaque indicates crudely the flow-chart for complaints at police departments. The chart is impossibly complex. On Dundas a sheet of metal announces that it is NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY, and supports a b-side which has non-hip slogans like BE EMOTIONAL.

In addition to the negation of the negation apparent in many of these works, there is the self-critical discourse addressed by the sculptures which comment on art and artworld practices. Diagonally across from the Complaint flow-chart is a book attached to the west wall of the artist-run centre YYZ. Clearly strategically sited, this piece is extraordinary owing to the ornate frame which the artist has attached to the open book displaying a Canadian landscape (moose and map of provinces and territories), thus generating further into the niceties of commodity exchange and colonial imperialist exclusionary tactics: WHOSE TELLING WHOSE STORY. The frame contains an artwork which can't even be pried off the wall, never mind sold for its perceived exchange value.

Another piece addressing native rights may be found at the Gladstone underpass on Queen. A heavy metal maple leaf suspended from the wall by a huge bolt-cutter proof chain is the ironic backdrop to another "whose story" sort of text. Empowerment is a strong theme in all the sculptures, and it is no coincidence that some pieces have found their way into the old Purple Institution gallery at 42 Gladstone, that bastion of an anti-authority grant-refusing space which carried itself along on the sheer creative energies of the members and guest artists.

The antithesis of the Purple Institution is the Ontario College of Art, the bastion of authoritative instruction and corporate soliciting (the cOCA cola campaign was overtly collusive). Four pieces, one of which remains at the time of writing, were attached to wooden posts behind Gallery 76, the space which exhibits works by students from cOCA cola college. In one of the artist's most beautiful works, a large glazed book displays a coat of arms consisting of a moose flanked by

SO I SEZ TO MYSELF, I SEZ, I SEZ TO MY-SELF

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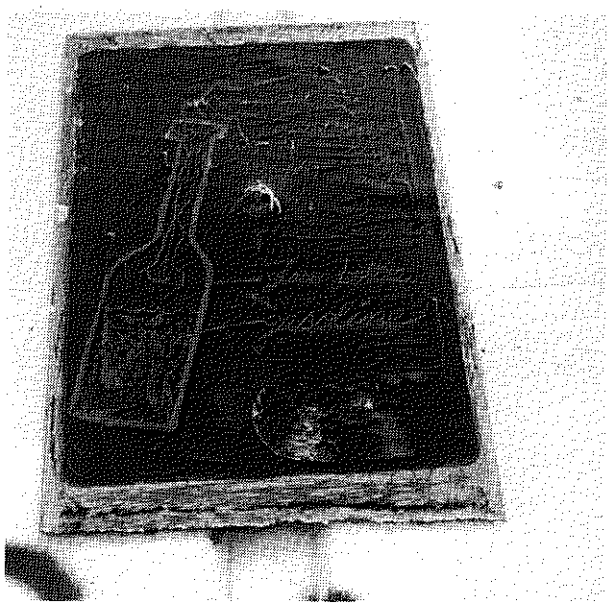

▲ Outside Pages bookstore (Queen Street West and Beverley Street)

a medieval Christian knight. The implications of cavalier tyranny in the context of Canadian icons is not lost in the text:

THOU SHALT NOT TRY TO MAKE ART WITHOUT SUPERVISION

THOU SHALT NOT MAKE BAD ART

THOU SHALT NOT MAKE NAIVE ART WITHOUT PERMISSION

THOU SHALT NOT BE SIMPLISTIC

THOU SHALL LEARN FROM PROFESSIONALS

The book-sculpture is well crafted and uses pleasurable materials such as black tar, copper, steel and golden paint supporting red calligraphy applied meticulously with a small brush. All in all the piece is outstandingly imaginative and sensually rewarding.

A trinity of smaller books formerly lined the south end of the Gallery 76 parking lot. With pictures of a baby reading, of a ridiculous happy couple, and sketches illustrating artmaking procedures, one reads STARTING TO DRAW … and, HOLD YOUR PENCIL … and, SO I SEZ TO MYSELF, I SEZ … and the enigmatic, POEPWRERPWOREP-OREPEEP …. Similar books are installed outside of 80 Spadina, 183 Bathurst Street, S.L. Simpson Gallery, Garnet Press (parking lot), all taking a run at the institutionalization of artmaking.

I estimate that there have been up to one hundred installations so far, and the artist seems as productive as ever. This effort represents a remarkably determined and sustained activism in the artmaking realm, a realm often tainted by compromises, coercion and economic bottom-lines. When I contacted the artist, he refused an interview and divulged no information about his work and motives other than explaining that his feeling was that as soon as a piece goes up, he no longer concerns himself about it in any way. The implication is that his artistic concerns operate completely outside the boundaries of a commodity culture. In my view, his work fits into a long and ongoing anarchist practice in Toronto, including the publication *Ecomedia,* the Purple Institution, Abattoir public art collective, the graffiti and courier artists, to name just a few.

Since the artist refused an interview, I was not able to find out where all the pieces are or have been. Thus, the subject matter treated here, i.e., corporate oppression, native rights, creative freedom, global politics, the environment, resistance, colonialism, police filibustering … is probably not a complete list. I expect that there are pieces dealing more directly with women's issues, race relations, language problems, gay rights, rights of those suffering internment in psychiatric institutions ….

When the Rae government in Ontario was elected last year, the public mood was said to be ugly. The electorate was fed up with corruption and manipulative government tactics. Legislative inaction and Treasury lies were finally taking their toll on the collective consciousness of citizens of Toronto in particular. The upcoming city election is a late opportunity for people in Toronto to make their demands for policy from their so-called representatives. Whether it's by bolting your statements to the street or by storming City Hall or by converting your ward "representative," the dialectic of discourse must reach into public affairs to effect policy implementation. The public art discussed in this article is an effective invasion into a space where human beings and their discourses belong: the public space. It's time for dynamic activity to overcome the immutable forces which seem to constitute the city.

I'm looking forward to discovering the newest installations. *Omnis determinato es negatio.* ◆

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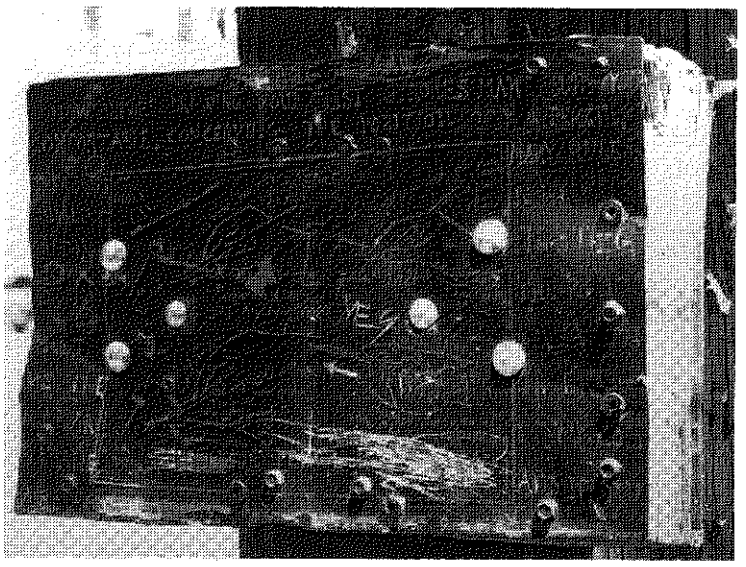
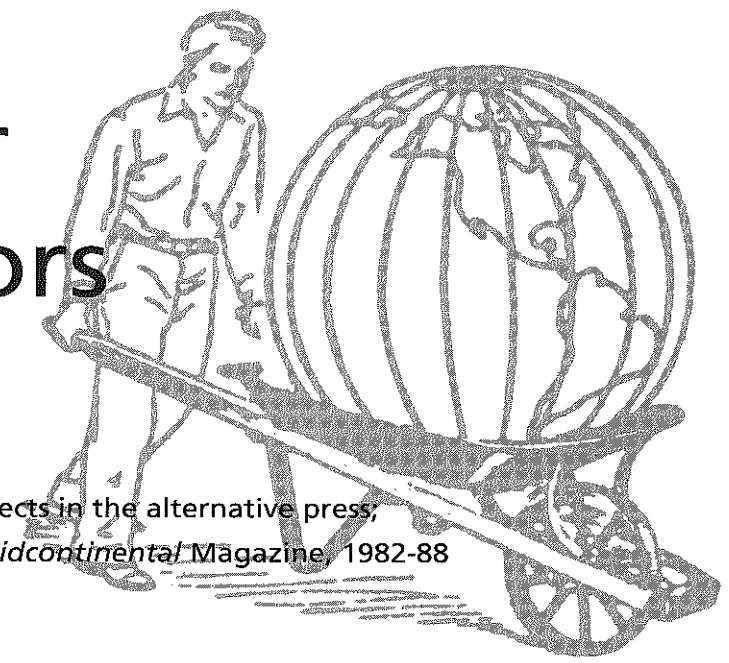


▲ Outside Gallery 80, Spadina Avenue

***Phil Kummel** lives in Peterborough where two of his plays are currently being staged.*

ROBERT **LABOSSIERE**

Paper Scizzors Rock



Problems and prospects in the alternative press; three readings of *Midcontinental* Magazine, 1982-88

JUNCTURES

It is now ten years since *Midcontinental* magazine began production. Despite pitifully low budgets and production in Winnipeg, away from the more established art centres, it nevertheless became well known nationally and internationally within a short two or three years. Conceptually ambitious, it cultivated a specialized readership, particularly in the alternative arts community while some of its issues found their way into the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

Midcontinental belongs to a long history of independent, counterculture publishing. It also belongs to a general movement in publishing of the early eighties; fanzines, tabloid community newspapers and politically targetted magazines. It also belongs to a developing interdisciplinary discourse where a more general, popular, cultural criticism emerges out of postmodern political, social and economic analysis.

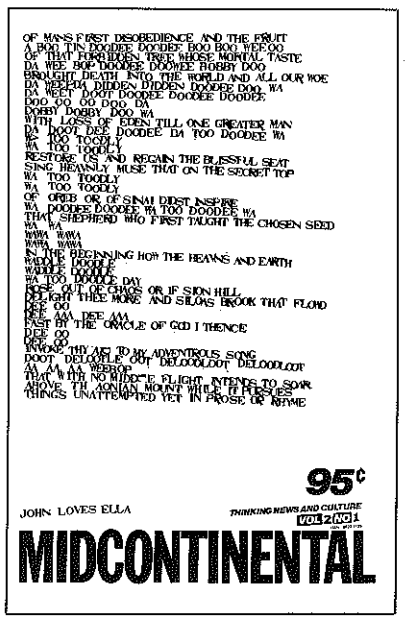
Midcontinental was an unusual experiment whose rise and fall reveals problems that were recurrent and are endemic to the alternative press. The alternative press is always both burdened and liberated by organizational structures and publishing procedures that, while designed to be progressive in relation to business and in relation to publishing, are economically perilous.

1982 in Winnipeg was the beginning of an economic recession. Al Rushton, Scott Ellis, Paul Downie and Jon Tupper, then manager of Plug-In, Winnipeg's artist-run centre, began planning *Midcontinental.* Jon brought to the venture the legitimation of an established centre and cash to cover production costs for the first few issues after which the magazine would qualify for arts council funding. His interest in it stemmed from his interest in punk, ska and reggae music and the fanzines that had sprouted up around the music scene after 1978. Al had been a successful entrepreneur before he went to university and discovered philosophy. His creative skills were harnessed to his enthusiasm for the marketplace. For him the social/cultural artifact needed to reflect commercial conditions and publishing represented a promising and affordable (as opposed to TV) art/commerce blend. Ellis could write as well as the writers he liked, something that is harder than it looks. For him, the publication presented an opportunity to publish. Scott was perhaps the most erudite member of the group and brought with him a demand for high quality. I had met Paul several years earlier when I worked in tabloid newspaper production. He had the knowledge and skills to put the thing together. He also had an aesthetic approach to materials that was rigorous. I'm not sure this was appreciated at the time but he kept everyone aware how form itself is a kind of content.

Even the most modest publishing venture is complex.

In this group there were all the necessary tools for a successful publishing venture; capital and management skills, marketing savvy, and writing and production skills. What was unusual was that they were put to use not in a specialized, compartmentalized way but creatively, each contributor being expected to be involved in every step of production from editing to assembly to distribution. This required a fusing of personalities and principles.

This biography which I have begun, and to which I will return, precipitates one kind of reading of *Midcontinental.* Motives, talents and personalities are seen to drive events. The narrative promises insight into human nature while also confirming belief in humankind as a moving force. Another reading of *Midcontinental* might start with history and social analy-


OF MAN'S FIRST DISOBEDIENCE AND THE FRUIT
A BOO TIN DOODEE DOODEE BOO BOO WEE OO
OF THAT FORBIDDEN TREE WHOSE MORTAL TASTE
DA WEE BOO DOODEE DOODEE BOBBY DOO
BROUGHT DEATH INTO THE WORLD AND ALL OUR WOE
DA WEE DA DIDDEN DIDDEN DOODEE DOO WA
DA WEE DOOT DOODEE DOODEE DOODEE
DOO OO OO DOO DA
BOBBY DOBBY BOO WA
WITH LOSS OF EDEN TILL ONE GREATER MAN
DA DOOT DEE DOODEE DA TOO DOODEE WA
WE TOO TOODLY
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WADDLE DOODLE
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DELIGHT THEE MORE AND SILOAS BROOK THAT FLOWD
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DEE OO
DEE OO
INVOKE THY AID TO MY ADVENTROUS SONG
DOOT DELOOLE DOOT DELOOLOOT DELOOLOOT
AA AA AA WEEBOP
THAT WITH NO MIDDLE FLIGHT INTENDS TO SOAR
ABOVE TH ALONIAN MOUNT WHILE IT PURSUES
THINGS UNATTEMPTED YET IN PROSE OR RHYME

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JOHN LOVES ELLA

THINKING NEWS AND CULTURE

VOL 2 NO 1

MIDCONTINENTAL

sis. Raymond Williams, for example, in his book *Culture,* writes about social formations that, while out of the mainstream, are nevertheless significant if our understanding of culture is to be complete:

> It is obviously easier to offer social analysis of a formal institution, with its regularized type of internal organization, and its commonly regulated relations to the rest of society, than even to begin analysis of the relatively informal associations which have been so important in modern cultural life .... Certain principles of analysis have to be learned in work on other types of cultural formation, and on the relations between formal and informal, established and breakaway formations, before the problems which are being negotiated and at times overridden in the combines and corporations can be substantively rather than merely organizationally assessed. ... To the relatively small numbers involved in many cultural organizations and associations we must add the characteristic of relatively short, often extremely short, duration. Among the relatively or wholly informal groups and associations, the rapidity of formation and dissolution, the complexity of internal breaks and of fusions, can seem quite bewildering. Yet this is no reason for ignoring what, taken as a whole process, is so general a social fact.

Williams, the social scientist, finds researching small formations difficult and therefore scientifically compelling. He appears to strive after the conventional scientific ideal that comprehensiveness will permit a better understanding of larger, more accessible, conventional formations. But Williams' observations only gloss over his more critical agenda: to pay attention to forms of production and social formations that have generally been ignored not only because of their small scale but also because they represent ideological challenges to the conservative establishment

The Midcontinental Media Group, as the editorial collective formally became known, took an experimental view of the relations of production as much as of content. The result was an editorial organization verging on the anarchic.

For Williams, the social critic, the printed object is only the beginning of an analysis into the totality of the social conditions within which it operates and the social relations it produces/reproduces. The small publication bears the imprint of capitalist relations but also provides a critical alternative. Following Williams, it is possible to read *Midcontinental* critically against the standard operating modes of commercial publishing.

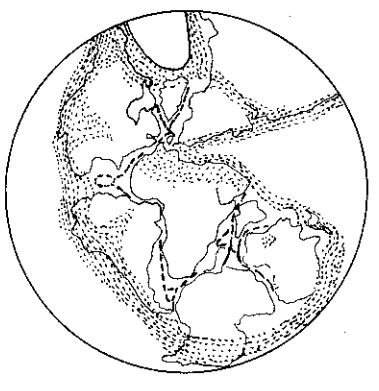
Even the most modest publishing venture is complex. There is always a play between convention and invention, between the editorial master and the rebellious subject, between the authority of the writer and the demands of the reader. It is the struggle between these that colours the magazine, giving it tone and identity. The mainstream press harnesses these forces through ownership, hierarchies of administrators, technicians and employees, through target marketing and through rules of editing and production based on assumptions about objectivity and readability. But in the alternative press hierarchical structures are to be avoided, goals are often more general and elastic, economics is often abhorred, replaced by notions of commitment, anti-authority and progressive criticality.

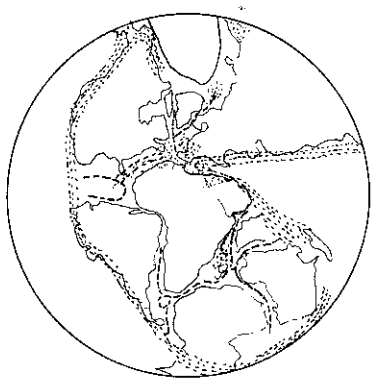
The Midcontinental Media Group, as the editorial collective formally became known, took an experimental view of the relations of production as much as of content. The result was an editorial organization verging on the anarchic. It was as if production relations had been skinned alive. And if the nerves so exposed were excruciatingly sensitive, so too the magazine represented extremes. But this was also the magazine's strength, lending diversity and novelty but also introducing, conspicuously and in contradistinction to the popular press, editorial, literary and artistic creativity as specific objectives.

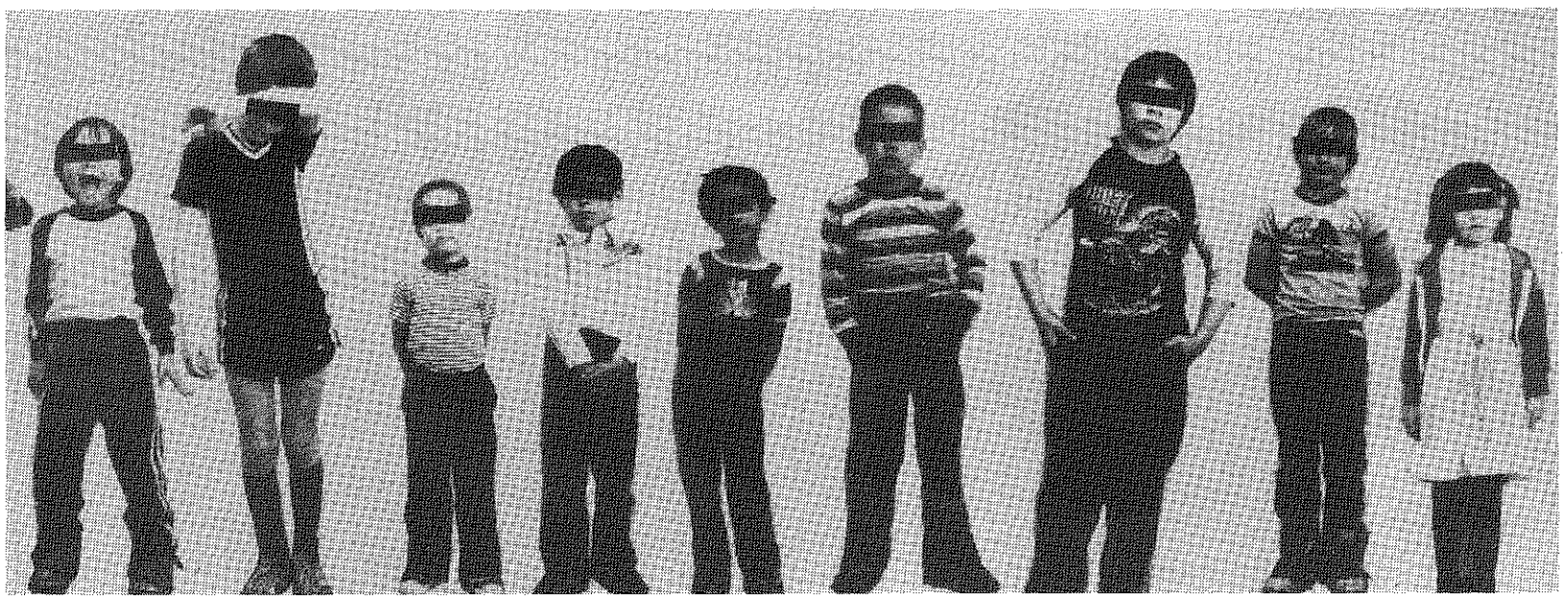
There is yet another way of reading *Midcontinental,* through the examination of its substance, its layout and contents. Here we find that *Midcontinental* self-consciously offers up its own analysis. Take for example the seminal editorial by Scott Ellis on the derivation of the name *Midcontinental:*

> In the USSR the theory of continental drift is only slowly being accepted. Continental drift is the idea that the earth's continents are massive plates of rock which move slowly over the still denser magma that makes up the earth's core. Most of the world's geologists accept this theory because it seems to explain why there are so many volcanoes and earthquakes around the edges of these plates and in cracks like the San Andreas fault, places you would expect to find under a great deal of stress. ... Many Russian scientists, however, cleave to an earlier concept, one that holds that the earth's magma center is like a gigantic heart whose contractions and expansions force lava up through weak sections of the surface crust. This seems now to be an inadequate metaphor to many other geologists, because it doesn't convincingly explain, for example, how certain land masses can sink while others adjacent to them are rising. ... One of the attractions to this theory, to the Soviets, is that it offers a peculiarly Marxist view of vulcanism. The periodic expansions and contractions correspond very well with a cyclic view of history. The magma is classically proletarian: a massive unindividuated majority, full of submerged power. When the magma expands, the fluid, elite Leninist revolutionary lava punches through the earth's crust. The crust could be seen as bourgeois, stratified, resistant to change, the upper crust indeed. ... Eruption is revolution and synthesis, burying cities and creating islands .... Just another case of mistaken metaphor. And when was the last time you listened to a "born again" conservative, loved, nurtured, schooled, vaccinated, subsidized, and advised, speak of "the law of the jungle" as if he'd hatched from a snake egg, ready to kill or be killed.

Ellis casts the supposed objectivity of plate tectonics into doubt by showing how theory reflects local ideology. This pro-







duces an emancipatory effect in the reader – an illusion of experience beyond ideology, founded on scepticism and pragmatic in scope. Neither left nor right scientific views are endorsed. Rather, the mutability of metaphor is used to base a strategic attack against the emerging neoconservatism of the early 80s. The surprise ending follows short story convention, but the story also has a critical moral, one that resonated at the time with personal experience: it is the story of the artist adrift in a sea of unemployed workers and confronted by a marketplace ideology that narcissistically suppresses knowledge of the very social support mechanisms that made it possible in the first place.

Ellis' editorial signalled themes which were to dominate *Midcontinental*. It was cross-disciplinary – any form of activity, cultural, political or scientific could be discussed; creative – writers and artists consistently surprised readers with the range of their interests and innovative approaches to presentation; and critical – the purpose of appropriating work of other disciplines or in creating new hybridized works was both to gain perspective on built-in ideological assumptions and to bend the conventions of art and journalism toward a more outward looking socially useful critique. The material process was writing, editing and printing. But the strategies were appropriation, fragmentation and juxtaposition, in a word, postmodern. And the effect was radical – the magazine at once appeared fresh, sophisticated and socially progressive.

I met Jon Tupper when he was still hanging around with Doug Sigurdson and Suzanne Gillies who dropped out of art school to start the Plug-In Gallery in 1970. Plug-In was one of the first alternative space galleries. Doug and Suzanne were exceptional people, intelligent and outspoken. They single-handedly introduced the 70s avant garde to Winnipeg. Hanging out with them was an education in itself. When Doug and Suzanne finally tired of splitting the single salary the Canada Council held them to, they decided to leave the gallery and Jon was the only person qualified enough to succeed them. Younger than Doug and Suzanne, Jon wasn't so interested in the visual art scene. This was also the late 70s and concept art, performance, video and installation had been stagnating for several years. Music had taken over. Punk was really new. I remember Tupper used to read *The Face* all the time. I think he thought *Midcontinental* would be like that.

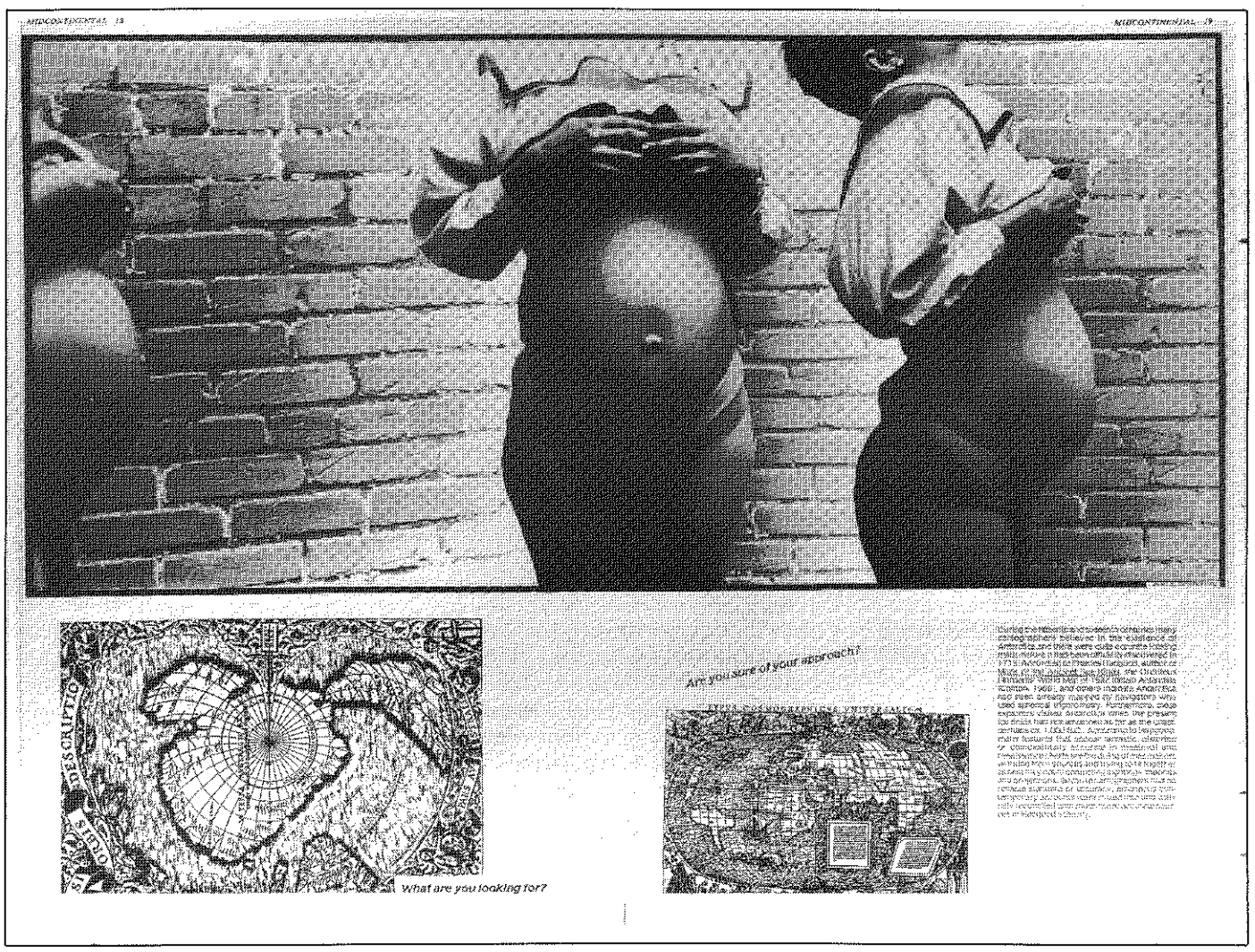
Downie had a more conservative and workmanlike approach. He thought the magazine would function as a kind of portfolio of art, not Malreaux's gallery without walls – that extended attitudinal space that was believed to result when art categories were collapsed, as they were by conceptualism – but a portable gallery.

The others were less clear about their vision. It wouldn't be too far a stretch to imagine that Rushton hoped it to be a commercial success, a better mousetrap after which the world would beat a path to his ultimate technology studio on wheels. Ellis may have thought of it as a message in a bottle, practice, or his ticket to the mainstream press. I don't know. All agreed that a magazine could be produced relatively cheaply, include many kinds of work, and get wide distribution. It promised to be an economical and effective vehicle.

The group was thrown together *ad hoc* at first and though the loose structure seemed to be a perennial stumbling block to establishing a program for the publication, as Williams points out, organizational difference can be distinguished from simple disorganization:

> We … can now provisionally classify [the internal organization of small formations] as follows: (i) those based on formal membership, with varying modes of internal authority or decision, and of constitution and election; (ii) those not based on formal membership, but organized around some collective public manifestation, such as an exhibition, a group press or periodical, or an explicit manifesto; (iii) those not based

The purpose of appropriating work of other disciplines or in creating new hybridized works was both to gain perspective on built-in ideological assumptions and to bend the conventions of art and journalism toward a more outward-looking, socially useful critique.



on formal membership or any sustained collective manifestation, but in which there is conscious association or group identification, either informally or occasionally manifested, or at times limited to immediate working or more general relations.

In terms of Williams's analysis, *Midcontinental* was a type (ii) formation, a group organized around a collective public manifestation – the magazine. Although not explicitly articulated as such, the articles in the first issue had the tone of a manifesto. But as Williams points out, his categories overlap. *Midcontinental* also created type (iii) group identification over time, not with a particular style of work so much as through working and more general relations. Later on, it became a non-profit corporation with type (i) formal membership and varying modes of internal authority.

Williams goes on to discuss the countercultural values developed in small formations. He uses as examples William Godwin's circle, the English Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with its periodical *The Germ,* and the Bloomsbury group, the paradigmatic vanity press. Each identified itself differently in terms of organization but each had an alternative, reform agenda. Godwin promoted open, rational enquiry and education in opposition to

Unlike most other magazines, Midcontinental was self-consciously aware of the contradictions it was facing and prepared to discuss them openly, perhaps to exorcize them.

oppression, the Pre-Raphaelites championed the traditional workman-like craft base of the arts and Bloomsbury pitted intellection against dominant militarism, colonialism, unbridled capitalism, sexual inequality and social hypocrisy. To understand these formations, Williams suggests that their practices be considered in the social context of each group:

> We have to note, first, an increasing generalization and development of the idea that the practice and values of art are neglected by, or have to be distinguished from, or are superior or hostile to the dominant values of "modern" society. This range of ideas is complex, and its social history equally so. Its social bases include: (i) the crisis, for many artists, of the transition from patronage to the market; (ii) the crisis, in certain arts, of the transition from handwork to machine production; (iii) crises within both patronage and the market, in a period of intense and general social conflict; (iv) the attachment of certain groups to a pre-capitalist and/or pre-democratic social order, in which some arts had been accorded privilege within a general privilege; (v) the attachment of other groups to the democratization of the social order, as part of the process of the general liberation and human enrichment to which the arts, if they were allowed, could

contribute; (vi) a more general opposition, often overlapping and even seeming to unite these diverse political views, to the practices and values of a "commercial" and "mechanical" civilization, from which the practice and values of the arts could be distinguished.

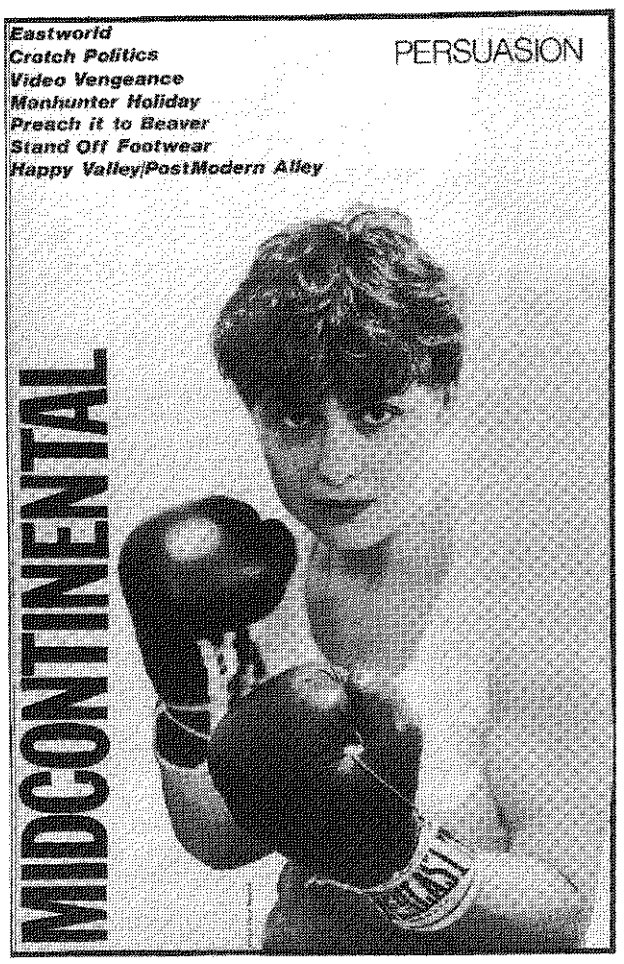
Midcontinental shares certain characteristics with its forebears, enough that it could almost be cut out and pasted into the landscape of financial institutions and technology of early capitalism. This in itself is revealing. Despite the passage of time, visual artists continue to agonize over the contradiction of producing work by hand when virtually all other forms of cultural production is by machine. There is still great ambiguity about markets and patrons as recent debate over purchases by the National Gallery illustrate. And although there are few artists presently resisting democratization in the arts, there is a subcurrent of resentment surfacing against political correctness that is based on a typically 19th century nostalgia for art as a distinct and revered discipline capable of enriching our lives.

Al Rushton's "Centralization on the Prairie, Isn't That Funny or How Winnipeg Eats Its Young," also in the first issue of *Midcontinental*, schematized the dilemma of the local artist facing off against local, national and international commercial culture. It called for a new kind of artistic practice, at once populist and philosophical, and in its against-the-grain stand invokes Williams's analysis. The editors were in the grips of an economic crisis, the 82 recession. More generally they, like other artists, were faced with the collapse of standards of aesthetic appreciation through the 70s that was finally named postmodernism. They were subject to a yet more general crisis of regional isolation. They were unsure whether support should come by way of patronage or the marketplace, and found, in the alternative gallery, some hybrid. They also were investing in new publishing technology against the traditional art media. And while their gallery alliance and commitment to visual art wanted to salvage some part of the privilege associated with the high arts, the group had definite ideas about democratic, collective, collaborative participation to counter an oppressively rigid, narrowly defined and hypocritically exclusivist popular press.

Unlike most other magazines, *Midcontinental* was self-consciously aware of the contradictions it was facing and prepared to discuss them openly, perhaps to exorcize them. Indeed, Rushton used examples of art being produced in Winnipeg at the time to argue that it was incumbent on artists to do this work:

> Developing an aesthetic that dissolves the distinctions between the media, corporate and personal structure appears to be the direction. Whether this includes miniature sculpture of oppressive, supportive, competitive or cooperative attitude (allowing us to see each other as human over them) or a flattening of an emblem of military power (equalizing us as human in front of it) or the construction outside a gallery (that entices the viewer then forces this person to look at the crossed-out members that are its internal support) we are made aware of the problem and the situation .... A highly general task, organization demands increasingly wide dialogue with specific aesthetics which may be on the periphery of tradition if it is to maintain any freshness or vitality .... If a cultural institution takes its lead from the popular media (that has a traditional investment approach) it is doomed to stasis.

The group had definite ideas about democratic, collective, collaborative participation to counter an oppressively rigid, narrowly defined and hypocritically exclusivist popular press.



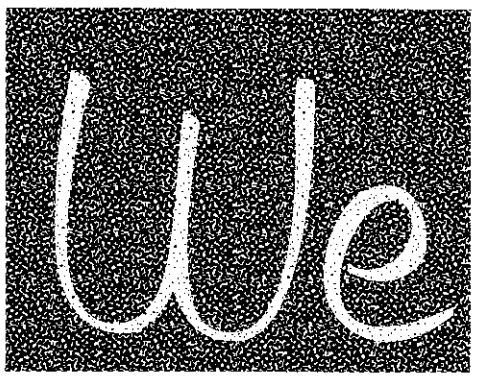
Over the next three years many artists and writers joined in the experiment to work outside of the mainstream, to explore new ways of doing things. While not always successful, the magazine was well received, and had a seminal influence in developing postmodern and social critical discourse that now pervades art practices. The magazine that you are now reading is perhaps the best example of interdisciplinary publishing that is both popular in its subject matter and politically informed. The recent issue of *Canadian Art*, devoted to environmental issues, recalls *Midcontinental's* Earth issue, published in 1983.

So what happened to *Midcontinental?* Rushton's essay contains the answer. Chronic poverty due to underfunding, the lack of a conflict resolution process due to non-hierarchical organization and constant pressure to make the magazine successful in conventional terms took their toll, exhausting and frustrating the individuals in the collective. With changes in the collective membership came new ideas about how the magazine should operate, including a more commercial approach. By 1986 *Midcontinental* started to list popular entertainment events to attract a broader readership and the advertising to cater to it. Articles devolved into promotional art reviews. Artwork began to look like reproductions again instead of living works that only existed in the magazine. The local arts council gave the magazine a no-win choice – go back to the way you were or become an independent commercial venture. The choice had already been made to take its lead from the popular media and, as Rushton predicted, *Midcontinental* was doomed to stasis. ◆

***Robert Labossiere** is an artist living in Toronto and a former member of* Midcontinental.

NATU

at home



don't just talk and dream about our relations with the non-human world. We also actively explore them in the real places of our streets, gardens, and working landscapes. By crossing to the sunny side of the road on a winter's day, or by arranging some flowers in a vase, we both respond to and address the animals and plants, rocks and water and climate that surround us. Those working landscapes – the ordinary places of human production and settlement – are enormously complex places. Their history is in part a history of engineering – of how we build bridges, contain water, prune trees, and lay sidewalks. But it is also an aesthetic history. It is about shaping, defining, and making the world beautiful in a way that makes sense to us in the time and place that we live.

Alexander Wilson

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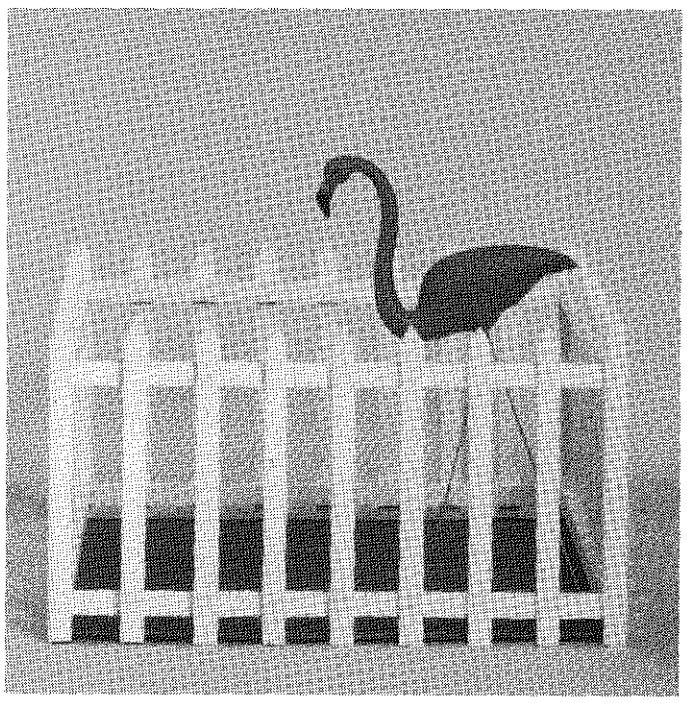


A Social Ecology of Postwar Landscape Design

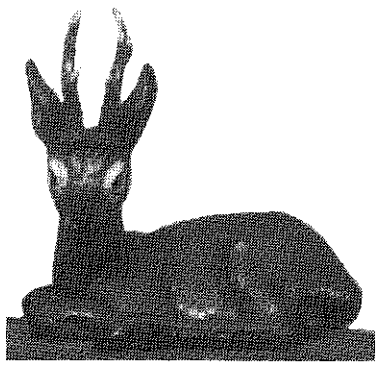
Throughout the 20th century, landscape design ("landscaping," as opposed to landscape) has expanded into new spheres. Regional planning agencies have built new towns and reorganized entire watersheds, all of which require landscaping. In addition to traditional sites such as public parks and private estates, landscaping is now done alongside freeways and in industrial parks. We see landscaping at airports and outside restaurants and shopping centres, as well as inside buildings. Some of these sites either didn't exist before or weren't typically planted and tended by humans.

There have also been changes in the way people have come to make their domestic spaces fit their ideas of – or felt needs for – nature. In the 20th century, millions of North Americans left rural communities and settled in cities and suburbs, disrupting their traditional physical relationship with the non-human world. Yet in the construction of suburban yards, victory gardens, and, later, shopping malls, community parks, and "wild gardens," people have addressed and replicated nature in other ways, developing new aesthetics in the process.

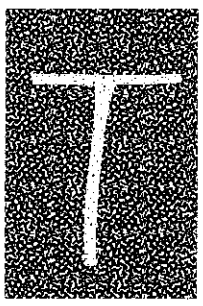
Changes in North American settlement patterns have been slow and uneven, and they have had complex social and geographical repercussions. City and country can no longer be thought of as the two poles of human settlement on the land. As agriculture was industrialized and the economy shifted its centre to the city over the course of the last century, many people abandoned rural areas, leaving whole regions of the continent both socially and economically impoverished. By the 1960s, when this trend peaked, more than two-thirds of North Americans lived within the rough boundaries of urban agglomerations. But those boundaries have gradually become indistinct. In the postwar years, regional planners directed most population growth to the new geography of the suburb, which took over rural lands on the margins of cities. By 1970 almost 40 percent of US citizens lived in the suburbs, which became, ideologically at least, the dominant land form on the continent.

Yet the next 20 years brought further changes. Many people moved back to rural areas, or to more intact examples of the small towns that were engulfed by the rapidly expanding cities of the postwar years. In the 1960s the back-to-the-land movement (only one among many in North American history) was merely one symptom of a much more systematic development that brought about an increasing interaction of urban and rural economies. Rural areas became very different places than they were two decades earlier. Agriculture, for its part, became closely (and perhaps fatally) linked with urban money markets. In legitimated scenic areas, the leisure industry – a sector that epitomizes many of these changes – propelled itself into existence through the mass marketing of raw land, recreational communities, resort condominiums, and second homes.

As the nature of the capitalist economy shifted towards information and commodity production, production was decentralized. Now, many industrial activities no longer rely on concentrated workforces or physical proximity to resources or markets. Data processing centres and small more specialized industries have parachuted themselves into forests and fields well away from metropolitan areas, giving rise to new kinds of exurban settlements that some commentators have called "technoburbs." All of these developments have intensified the reinhabitation of rural space.



These complex displacements and resettlements – and North American society in particular thinks of itself as mobile – have contributed to a jumble of landscape design styles. Predominant among those styles is the aesthetic tradition which I broadly call pastoralism. Since the 1970s this tradition has collided with pronounced regional and ecological tensions that leave the future of landscaping (and landscape) wide open.



The Planting of the Suburb

The postwar suburb has had an enormous influence on modern landscaping practice and its aesthetic continues to influence human geographies the world over. Some of its forms – from mobile-home architecture to street layout to the choice of trees planted – have since followed urban emigrants "back" out to rural areas.

Mobility is the key to understanding contemporary landscape design, because in the last 40 years planners and builders have organized most land development around the automobile. This has had enormous effects on how most of us see the landscape. It has also changed the look and feel of the land itself. The car has encouraged – indeed, insisted on – large-scale development: houses on quarter-acre lots, giant boulevards and expressways that don't welcome bicycles or pedestrians, huge stores or plazas surrounded by massive parking lots.

The mass building techniques practised in North America both require and promote uniformity. To build on land, property owners first have to clear and level it. Everything must go. Once they put up the structures they replant the land. Biological life is allowed to reassert itself, but it is always a life that corresponds to prevailing ideas about nature. Obviously, building contractors cannot restore the land to its former appearance – an impossible task, because they've had the topsoil removed and heavy machinery has compacted the remnant subsoils. But it is also ideologically impossible. A suburban housing development cannot pretend to look like the farm, or marsh, or forest it has replaced (and often been named after), for that would not correspond to popular ideas of progress and modernity, ideas based more on erasing a sense of locale than on working with it. By and large, contemporary design and materials strive towards universality. Regional character, as Michael Hough points out in his book *Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape,* is now a matter of choice rather than necessity. When buildings were made of local stone, wood, and clay, they had an organic relationship to the soils and plants of the region.

❁ A suburban housing development cannot pretend to look like the farm, marsh or forest it has replaced, and often been named after. That would not correspond to popular ideas of progress and modernity.

We can get a direct sense of these changes by considering what has been planted in the suburban landscape. First, the plantings have had to be species able to survive the harsh conditions of most North American suburbs: aridity, soil compaction, salt spray from roads, and increasingly toxic air and water. Where I live, the plants that "naturally" grow in such places are pioneer species like dandelion, sumach, tree of heaven, and brambles of various kinds – plants that, ironically, are usually considered weeds. Yet instead of recognizing the beneficial functions of these opportunistic species, university horticulture departments spent much of the 1950s and 1960s breeding properly decorous plant varieties and hybrids able to tolerate the new urban conditions. The plants had to be fast growing, adaptable to propagation in containers, and, perhaps above all, showy. By definition these requirements preclude most native North American species – for the showy very often means the exotic. Unfortunately, with so much effort put into breeding the top of the plant for appearances' sake, the resultant hybrid invariably has a shallow, weak root system, a bare base, and needs frequent pruning, fertilizing, and doses of pesticides during its short life.

Evergreens became another common feature of the suburban aesthetic. The junipers, spruces, yews, and broadleaf evergreens planted throughout the temperate regions of the continent constantly say "green" and thus evoke nature over and again. The implication is that nature is absent in the leafless winter months (or perhaps all too present), because by some oversight she does not produce green at that time of year. So evergreens are massed around the house as a corrective.

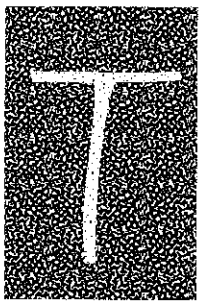
But what are the economic strategies of the culture in remaking the domestic landscape? Certainly some already existing ideas were carried over to the postwar suburbs. Many people planted fruit trees and vegetable gardens when they moved to the suburbs, and indeed, some even brought their pigs and chickens – at least until municipalities passed anti-husbandry legislation in the name of sanitation. Yet the backyard could not serve as a displaced farmyard. Too much had intervened. The suburb quickly became locked into a consumer economy in which agriculture, energy, transportation, and information were one consolidated industry. Sanitation and packaging technologies further mediated relations with the environment. So while suburban hedges and fences could recall the now ancient enclosures of farm and range, for example, they also promoted reinvigorated ideologies of private property and the nuclear family.

Most of the North American suburb was built quickly in the years following the Second World War. One result of such an immense undertaking was a standardization of landscape styles. Several extant styles were drawn upon to create an aesthetic that everywhere is synonymous with modernity and that until very recently dominated landscaping practice. In its caricatured form, the most prominent feature of the modern suburban aesthetic is the lawn, in which three or four species of exotic grasses are grown together as a monoculture. Native grasses and broadleaf

plants are eradicated from the lawn with herbicides, and the whole is kept neatly cropped to further discourage "invasion" by other species, a natural component of plant succession. Massive doses of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, and water are necessary to keep the turf green.

In a perverse example of this trend, the lawn industry removed dutch clover from grass-seed mixes because the clover was incompatible with 2,4-d, a common broadleaf herbicide. Besides being drought-tolerant, clover can retrieve nitrogen from the air, making supplementary fertilizers unnecessary. The aesthetic value of the lawn is thus directly proportional to the simplicity of its ecosystem, and the magnitude of inputs. The "by-products" of this regime are now familiar: given the intensive inputs of water and fossil fuels, there's a related output of toxins that leach into the water table.

Typically, the suburban lawn is sparsely planted with shade trees and occasionally a small ornamental tree bred to perform for its spectators: it either flowers or is variegated or somehow contorted or stunted. These species are planted to lend interest to an otherwise static composition. The house is rung with what are called foundation plantings, very often evergreen shrubs planted symmetrically or alternated with variegated or broad-leafed shrubs. These are usually clipped into rounded or rectangular shapes. The driveway and garage otherwise dominate the front of the lot. A hard-surfaced area for outdoor cooking and eating is off to the rear or side of the house and a bed for vegetables or flowers is usually at the far side of the backyard. The house's positioning on the lot has little to do with the movement of the sun or any other features of the place. The determinants of the design are more often the quantifiable ones: number of cars per family (the industry standard is 2.5 cars, plus recreational vehicles and lawnmowers), allowable lot coverage, and maximum return on investment. Such is the suburban garden as it has been planted in countless thousands of communities up, down, and across the continent.



The Persistence of Pastoralism

The lawns and trees that are so important to the postwar suburban landscape derive from the English landscape park of the 18th century. Lancelot ("Capability") Brown and others designed country estates in a pastoral style that was revived in the United States in the 19th century through the "rural cemetery" movement and later popularized by Andrew Jackson Downing, Frederick Law Olmsted, and others. Following this style, workers thinned forests and planted meadows with scattered groups of trees to create a landscape of woodland edges and openings. Sheep kept the meadows shorn, and the enclosures that had been built of hedging and walls were replaced by ha-has, sunken fences that allowed garden to recede unbroken into countryside. Some landscape gardeners even had vistas culminating in ruins – usually manufactured – of medieval abbeys or Greek temples, in this way placing a human presence in the middle ground, just as the landscape approached the wildness of the forest. These landscapes were above all idealized versions of the pastoral, and their own antecedents stretch back to the classicist painting prominent in the salons of the European continent.

But what interests me here, looking back from the very different situation of the North American postwar suburb, is how this pastoral tradition continues to have meaning today. Versions of the English park persist right through the Romantic, Victorian, and Modernist landscape work of the 19th and 20th centuries, and an impoverished version of it – lawn-and-trees – is still the mainstay of contemporary municipal park work.

Pastoralism has a long history in Western culture. It promotes a view of nature as a kindly mother, a refuge from the

demands of urban life. The Earth, in this view, is a garden of Eden, generous and fertile. Mother Earth provides us with food, rest, diversion, and solace. Nature in this tradition – and it is an ancient tradition, predating both science and Christianity – is an analogue of the female body. The pastoral tradition is the obverse of another Western tradition – equally primal – which understands nature as chaos and death.

Pastoralist ideas flourished during the European conquest and settlement of North America. Colonial explorers and promoters lavishly described the Atlantic seaboard – and later, the upper St. Lawrence and the Transappalachia – as bountiful gardens, as virgin lands to be tamed and cultivated. The historical record is ambiguous on this point, however. The accounts of many Europeans suggest that North America, a continent so unlike their own, troubled and lured them in ways their dominant spiritual traditions hadn't prepared them for. Judeo-Christian civilization emerged in the inhospitable semi-arid zones of West Asia. But when that civilization encountered the Americas, whose indigenous peoples lived mutually with nature, the rush to destroy this land and its inhabitants was by no means universal. As the 1990 movie *Dances with Wolves* documented, some white people – more than our historians teach us – resisted the impending genocide. Some of them even "went native" – an inconceivable act that was interpreted by the priests and administrators of the day as a kidnapping and punished with incarceration or death.

By and large, the Western pastoral tradition has been compatible with the idea of nature as a resource to be manipulated by human enterprise. Very often in this tradition, the image of nature presented is that of a passive mother and bride to an active male spectator. The image of the Earth as a benevolent female is an ancient anthropomorphic gesture, and one that in pre-modern societies had a normative function. Before the rise of a mechanistic world-view, for example, proscriptions against rape could be used to argue against mining. Yet as Mary Daly, Marilyn French, and other feminist historians have documented all too well, the identification of women with nature and men with culture was used to justify the emergent power of men and their machines over the land and its history. It was far easier to turn pastoralism on its head than to incorporate more marginal traditions that understood nature as a unity of male and female principles.

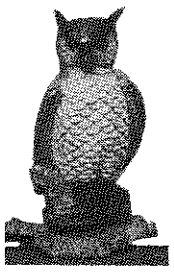
In any event, it is easy enough to see why pastoral traditions in landscape design have persisted in an urban industrial society. While Romantic landscaping practice tried to reintegrate the human and non-human worlds, the dynamo of modernity required a passive image of nature for the dual purposes of escape and exploitation. In our own day, this trajectory has perhaps run its course. American art critic Lucy Lippard argues that the identification of the Earth with a woman's body need not only reinforce the inferior and submissive role relegated to women in male-dominated societies like our own. It can also be an abiding source of female strength. Moreover, there is a growing feeling in North Atlantic culture that the Earth will no longer yield to human (or male) domination; that unless we reinvent pre-modern conceptions of nature, the present "environmental crisis" may be the last.

But the persistence of pastoral traditions in landscape design can't be explained only in terms of domination. The English landscape park and its North American reinterpretation are landscapes of woodland edges, a place where several plant and animal communities overlap. In temperate climates, the woodland edge – where forest and meadow meet – is the most complex and textured ecosystem of all. There the number of species is greatest, the degree of cooperation and symbiosis the most advanced. The edge is the richest feeding ground for all animals, including humans who rely on hunting and gathering. It is one of our oldest and most sacred abodes. The persistence of the English park has to do, I think, with the impulse to create and inhabit edges, the diverse and dynamic places that connect, that bind the planet together. The woodland edge is the principal model in the design of most parkway landscaping in the eastern part of this continent, for example.

In the mass-produced bungalow and ranch houses of the 1950s and 1960s, much of this impulse was brought under control or stylized beyond recognition. There, edges are not so much about diversity and interrelationship as they are about separateness. In the suburban landscape the edge is typically the property line, an assertion of conformity to the ideology of the home as private domain.

Men and Women in the Suburban Garden

In postwar North America, patterns of management and domination suffused popular culture. The pastoral lawn, for example, not only predominates in suburban frontyards, but also stretches across golf courses, corporate headquarters, farmyards, school grounds, university campuses, sod farms, and highway verges. For such enormous expanses of this continent to be brought under the exacting regime of turf management, an entire technological infrastructure had to be in place. There had to be abundant sources of petroleum and electricity to provide for an increasingly mechanized horticulture. Power mowers, clippers and edgers, weed whips, leaf blowers, sod cutters, fertilizer spreaders, and sprayers brought nature under control. Hedges and shrubbery were closely clipped. Each housing



lot needed its own driveway (a large one, to accommodate the 2.5 cars). In colder climates this often necessitated the purchase of a snow plough or blower. In the 1950s, the new petrochemical industry introduced chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides as virtual miracle products that would liquidate unwanted weeds, insects, or fungi. Popular horticultural literature reduced the soil – the very source of the ancient metaphor of the life-giving mother – to a lifeless, neutral medium that did little more than convey water-soluble fertilizers and help plants stand up. As a site of mediation between humankind and nature, the postwar garden had become technologized.

While contemporary garden chores may still be a source of pleasure, the chores themselves have changed. Many people talk fondly today about climbing onto a tractor mower and cutting an immense lawn – not unlike the way a combine harvests a field of grain. This is an activity that ends up integrating the human body into a mechanistic view of nature. The idea of the body as machine has been around since the Enlightenment and the beginnings of industrial capitalism; gardening had also begun to be mechanized by the early 19th century. But in postwar North American culture, a great many people became gardeners for the first time, for street trees and parks were no longer the only horticultural presence in the city. The space that surrounded the suburban tract home was of a new kind, however. It was neither the kitchen garden and barnyard familiar to women nor the rural field or urban street that was most often the domain of men.

As gardening became both less exacting and more technologized – in other words, as it came to be synonymous with turf management – it was increasingly an enterprise carried out by men. Previously, for men technics had always been confined to the workplace. The home, and the symbolic clearing in which it stood, had been thought of as a refuge from the world of alienated labour. But changes in the economy brought changes in the relationship between work and home. In some ways the workplace has been demasculinized as industry has shifted away from primary production towards what are called "services." As consumption, rather than production, came to dominate Western economies in the second half of the 20th century, men often took up more exacting "hobbies" to compensate for the loss of physical labour. Care of the garden was one such hobby.

❀ Often far from friends and kin, and "independent" of neighbours, the nuclear family of the 1950s clung to newly revived ideologies of togetherness. Yet the suburban form itself accentuated the feeling of absence at the centre of middle-class family life.

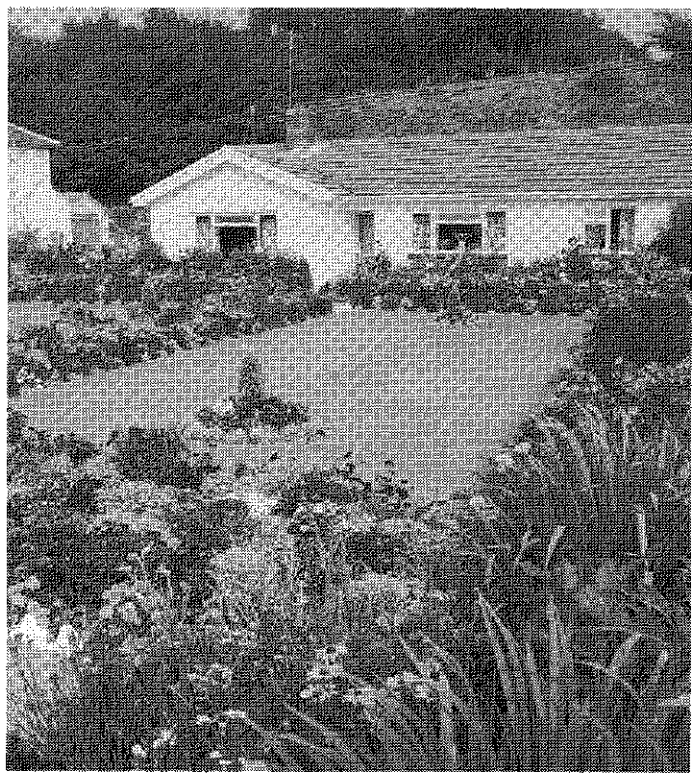
That's not to say that women stopped gardening, any more than they stopped cooking when men began to preside over the backyard barbecue. But women's presence in the garden tended to become associated even more with everything that could be generalized as "flowers": perennial borders, herb gardens, arbours and trellises, window boxes, bedding plants, and greenhouses. The landscape profession often dismisses this horticultural work (and horticulture is not a strong tradition in North America) as being too fussy or labour-intensive, when it is perhaps better thought of as evidence of a keen awareness of and interest in the other communities of the biophysical world. For women, the domestic spheres of food and sanitation had also gradually become mechanized; flower beds remained one of the few household locations not mediated by technology. Men wielded a lawnmower over the grass; women dug into the soil with a trowel.

The suburb was a new form of human settlement on the land, a new way of living. Often far from friends and kin, and "independent" of neighbours (as the suburb was supposed to be independent of city and country), the nuclear family of the 1950s clung to newly revived ideologies of togetherness. Yet the suburban form itself accentuated the feeling of absence at the centre of middle-class family life. The new houses replaced fireplace and kerosene stove with central heating, thus dissipating social experience throughout the home. A fridge full of "raidables" and supper-hour TV programs broke down the pattern of meal-times. Separate bedrooms for all or most of the children and the evolution of men's spaces like the workshop and the "yard" further encouraged rigid gender distinctions. At the same time, communal experiences within the family often became more a matter of choice than necessity. The growing independence that children felt from their parents and siblings opened up the possibility for an affective life outside the confines of the nuclear family for both men and women. These changes were as subtle as they were contradictory; many of their social implications are still not entirely clear.

The suburb stands at the centre of everything we recognize as "fifties culture." Beneath its placid aesthetic appearance, its austere modernism, we can now glimpse the tensions of a life that for many had no precedent. Until these tensions were brought to the surface in the 1960s, the suburb was a frontier. There were no models for a family newly disrupted by commodity culture, any more than there were for garden design in a place that had never existed before. It was as if nature and our experience of it were in suspension. Things were unfamiliar in the suburb, and it's no surprise that people who could afford it fled whenever they could. Weekends and summer holidays were often spent not in the ersatz idylls of Don Mills, Levittown, or Walnut Creek, but in what was imagined to be nature itself: newly created parks and lakes and recreation areas. Here, at last, out the car window or just beyond the campsite or cottage, was an experience of nature that was somehow familiar. In fact it seems that this holiday place – and not the suburb – was nature.

But the idea of nature that was invented by postwar suburban landscaping was not a unitary one. The distinction I've made between "lawn" and "flowers" – and the parallels with gender roles – were and continue to be refuted by many people's gardening habits. Organic gardening, for example, is a very old practice that allowed many people to resist the technological incursions of the 1950s. And technology was resisted in more obvious ways, too. The mass movement against the bomb was perhaps the earliest expression on this continent of modern environmentalism.

Outside of the suburbs, in the older settled areas of the cities themselves, other forms of resistance gathered strength. The social movements whose beginnings we casually ascribe to the "sixties" – civil and human rights, feminism, peace, free speech, sexual liberation, as well as environmentalism – were in part struggles over the nature and use of urban land. Urban activism developed its own very different ideas about landscape design – ideas that are now more influential than ever.



The Ecological Imperative

The suburban landscaping of the immediate postwar years is still the spatially predominant model, but it has come to mean something different today. As modernity itself is being questioned right across the culture, we experience its expressions with much more ambivalence. Consider these examples: the "no-maintenance" garden of coloured gravel that was once popular in Florida and the US Southwest is on the wane. Its matrix was the Japanese-Californian work of the early 1960s, and when well done it was striking. But it turned out that no-maintenance meant that you got rid of weeds with regular doses of 2,4-d or a blast with a blow torch or flame thrower. It's unlikely that in a culture that has been through Vietnam and the Love Canal such a regime can have quite the cachet it once did. Likewise with "growth inhibitors" that you spray on hedges so they don't need to be clipped. These are landscaping strategies that deny change and the presence of life.

In recent years, ecological science has begun to change the way North Americans think about and work their gardens. Ideas of ecosystem and habitat have become new models for landscape work. There is new interest in native plants and wildflower gardens, in biological pest control and organic foods, as well as in planting for wildlife. These are all symptoms of a new understanding of urban land as animated, dynamic, and diverse.

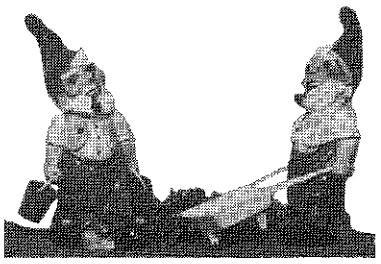
These issues are now often forced into the open. Many North American cities mandate water conservation, for example. The city of Santa Barbara, California, forbids people to water their lawns with municipal water. Marin County, California, pays residents to remove their lawns and replace them with drought-tolerant plants. In many parts of the western United States, new land development is contingent on no net increase in water use, forcing communities to investigate composting toilets, the reuse of grey water (non-sewage waste water), and what is now called "xeriscaping," water-conserving planting schemes. Sometimes these schemes mean drawing strictly from the region: cactus and rock landscapes in Arizona, for example. But they can also mean working with composites of native plants and plants from similar bioregions elsewhere. In southern California this means rejecting the tropical and subtropical plant species that have been so long associated with Los Angeles and drawing instead from the chaparral and dry woodland plant communities of the Mediterranean regions of the world: southern France, central Chile, South Africa, Australia, and of course southern California itself. All of this work gives the places we live a sense of regional integrity.

The role of ecology in landscape aesthetics is not new. In the 1920s and 1930s the new discipline of regional planning dedicated itself to the design of *whole* landscapes. Its mission is best exemplified by the work of Lewis Mumford and, later, some of the public agencies of the New Deal years. Ian McHarg, a Scottish immigrant to the United States, made the most celebrated professional intervention in 1969, with the publication of *Design With Nature*. This ambitious book, which is everywhere cited but seldom taken seriously within the land-design professions, attempted to introduce natural science to the planning process.

McHarg taught in the landscape architecture program at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1970s and 1980s. His lectures ranged across ethics and aesthetics, lurching from the advent of agriculture to Christianity, science, and space technology – all with an aim to understanding better the relations between human settlement patterns and natural systems. The discussions anticipated many of the philosophical debates in ecology today.

McHarg's work, which has given rise to a small but influential school of ecological designers and consultants, is both descriptive and prescriptive. While the philosophical discussion in *Design With Nature* is broad and at times sloppy, the examples are instructive. For McHarg, those examples were close to home: the landforms of the Atlantic seaboard, and particularly the city of Philadelphia and its environs. McHarg provides detailed discussions of local geology, plant communities, hydrology, dune formation, soils, and topography. He places maps of these systems over one another to indicate the importance of detailed site analysis well before development.

From there his discussion moves out into the interior river valleys of east-central North America. McHarg argues for changes in settlement patterns, for design work that begins with nature – indeed, he advocates a kind of ecological determinism. Steep slopes, he notes, are unsuitable for row crops but good for secondary agriculture such as orchards, or for recreation. Cities should be kept well away from the aquifer and are best encouraged on the nodes of ridges, which have low agricultural value but high scenic value. Agricul-



ture is best directed towards alluvial valleys, where the soils permit extensive row cropping. Using these principles McHarg fashions an aesthetic that promotes development compatible with the bioregion. This is not an anti-urban polemic. Rather it is about bringing nature into the city.

McHarg's lessons have been all but ignored within the land-design professions. A great deal of development has taken place in North America since 1969, and little of it shows an understanding of ecological principles. For its part, landscape architecture is in disrepute, having for the most part degenerated into a service industry that provides "amenities" and adornment for real estate development projects. Many land designs are undertaken by people who have never been to the site.

If the landscaping professions are in disarray, it is because they are awash in the flood of environmentalism. For better or worse, an entire generation of people now understands landscape design as applied ecology. As the idea of bioregion gains currency as an organizing strategy, Ian McHarg's work is once again relevant, this time to people working in the social movements. It offers a methodology of place, a way communities or watersheds can map their identities according to climate and landforms. "Place," McHarg writes, "is a sum of natural processes and ... these processes constitute social values."

Questions of place and values resonate differently across generations, classes, and political cultures. But some landscape work is able to galvanize both communities and professions. A promising example is ecological restoration, an emerging discipline – and movement – dedicated to restoring the Earth to health. Restoration is the literal reconstruction of natural and historic landscapes. It can mean fixing degraded river banks, replanting urban forests, creating bogs and marshes, or taking streams out of culverts. Since the early 1980s, this work – a great deal of it carried out by people working for free in their spare time – has been going on in forest, savannah, wetland, and prairie ecosystems all over North America. The Society for Ecological Restoration was founded in 1987 to coordinate the endeavours of its disparate practitioners: farmers, engineers, gardeners, public land managers, landscape architects, and wildlife biologists, among many others.

Restoration ecology is multidisciplinary work, drawing on technical and scientific knowledge for a generalist pursuit. It

✿ Today suburbia is clearly a landscape that can no longer negotiate the tensions between city and country.

is more than tree planting or ecosystem preservation: it is an attempt to reproduce, or at least mimic, natural systems. It is also a way of learning about those systems, a model for a sound relationship between humans and the rest of nature. Restoration projects actively investigate the history of human intervention in the world. Thus they are at once agriculture, medicine, and art. William R. Jordan of the University of Wisconsin Arboretum writes:

> Watching a group of volunteers collecting seed on Curtis Prairie one fall day, I realized that they were repeating the experience of hunter-gatherers who inhabited this area centuries ago, and who actually, through their hunting, gathering and burning, had helped create the prairie communities we tended to think of as "native," "original," or "natural." At this point I realized that restoration represents a reenactment – not only of the forces that created the communities being restored in the first place, but of the entire passage of cultural evolution, from hunting and gathering through agriculture, to the analysis and synthesis of modern science. I now see restoration as providing the framework for a system of rituals by which a person in any phase of cultural evolution can achieve a harmonious relationship with a particular landscape.

These are not new ideas, but they are ideas newly current in the culture. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jens Jensen, Stan Abbott, Aldo Leopold, and others have all been part of efforts to replant and restore this continent. The recirculation of these ideas has led to some fascinating philosophical and political debates. What is an authentic landscape? What is native, or original, or natural? These are cultural questions, and it's refreshing to see them raised within a technical – even scientific – profession.

Restoration actively seeks out places to repair the biosphere, to recreate habitat, to breach the ruptures and disconnections that agriculture and urbanization have brought to the landscape. But unlike preservationism, it is not an elegiac exercise. Rather than eulogize what industrial civilization has destroyed, restoration proposes a new environmental ethic. Its projects demonstrate that humans must intervene in nature, must garden it, participate in it. Restoration thus nurtures a new appreciation of working landscape, those places that actively figure a harmonious dwelling-in-the-world.

What we see in the landscaping work of the late 20th century are residues of many traditions: romantic, modernist, environmentalist, pastoral, countercultural, regionalist, agrarian, and, now, restorationist. The suburban aesthetic was able to accommodate some of those traditions, but today suburbia is clearly a landscape that can no longer negotiate the tensions between city and country – much less those posed by the many people and movements already busy making new relationships with the non-human world.

Changing environmental and cultural circumstances have brought changing aesthetics. If these changes have left the landscape profession (and the landscape) in disarray, they have also allowed large numbers of people to become involved in shaping the physical world as never before. As landscaping ideas have been reinterpreted and reversed, the boundaries of the garden have become less distinct. Much recent work attempts to reintegrate country and city, suggesting that what was once nature at home may soon become nature as home. ◆

Excerpted from Alexander Wilson's forthcoming book, *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to Exxon Valdez*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1991.

***Alexander Wilson** is a Toronto writer and horticulturist. He has been associated with* Border/Lines *since its founding in 1984.*

JAMES GILLESPIE

SEEING DOUBLE

THE INTER-TEXT OF SOREL COHEN

Through the perception of meaning-production, the semiological association of images in works of art has acquired a consensus for its critical consideration as *text*. The works of Bakhtin, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva and others make it possible to understand that these considerations of *text* are not confined to the literary model, but cut across all genres of discursive practice in response to an infinite variety of experience. The properties of a given text, however, can no longer be seen to originate with the procession of rhetorical genius, or to be solely attributed to a particular author. Writers/ artists are now seen more as guests, sharing the text with a host of contributors within the realm of a particular discourse. It has been said that we now inhabit a community of texts of various forms, in which it follows that *textuality* is a function of our experiential habitat.

If art can be seen as a site from which meaning can be derived, then it has the capacity to alter accepted notions of meaning and their traditional conjunction with particular images. Associations of visual images structured by commercial artists in advertising are invested by media-power with an *aura of ubiquitous presence,* forming a large and influential part of our everyday visual landscape. Photography and photo-based modes of reproduction are aptly employed in appropriating, manipulating and disseminating these omnipresent *signs of the times.* Artistic integrity resists the insidious hegemony of imperial image-manipulation, which erodes cultural and social freedom through the privileging and promotion of a prescribed meaning, derived from a directed view of a given image. Fine art practice strives to apprehend and keep open those elusive sites from whence new meaning is distilled from experience and brought freshly to consciousness in the artist's work.

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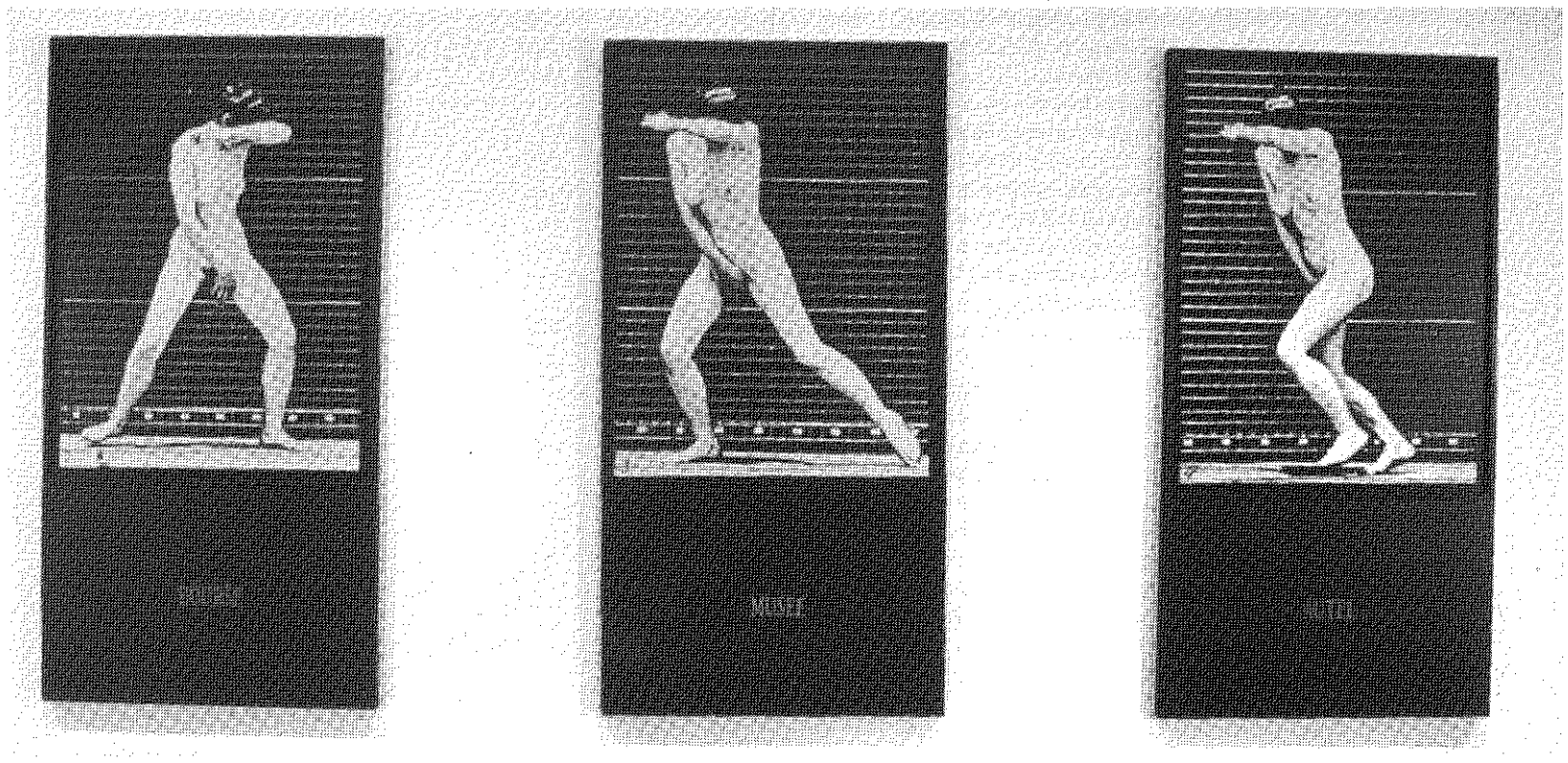
The questions which unfold in Sorel Cohen's new works have their roots in a concern for issues of gender in the world of repre-



▲ *Le geste qui cache* (detail) PHOTO COURTESY OF WYNICK/TUCK GALLERY, TORONTO

sentation. They initially became manifest through a self-conscious regard for her own condition as a woman, in the *context* of everyday life in her native Montréal. It was this concern with the implicit textuality of representation, and its focus on the domestic activities commonly performed by women, which motivated and informed Cohen's early works from the grassroots level of feminist concern, and imbued them with the *puissance* characteristic of her continuous fine art project.

For more than a dozen years, Cohen's photo-based artworks have been the focus of a growing public interest, generated through the intrigue of her compelling yet disturbing works. In an extensive program comprising scores of group and solo exhibitions, Cohen's images have been recognized by a wide variety of publics in Canada, the United States and Europe. In the spring of 1991 her work was seen in fresh light in a solo exhibition at Wynick/Tuck Gallery in Toronto, and in survey exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Hamilton and in New York at the 49th Parallel gallery, on West Broadway.

The conceptual seeds of Cohen's recent works were largely germinated and developed during a period of residence in the Canada Council's *Paris Studio,* during the autumn of 1989. It wouldn't surprise anyone familiar with the artist's prior agenda that the host of historical representations of women in painting housed by Paris museums would be a big draw for Cohen. The Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay proved to be favorite haunts and allowed her to carry out the anticipated research of selected works in the most privileged of settings. Since Cohen's return from France, North Americans have been witness to a strong, new body of her work that confirms its own maturity. Cohen focuses the primary aspects of her research on the controversy surrounding Manet's *Olympia,* and this appears as no accident, when illuminated by a brief reconnaissance of her career.

Cohen's early video *Houseworks* (1976) documented her bed-making activity through each consecutive day of an entire week, as a textual study in itself. Apart from direct personal interlocution with her audience, Cohen sees another text harboured in the conundrum of *playing* the video *work.* This not only disseminates the image but collapses the conscious distance between those who anonymously share, in their separate lives, the dehumanizing burdens of such routine role-baggage as that with which women have traditionally been saddled.

In an attempt to address the gaps in her prior *domestic* studies, Cohen produced a series of images using a still camera, in photo-prints and cyanotypes, which she entitled *Le rite matinal* (1976-77). Here the flourish of gesture intrinsic to the manipulation of bed-clothes is taken beyond the context of the mundane. Recording at relatively slow shutter speeds resulted in a somewhat blurred depiction of motion and a so-called "painterly" or brush-like effect, particularly striking in the flashing gesture of a coverlet being tossed or flung out over a bed. Similar effects are evident in *The Shape of the Gesture* (1977-78), where serial images of Cohen's activity, recorded while cleaning glass with a cloth, could be seen as a woman waving a handkerchief. But there is more than a sense of Eadweard Muybridge's motion-studies here; more than an indexed reference to the mechanical aspects of gesture which perpetrate an evocation of simple anthropomorphic empathy. These works entertain both grace and panic, as the spell of the anonymous subject, whose features are obscured in the blurring of the gestural images, combines with the ambiguity attending the apparent investment of her vigour. Is she cleaning glass, waving goodbye or calling for help? What these two bodies of work have in common is that sequential images of the ordinary activity in everyday life are seen and framed by the artist as "ready-mades." In this framing that begins with their appropriation by the artist, these images constitute windows of opportunity thrown open for review, and the exercise of re-interpretation.

It was Mikhail Bakhtin who recognized the *specifics* of any "temporal expression of space" in representation, and framed them as the textual entity which he coined, the "*chronotope.*" His understanding that "[t]he image of *man* (humankind is implied here) is always intrinsically chronotopic"[1] invites us to explore the relative distinctions of this phenomenon at play, with respect to appropriation and pastiche at work in Cohen's images. Bakhtin's manifold orders of major and minor chronotopes permeate not just *images as text* within the interior folds of her individual works, but the entirety of what we can perceive as their *inter-textuality.* In other words, the relationships of expressed encapsulations of specificity pertaining to the operative space/time context of images, within the limits of a given work, have dialogic relations with the text of other works, and also with the world outside the field of representation or "world represented."[2] According to Bakhtin, a trace of these inter-chronotopic and dialogic relations is present in *the work*; however, he sees the "actual dialogue" as existing apart from

the "world represented" and not able to enter the artwork or any of the chronotopes represented within it.

Julia Kristeva refers extensively to Bakhtin in her *Semiotike,*[3] where she describes inter-textuality as going beyond the relation of mere appropriation or citation, allowing correspondence between all historical texts or ,for example, between Cohen's work and let us say Bacon, Maffi, Manet, Muybridge and Velázquez, in an open dialogic relation. As Levi-Strauss would say that Freud on Oedipus belongs to the myth of Oedipus, we could follow that Deleuze and Guattari's text in *Anti-Oedipus* and even *A Thousand Plateaus* are similarly claimed. The implications of these elements of theoretical analysis pervade the interstices of Cohen's matrix of artistic production as she participates in a complex correspondence with the viewer which involves the great texts of social and cultural history.

Over the course of the next several years, Cohen's actual presence as a self-reflexive subject in her work was to disappear, reappear and disappear again. Her studio work *The Camera Can Obliterate the Reality It Records* (1978) marks the occasion where Cohen vanished as a subject in her work (by the gradual diminishing of shutter speed), and stepped through the aperture to discover her next project. Cohen's realization that Francis Bacon's paintings of figures coupling were based on the sequential motion-studies of Muybridge's wrestlers caused her to reflect on both the synchronous relation between motion-study and the serial imagery of her own work, particularly the interface of her earlier blurred-motion passages with those effected by the brush of Francis Bacon.

In the series *After Bacon/Muybridge* (1980) Sorel Cohen locates both Bacon and herself with respect to Muybridge and each other. In studies of the fleeting gestures of male bodies locked in the urgent embrace of combat, she shares with Bacon a homo-erotic appreciation of the male body. This appreciation is suspended between a classical or neo-platonic ideal and the ambiguity prompted by these later studies of both artists. Here a formal allegory of gender relations is considered through voyeuristic glimpses of a sensuality inherent to embraces of the flesh. Cohen was also fascinated by her perception of a parody of death which may be perceived in the climax of lovemaking. Despite common factors, seeing combat as an allegory of love can be a dangerous trap which views sexual intercourse as combat; by definition without love. When the traditional extension of this parallel view sees the gender-role relation as male/female with the dyad of strength/ weakness denoting the privileged partner as dominant. This leads us straight back into the master/slave debate. However, submission and weakness are not entirely synonymous in association with the Cohen/Bacon images, as the ambiguity held within by a blanket of sensuality induces a condition of abandonment to the perceived dialectical movement. Playful contests of strength in love insist on mutual submission to pleasure; the deadly holding associated with combat does not belong. Nevertheless, the trace of win/lose central to the idea of the contest lingers in the images. Cohen recognizes that this formal relation of domination/submission thrives in typical models of both hetero- and homo-sexual relations, and forms a matrix through which gender relations are traditionally seen and *understood.* In recognizing the status of *otherness* in her identity as woman and artist, Cohen empathizes with the gender perspective revealed in Bacon's studies and candidly declares vulnerability to a similar state of sexual disenfranchisement to that which is often experienced by male homosexuals in the world of *real* men. In these photo-works, Cohen restores authorship of the "wrestler" studies to Muybridge, augmented and enlightened, if you will, by their Baconian/Cohenian experience.

The artist's presence is restored in Cohen's *An Extended and Continuous Metaphor* (1983-86). In the course of an extenuated, studio exercise, the artist set up a condition of perpetual interpolation between the roles of painter (author), model (subject) and viewer (reader). The work consists of several successive ensembles of life-size colour prints. Speculating from various perspectives, each grouping achieves the chromatic richness and subjective intrigue of a Caravaggio, while echoing the formal hierarchy and symmetrical emphasis characteristic of traditional Flemish altar-pieces. The photographic montages, achieved by multiple exposures, depict Cohen uniformly dressed in jeans and white pullover, often with lengths of scarlet drapery in evidence as she appears to portray herself in all of the roles at once; her camera noting the simultaneous manifestations of her various meta-presences. That she is the author, her own subject and the first reader is not in doubt here, but this constitutes a set of internal relationships which include us in the work by locating some of the points from which our various inter-relative views proceed. The images generated by this work challenge established views within the symbolic order which governs objective relations in the realm of artistic production, primarily by challenging the cloak of legitimation worn by the historical logocentrism of male authorship in all genres of artistic production.

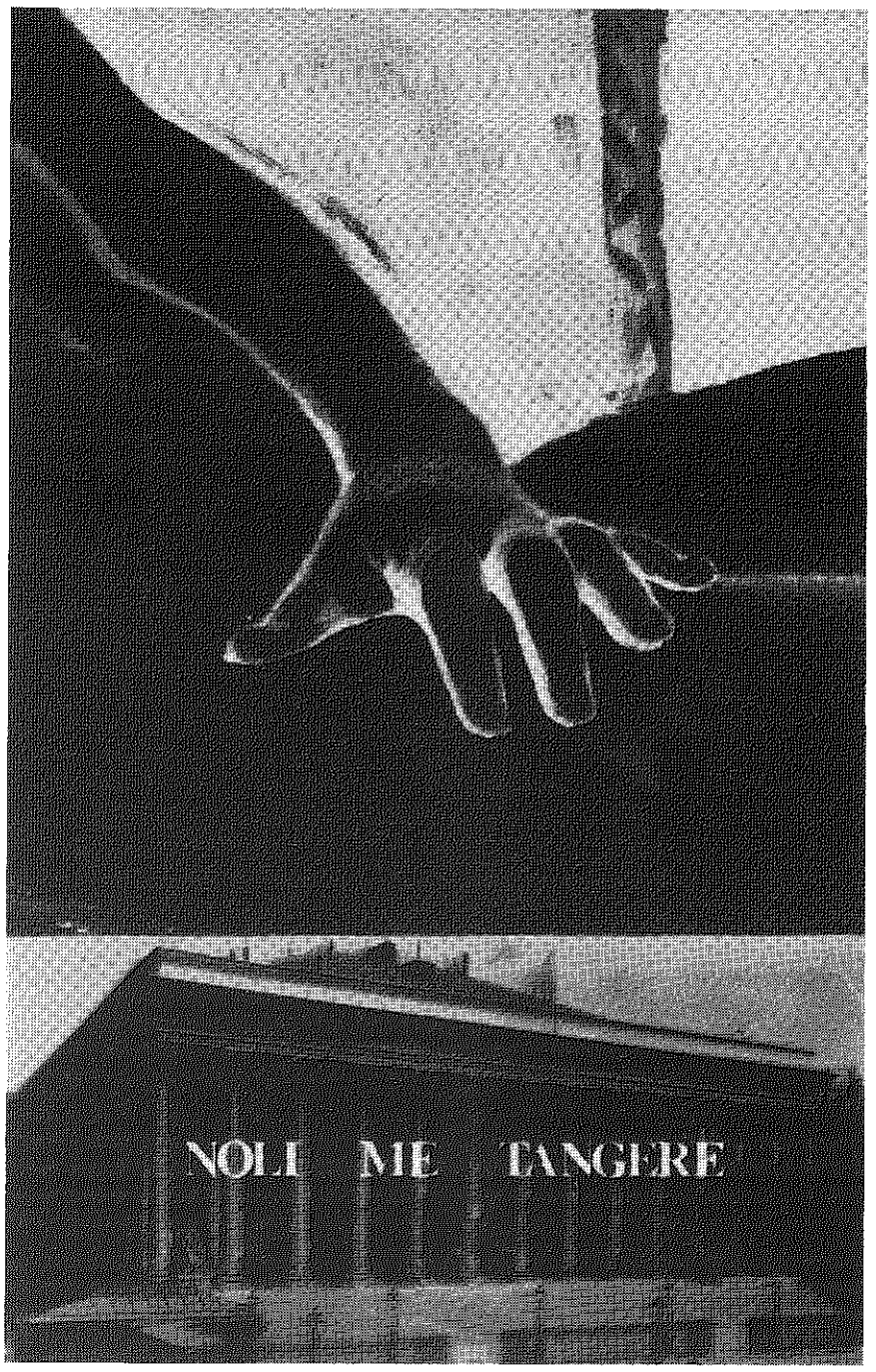
The cultivated mood of the work is questioning but not squarely interrogative, with Cohen's sinuous path touching one stone just as she overturns another. Each element in turn is posited as mediating the relationship of the remaining ones to each other, and to the whole construct.

One is strongly reminded here of *Las Meninas,* by Velázquez; of being fixed by the riveting gaze of the artist's image of himself as he directs it out towards us, past the large canvas on which he works – but of which we can only see the back. In Michel Foucault's surgical account of the operation of visual "vectors" within this painting,[4] he reveals the structure and the nature of a perceived political economy of the gaze, at work within the composite details of Velázquez's imagery: "In appearance, this locus is a simple one; a matter of pure reciprocity: we are looking at a picture in which the painter is in turn looking at us." And yet, "The painter is turning his eyes towards us only in so far as we happen to occupy the position of the subject. We, the spectators, are an additional factor. Although greeted by that gaze, we are also dismissed by it, replaced by that which was always there before we were: the model itself."[5]

To the void that confronts the painter's portrayal of a portrayal, do we then occupy the "real site of the spectator" or "the unreal site of the model"? For Cohen, relationships of the gaze are fragile and evanescent; flickering evidence of the relay of signification. It seems to be this very flickering which propels the operative ambiguity within *Las Meninas* and throughout *An Extended and Continuous Metaphor.* Her own gaze, however, became an exponentially introspective one in the unfolding of this series, as she rarely portrayed her image looking

There

is an absolute distancing at work within any photograph – a denial of presence in spite of the *likeness* of the image. It is this constructed view of the real – the hyper-real, that is intrinsic to images of desire.



◀ *Noli Me Tangere*
PHOTO COURTESY OF WYNICK/TUCK GALLERY, TORONTO

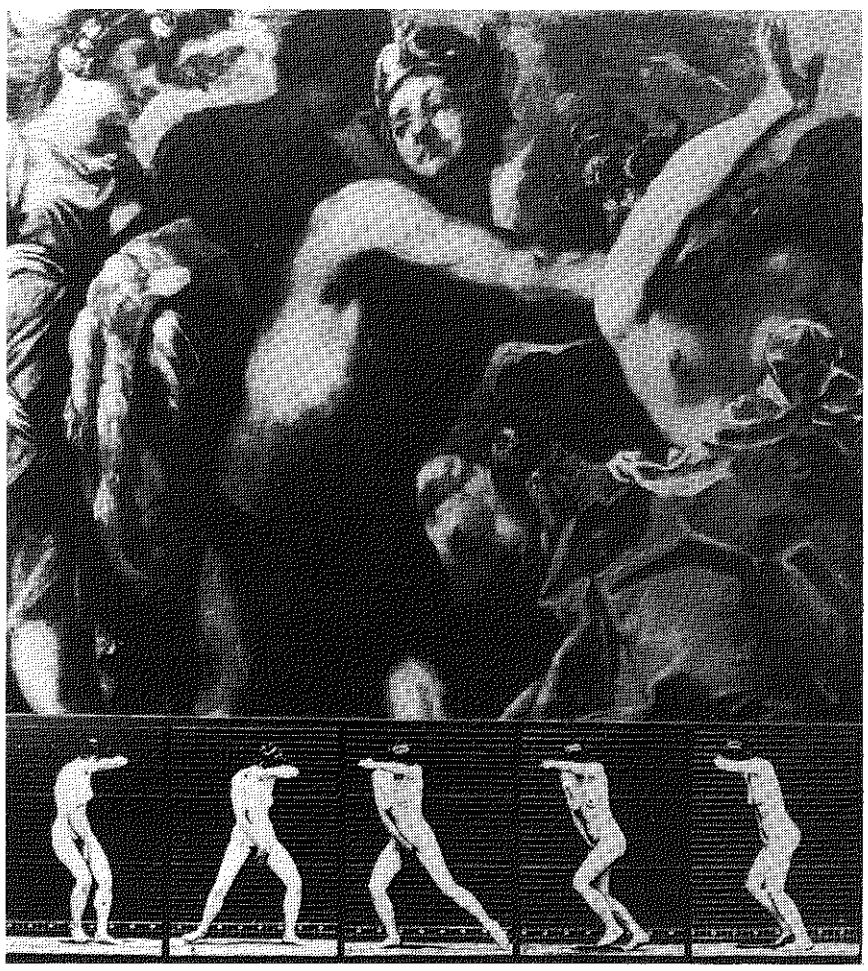
out from its own frame of reference. Instead she saw herself looking inquisitively into her own role in the process of representation.

To appreciate the parallels, it must be acknowledged that Kristeva's notion of *inter-textuality* is at work here. *Las Meninas* is an important document in the annals of the commodification of women and this painting, on the most fundamental level of its historicity, is one of a series of paintings which illustrate the "packaging of a princess." It can be seen as a typical "marketing job" of the period which extended these images of the available female child to such princely heads of Europe as may have bargained in marriage as a means to suit the economic ends of their social and political purposes. This may be a glimpse of the "real" picture of representation that Velázquez is opening for us here, in his distinguishing of this painting from others of the series featuring the Infanta Margarita. This issue of sexual appropriation by means of the gaze finds women as the sexual object in imagery throughout the history of painting. It seems to have been strangely overlooked by Foucault in this instance but it is a central theme in the trajectory of Cohen's work.

To explore and utilize the conflict encountered within the structure of meaning-production specific to photography seems to be the artist's central motivation in her series "Beyond Recovery." It was first shown at the Toronto Photographer's Workshop in 1988. Cohen's earlier profile of operation, creating auto-biographical, self-reflexive studio-works in the context of photo-based production within a feminist discourse, opens up here to consider a wider amplitude of cultural experience, framing both feminist praxis and the seemingly universal *crisis of representation.* Key elements of this series consider the conflicting nature of the representation of landscape within the landscape of representation which we inhabit. *Beyond Recovery* found Cohen creating a series of photo-dyptichs, each suspended in a black photo-ground. This was accomplished by the intuitive appropriation/manipulation of various images from Cohen's visual experience and their juxtaposition into visual dyads, each forming a dialectical unit; culture/nature being the most significant one to a discussion reflecting on the central issues of Cohen's identity. In *Boreal Portage* a photo-print depicts a tutued, prima ballerina, posed on painful tiptoe, limbs fully extended, frozen still – in a gesture of pointing that would quicken a bird dog's pride; an image with some common denominators, perhaps suggested by the appropriation of the adjacent scene – a cabin with chimney, halated by northern lights in a forest clearing. The presence of terror in the sublime is proposed by the use of reverse or negative images in these works, but it adopts a subliminal habit, as Cohen has worked them with sensuous monochromatic washes of photographic colour. In effect, the reversal entertains a kind of Derridean *deconstruction* which would redistribute privilege within the relation, to reconsider the dyad as nature/culture. The allegory apparent within further orders of deferral in this work may help explain the artist's motives.

There is an absolute distancing at work within any photograph – a denial of presence in spite of the *likeness* of the image. It is this constructed view of the real – the hyper-real, that is intrinsic to images of desire. Anything that is represented, subject to the constructed view becomes a commodity; and what could be more appropriate than photography to perpetuate commodity fetishism, through its infinite denial of the presence of the sublime object represented? If we read culture/nature, we see on one hand, the dancer – not the woman as persona. Under the terms of *the enlightenment,* woman is associated with *nature* by way of her essential fertility, which implies a responsibility to reproduction and motherhood; but *the enlightenment* saw nature as something to be utilized, domesticated, managed and controlled. This echo is heard when the cabin is seen as culture, deferring nature's presence by actually consuming it. *Beyond Recovery* reflects Cohen's sense that *the real* is being eroded from experience, never to be recovered as such. Experience, in her view, is evermore an assimilation of the real, through selected or constructed *signs* of it. This ultimately constitutes a *reality of assimilation* or *the hyper-real.*

Cohen's solo exhibition at Wynick/Tuck Gallery in January of 1991 comprised many of the new works conceived during her sojourn in Paris. The most striking was a piece entitled *Noli Me Tangere.* This work is the second generation of two pieces by the same calling. Both featured an enlarged colour-photo study of the hand of Manet's *Olympia.* "Noli" the first was shown in 1990 at New York's Jayne Baum Gallery as part of a group exhibition called "Odalisque." The excerpted image, showing the confluence of Olympia's thighs and abdomen *guarded* by the controversial hand, is underscored by a painted band of deep, cobalt blue on which the text, "Noli Me Tangere" is juxtaposed. Cohen's cropping of *Olympia* also features an inverted triangular patch of the dark background space which interrogates Manet's method of conspicuously invoking the sign of the pubic triangle itself. His designation of so called *negative*



▶ *Medusenhaupt*
PHOTO COURTESY OF WYNICK/TUCK GALLERY, TORONTO

space in his composition, to metaphorically denote what we have come to know from Jacques Lacan as the *lack,* works as a kind of topological interception of perceived space by actual space within the work. This appropriated visual phrase demands at least a para-literate consideration of the *text* within Manet's painting and of the relationship of *Olympia* to its art-historical context.

The figure of the young woman in this painting of Manet's represents a young, Parisian courtesan of the period. Paintings of prostitutes were a category in which they served as visually available icons representing a class of women whose bodies were physically available and dedicated to the service of male pleasure. This situation attended the general availability of all women's bodies to the male gaze. Typical images of women as object (the so-called *female nude*) obeyed an iconography designed to demonstrate the lack of the phallus and thus an envy and dependency on male possession of the penis, which of course was never revealed or even depicted publicly in its aroused state. The attitude of Olympia's gaze does not accommodate male appropriation but defends the space of her persona and "self conscious" possession of *the phallus.* T. J. Clark notes as evidence the subtly flexed attitude of her left hand which "fails to enact the lack of the phallus."[6] The typical male viewer, seeing only his advantage, is invited into speculation by the apparent availability of *the body,* but is summarily exposed in the pursuit of this exercise. Though the body of Olympia at first glance assumes the classic, available posture of the female nude, the obvious confirmation of her mind, in its spirit and sense of self-identity, does not comply. By abandoning the sensual gloss and usual suggestiveness of such painted images in order to focus on the persona of his model Manet distinguished her and inscribed her subtle enigma on the face of modernity.

"Noli" the second reconsiders the hand, but this time in a reverse or negative image, echoing the feeling of deferred presence. This section is richly coloured with a wash of transparent, cobalt blue. The actual text invites the captional consideration of a wider social context.

Cohen's

point is that historical prejudice is carried forward by these published images, socially perpetrated as a matter of course

Olympia's hand now shares the 77.5 by 51.0 inch, vertical frame of reference with an early, sepia coloured photo-image of the Paris Stock Exchange – la Bourse. In his work, *A la bourse* (1878)[7] Edgar Degas represented a scenario of tailed and top-hatted males whispering in each other's ears in the concourse of the stock exchange, where commodities (including women) were formally exchanged within an exclusive society of men; Degas gives a real contextual flavour of the period to this image of the status quo; the institution requiring even them to submit to a uniform business attire of dark suits and silk hats. Cohen's fleshing out of the context of Olympia's world, clearly cites that the hegemony of male-dominated institutions is still intact and guarded by the implied, *Hands Off!* or "*Don't Touch Me.*"

Muybridge's *influence* on Cohen and her intrigue with his studies began as a close reading of his work within the historical context, but carried forward and considered against the experience of contemporary, urban, social praxis it manifests itself as counter-memory in reaction to the implications which his images have continued to inscribe on gender relations within the social structure since their publication in the 19th century.

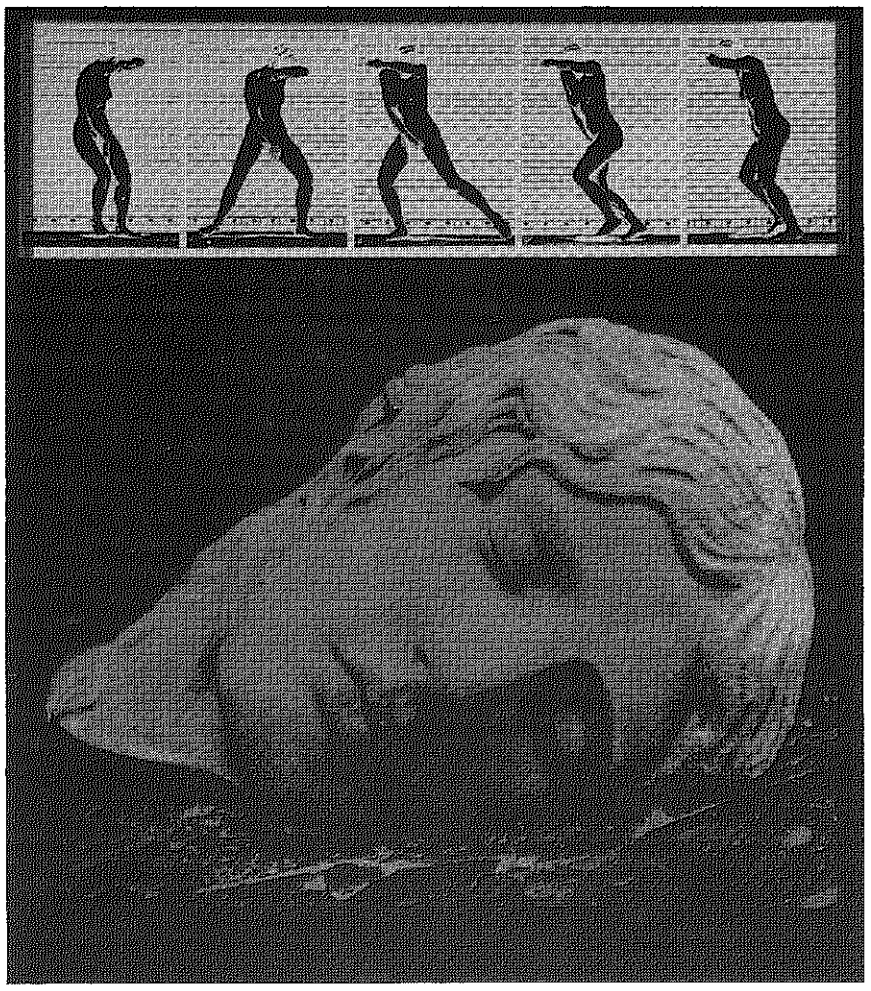
In *Le geste qui cache,* the artist appropriates an interesting passage of six serial images directly from Muybridge; again committing them to the service of review or reconnaissance in the breadth of our inherited, historical context. In each of six vertical panels, an enlarged, black and white photo-print of a figure from *Ashamed* surmounts an underlying panel of red-painted wood, which carries in bold, upper-case, bronze letters, one of the following inscriptions: "ASSEMBLÉE," "FAMILLE," "BOURSE," "MUSÉE," "AUTEL," "ACADÉMIE." The figures are excerpted from a series of 15 studies, which depict a nude female in some aspect of turning away while one hand covers her genitals and a raised forearm guards her averted eyes, in each case reflecting Eve's posture on being discovered *naked* in the Garden of Eden, as oft represented in historical painting. Cohen's research had revealed that this series, which in the published catalogue of his works is titled *Female (Nude) Turning around in surprise and running away*[8] was referred to in his personal notebooks as *Ashamed.* For Cohen this particular passage, distinguished by her personal revelation, is a key to understanding the inscription of social prejudice throughout Muybridge's studies. His portrayals of nude men are divided between the *responsible* activities associated with defense and production and the progressive pursuit of athletics, generally characterizing the work and play of males as noble and important, respectively. These depict lithe male bodies in which skills and strengths are refined through practice in trades, or competition in a variety of sports. Women are generally depicted by Muybridge, as awkward with motion that doesn't involve: carrying water, spanking babies, taking off their clothes, waving hankies, scrubbing pots and floors, or being led around the dance-floor. Cohen's point is that histori-

cal prejudice is carried forward by these published images, socially perpetrated as a matter of course, and is alive and well in the status-quo of the operational *deus ex machina* of our contemporary institutions. Divesting the popular media of their charismatic *aura of ecstasy* reveals them as a systemic, working element of this machine, and clearly shows that the fearful and omnipotent view being avoided by Muybridge's *ashamed* subject is not God's own, but the male gaze embodied in the panoptic view of the camera. Photographic practice, with its aptitude for appropriation feeding the appetite of its affiliated technologies, can intimidate by objectifying and misrepresenting the subject, especially those subjects perpetually vulnerable to *the gaze which sees a lack.* One of the important elements in understanding Cohen's work is to share her knowledge that *seeing* is conditional, a function of *the mind's eye* doing the seeing, and its particular point of view.

Medusenhaupt (1990, 66.5" x 60.5") features a visual deconstruction and review of the Medusa myth, via a passage cited from Francesco Maffi's painting *Perseus and Medusa.* The *punctum,* employed to precipitate this, is a horizontal band comprising five of Muybridge's "ashamed" women (as featured in Cohen's, *Le geste qui cache*) set against a ground of vivid, red photo-colour, catalytically providing a bottom line to underscore Maffi's baro-que, Venetian image. Perseus's assault is strangely encoded in a plan, said to have been issued by Zeus *himself.* He stands with both arms extended, holding the victim's head while readying to sever it with the sword in his other hand. Cohen sees an allegory of the photographic process implicit in this story. In order to avoid the deadly gaze of this *demon* Perseus's eyes are sharply averted. He is able to monitor his murderous work, however, by observing the image of his prey seen in the mirror of his polished shield. The young *hero* believes that he has access to Medusa only by deferring the actual presence of that which threatens him – the female persona. No eyes meet within the work; nor are they offered to the viewer, as Medusa's gaze is directed toward's the hero's turned head. Her head is all but obscured by her right arm being raised in front of her face; a gesture appropriately echoed by the arms of the "ashamed" figures below. The ground of blood-red colour correlates the instances of violence, making it clear that the full integrity of womanhood has been denied in both instances; the portrayal of the body without countenance or identity – *sans persona.*

Dreams, Memories, Fantasies echoes the *Medusenhaupt* theme with an image of the severed head of a Roman *Fury* statue. It lies as if on a pillow, in mid-ground with curiously blissful, closed eyes, and a countenance that a Buddha would envy. A headline of *Ashamed* figures across the top is reversed so that the figures themselves appear red. Their former relation to a blood-red ground, is recalled here by a bold horizontal passage of red at the bottom, strangely underlining the martyr-like head. There is a pervading sense of the weight of suffering borne, the innocent surrender of fury to peace, vengeance foregone and the subliminal evocation of "love thine enemy." Cohen clearly decapitates the myth of Perseus and Medusa, but the story remains forever enhanced through its inter-textual association with *Medusenhaupt* and related works; its amplitude broadened by the recognition of new perspectives through the reviewing of Maffi's reflection of the Perseus and Medusa myth, and the deconstruction of its assumed connotation of male dominance.

Implicit in the aesthetic of Cohen's production is the critical flux which penetrates the rigid rubric of signification constantly shaping society, and which seeks a condition of openness for the decodification of traditional sites of meaning. Cohen seems determined to make her art reflect the fullness of texts drawn from within her own life circumstances. Using the medium of photography with startling powers of articulation, she has found a way to address the dialectic within experience, including her experience of history, in works that invite a fresh semiological reading of related images as text. It is the extensive correspondence of inter-textual relations which Cohen's work enjoys with both historical and contemporary images which imbues its amplitude with pertinence. That historical artists such as Manet or Velázquez (some of whose works were shocking in their own time) could anticipate an artist such as Sorel Cohen within the range of their own inter-textual theatre may seem far-fetched; however, the common denominators are evident. They identify a kind of artwork that is a valuable critical resource; a vigorous challenge to the interpretation of culture and our notions of what culture is. ◆



◀ *Dreams, Memories, Fantasies* PHOTO BY T.E. MOORE; COURTESY OF WYNICK/TUCK GALLERY, TORONTO

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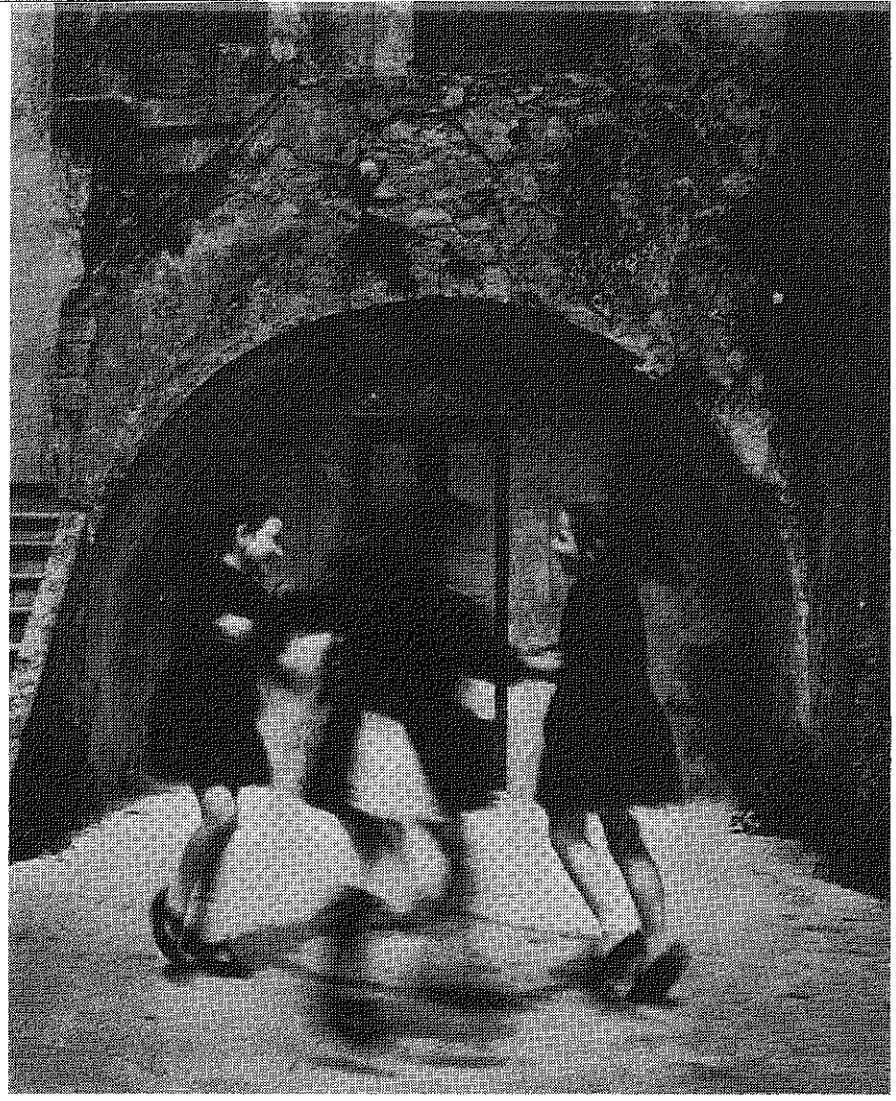
NOTES

1. M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin,* Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1981, pg. 85.
2. Ibid., pg. 252.
3. Julia Kristeva, *Semiotike: Recherches pour une semanalyse.* Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1969.
4. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences.* Trans. of *Les Mots et Les Choses,* New York: Vintage Books, 1973, pp. 3-16.
5. Ibid., pg.10.
6. See T.J. Clark's, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers,* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U. Press, chapter 2, "Olympia's Choice": pp. 79-146.
7. Ibid., pg. 256, ill.
8. Eadweard Muybridge. *Complete Human and Animal Locomotion,* Vol.1, plate 73, pg. 320, New York, Dover Publications, 1979.

Pla(y)in Jane

See Jane Play, See Dick (Run)



One day I decided that Barbie would wear Ken's leisure suit. My brother said "Cathy you don't know anything – Barbie wears dresses." Barbie, as far as I was concerned, could wear whatever the hell she wanted. My brother, along with my mother and my friends, insisted that I didn't know what I was talking about. Luckily, I didn't play with my mother and as far as the others, I was a tomboy and could physically overpower them. So I got my way, Barbie could cut her ridiculous hair, wear a leisure suit, go to work, and leave Ken home to change Kenny Jr.[1]

For(e)play

No no, don't apologize. I think that's a fair question – you just want to know how I feel. There's nothing wrong with that. So, how do I feel … I know, give me your hands and I'll show you. Okay, okay, I'll be serious. You want to know what all this means to me, right? Well, I guess if I had to pin it down right this second I'd say something like this:

> It is not surprising that the contributors to theories of estrangement are often those who have experienced the estrangement of academe, the canon, and theory itself. Because I profess feminism to undergraduate students, I'm interested in looking at the effects of the feminist professor as she plays down, plays out, or plays up her estrangement in the classroom. In an institution that centres theories of estrangement, yet excludes estranging theories and estranging praxis, which play – if any – constitutes an emancipatory strategy for feminists?

But that's just how I feel right now. The other day I read that "it is better for women to avoid stating things precisely,"[2] so don't make me say it. Let's just do it, okay?

All work & no play makes Jane

Play is nothing new to women. And the recognition of women's play is nothing new to feminists. Ever since Simone de Beauvoir articulated that woman is "a product elaborated by civilization," feminists have exposed and revolted against the gendered play dictated by patriarchy. In *Of Woman Born,* for example, Adrienne Rich describes her frustration with "acting the part of the feminine creature" as girl, as woman, and particularly as mother. Similarly, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," Helene Cixous insists that we stop playing "the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing." One of the most impassioned denouncements of women's compulsory play comes from *The Female Eunuch* where Germaine Greer rejects the ideal of the Eternal Feminine:[3]

> Maybe I couldn't make it. Maybe I don't have a pretty smile, good teeth, nice tits, long legs, a cheeky arse, a sexy voice. Maybe I don't know how to handle men and increase my market value, so that the rewards due to the feminine will accrue to me. Then again, maybe I'm sick of the masquerade. I'm sick of pretending eternal youth. I'm sick of belying my own intelligence, my own will, my own sex. I'm sick of peering at the world through false eyelashes, so everything I see is mixed with a shadow of bought hairs; I'm sick of weighting my head with a dead mane, unable to move my neck freely, terrified of rain, of wind, of dancing too vigorously in case I sweat into my lacquered curls. I'm sick of the Powder Room .... I'm sick of being a transvestite. I refuse to be a female impersonator. I am a woman not a castrate.

With few exceptions, feminists from the second wave don't want to play anymore. Like Greer who wrote *The Female Eunuch* back in 1970, we're sick of playing at something we're not and of playing according to someone else's rules. Instead, we want to displa(y)ce the patriarchal games devised for women.

In the feminist's classroom (as in her texts), that displa(y)cement takes the form of playing down play altogether and playing up our resistance to play instead. In "Taking Female Students Seriously," Rich advocates such a pedagogy of displa(y)cement. Identifying the impact of feminine conditioning on female scholars, she claims that "[a]s women teachers, we can either deny the importance of this context in which women students think, write, read, study, project their own futures; or try to work with it. We can either teach passively, accepting these conditions, or actively, helping our students identify and resist them."

Playing (with) ourselves

Paradoxically, however, through our efforts to displa(y)ce patriarchal ideals and the very notion of an ideal for women, we've (unintentionally) constructed a new ideal for women to play up to: the ideal of the Eternal Feminist. Many women find this ideal about as unnatural, almost as compulsory, and consequently just as problematic as the ideal of the Eternal Feminine. Janice Williamson explains that as feminists "[w]e ask ourselves how we measure up to feminist ethical standards, standards which are often non-specific, unspoken, and certainly ideal. There are preconceived notions about what feminists are supposed to look like, how we are supposed to behave or dress, and what kind of language we should speak." It appears that the letter "y" is central to theories and pedagogies of displa(y)cement. Rather than liberating women from all play, such theories cement women to displaying the Eternal Feminist; rather than denounce play altogether, they simply expect dis/play rather than feminine play.

The Eternal Feminist ideal is particularly problematic for the feminist professor. In the classroom, we find ourselves (situated as the) acting Eternal Feminist, playing role model for dozens of aspiring Eternal Feminists. While, as Williamson points out, the feminist professor is "supposed to be preeminently a non-contradictory subject," at all levels, the feminist professor can only be contradictory.

At the first and most obvious level – as woman – she contradicts the gendered notion of the professor. Recent studies of the student ratings of university-level instruction reveal that to match the ratings of male instructors, female instructors must display stereotypically feminine behaviour. When both sexes provide the same level of professional instruction, students of both sexes give their female instructors significantly lower ratings. Only when female instructors begin to act feminine (by smiling or making social contact with their students) do their ratings increase; interestingly, when male instructors adopt the same feminine behaviour, their ratings are not affected. Another study reveals that besides displaying feminine characteristics, female instructors must work harder to convince their students that they possess the masculine qualities associated with the professorial role. One study concludes that female instructors must do more to convey confidence and decisiveness than their male colleagues.

While reinforcing that our notion of the professor is gendered, these studies also point us to a second level of contradiction for the female professor. As we've seen, to achieve as professor, a woman must significantly play up both femininity and masculinity. She must simultaneously demonstrate qualities that are "posed in opposition, in tension, in conflict," playing both sides of a "couple engaged in a kind of war in which death is always at work" (Cixous, *Castration*). As Cixous' definition suggests, in logocentric society the either/or exclusionary nature of the binary opposition insists that one term can only exist by silencing its opposite: the female professor's femininity can only exist to the exclusion of her masculinity; her masculinity can only exist to the exclusion of her femininity. By embracing both sides of this dichotomy, the female professor further embraces contradiction.

When the female professor plays acting Eternal Feminist, she is (ef)faced with three more contradictions. In her attempt to achieve as female professor, the feminist professor deviates from her pedagogy of displa(y)cement by playing out the same feminine qualities that she denounces. Similarly, the professorial masculinity she must play out often directly contradicts feminist values. Applying Barbara Johnson's observation about female writers to feminist professors, we can see that it is not enough to be a feminist teaching to resist the naturalness of female and feminist effacement in the subtly

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male pseudo-genderlessness of pedagogy.[4] Finally and perhaps most problematically, despite her feminist convictions, her idyllic intentions, and her doctorate, the feminist professor cannot leap out of her patriarchal context to become an a-contextual ideal. Barthes notion of "the impossibility of living outside the finite text" means that, to some extent, woman is always already situated within the patriarchal context. As woman, the feminist professor is too female. As acting Eternal Feminist, she is too feminine, too phallic, too contextualized, and, of course, too contradictory.

The ideal of the Eternal Feminist poses similar problems for other feminists. In their journals, many of my students express discomfort with the ideal and their ability to play it. The following excerpts convey a unanimous skepticism:

I don't think I'm a feminist really. Maybe a mild one. I certainly try to make myself equal but not anything that I would have to do publicly. I think almost every woman has a little bit of feminism in them, especially now as women's roles are beginning to change, and women are less confined to traditional jobs.

I like to consider myself a liberated woman – able to think for myself, make my own decisions, and be regarded as an equal to my male counterpart. Yet complications arise when I find myself enjoying a door being held open or a compliment being given. Does this make me a part-time feminist?

I wouldn't say that I'm a feminist. I don't know enough about it to be one. I believe men and women should be treated equally and should be independent. Does the belief in these two ideas make me a feminist? How does someone become a feminist? Does it well up within until an individual can no longer contain it? Does it come from being forced to be independent? Does it come from a bad marriage or a good education? This is a question I would like to have answered. If feminism comes from a good education can I expect to be a feminist after four years of university?

Am I a feminist? I've never really thought of myself as an actual feminist but now that I think about it I guess I sort of am. I mean, I'm not really into women's liberation and changing such statements as "mankind" to "humankind," but I strongly believe that women should be treated with equal respect.

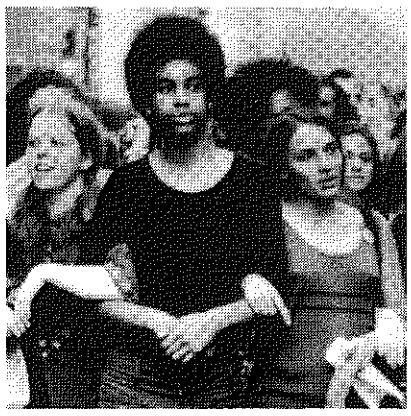
Those who aspire to the ideal of the Eternal Feminist more fully discuss the guilt associated with playing the feminist. One student guiltily confesses to hating being a woman during a painful yeast infection and pap test. Another apologizes to me for her low body image and resulting bulimia. Another relentlessly criticizes her "betrayal" of feminism for making the assumption that her surgeon would be male and for questioning the competence of a female surgeon. To conclude a full page of self-criticism, she writes: "I brag about being open-minded only to turn around and stab women-kind in the back. I feel I have done a great disservice to women in general. ... it appears that I have a lot of work ahead of me in order to knock out all of society's unjust attitudes from my system."

When confronted with the impossible ideal of the Eternal Feminist, these women simply cannot measure up. Unlike the Eternal Feminist, these feminists don't make scenes in public; they like having doors opened for them; they enjoy compliments from men; they haven't experienced a bad marriage or a good education; they don't love their cunts every minute of every day; they see the image of the Eternal Feminine as more natural and certainly more beautiful than the image they see in the mirror; they punish not praise the uniqueness of their bodies; they find themselves operating according to the same patriarchal attitudes that they denounce. Consequently, they describe themselves as *mild, part-time, not actual, sort of* feminists. Like their professor, they don't merely resist or denounce play; instead, they contradictorily and secretly and guiltily find themselves playing according to two antithetical ideals – the patriarchal ideal of the Eternal Feminine and the feminist ideal of the Eternal Feminist.

It's only fun if someone loses an I

The above examples point us to the way the recording of Woman's experience in THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE differs from women's experiences as recorded in dis/course. To demonstrate that difference, let me include one more passage from a student's journal:

I've decided to do my own little part for the feminist movement. By using the word "cunt" regularly, you depower the word. Since it is one of the ugliest words used today, and it makes a normal part of the female anatomy seem dirty, stinky, rotten, and offensive, I've decided to include it in my vocabulary. I started with my boyfriend. I turned to him and said "My cunt is itchy." Now my roommates and I say it all the time – "Would you please move your cunt out of the way?" or "How's your cunt?" or "I banged my leg, I'm glad I didn't hurt my cunt." A good friend of mine at work has adopted my new word and we have fun with our cunt talk. Once at the bar [we work at] I sat next to her and said "Hi Kim, how's your cunt?" and she said "Terrific, how's yours?" A male co-worker [who is] one of the biggest flirts and women users at our restaurant was behind the bar and overheard us. He looked at us and said "What did you say?" We roared out laughing and he replied "Holy fuck you guys are retarded," then he shook his head, glared at us, and stomped away. You see, Kim and I look pretty much like "good girls," we wear make-up and try to dress well. That guy obviously didn't expect these feminine young girls to use the word "cunt," only whores use that word.



I like

to consider myself a liberated woman – able to think for myself, make my own decisions, and be regarded as an equal to my male counterpart.

When I initially recorded this quote, I ended it here. Undoubtedly, this conclusion is a "good" one: it demonstrates that my student recognizes society's Eternal

Feminine/Whore dichotomy; she understands the relationship between that dichotomy and our discussion about women reclaiming their cunts; and she knows that her play (or "cunt talk" as she calls it) is subversive. With this conclusion, her anecdote would deserve full marks, and for bringing it to your attention, so would I.

More importantly, however, the unedited conclusion to this journal entry reads "It was pretty funny at the time, but maybe we got carried away. Maybe things got out of hand." By cutting out these two lines to carefully remove any indication of insecurity, uncertainty, or contradiction in accordance to my role as acting Eternal Feminist, I rendered her cuntclusion a conclusion. My own act of castration – my attempt to render her messy and potent(ially problematic) recuntstruction a squeaky clean reconstruction – typifies the castration subjected to feminist discourse as it is prepared for THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE. Similarly, it typifies the necessary castration of the aspiring Eternal Feminist.

Analogous to its impact on woman in her entirety and on women generally, the impact of THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE on the cunt is, in many ways, extremely positive. In the hands of feminists, the cunt has finally begun to come alive. Feminists have personified the cunt; they've rendered the passive object an active subject; they've remembered what phallocentric society has dismembered; they've made the hole whole.[5] While such efforts have been invaluable in enticing women to reclaim their cunts, this reconstruction is too static to reflect women's cuntflicting experiences. THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE, like the patriarchal discourse of femininity, presents and promotes only a systemic sanitization of women's messy experiences. While patriarchs created women's alleged need for feminine deodorant spray, we feminists are still (figuratively) spraying it through our squeaky clean approach to denouncing it. Like the ideal of the Eternal Feminist, our "fresh and natural" scented DISCOURSE serves to de-naturalize women from themselves and from feminism.

As we profess feminism, I propose that we stop cleaning up our acts. To do so, we need to admit to our estrangement by telling our students that as women and as feminists we find ourselves always already playing. It is time that feminists cuntaminate THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE with contradictory experiences such as those described by my students in dis/course. In 1991, *The Female Eunuch* invites a sequel called *The Feminist Eunuch.* Twenty-one years after Greer's impassioned denouncement of the Eternal Feminine, we need an equally impassioned denouncement of the Eternal Feminist:

> Maybe I couldn't make it. Maybe I do have a pretty smile, good teeth, nice tits, long legs, a cheeky arse, a sexy voice. Maybe I do know how to handle men and increase my market value, so that the rewards due to the feminine will accrue to me. Then again, maybe I'm sick of masquerading the masquerade. I'm sick of pretending eternal sisterhood. I'm sick of belying my own context, my own contradictions, my own complicity. I'm sick of peering at the world through false dichotomy, so everything I see is either politically correct or phallocentric; I'm sick of weighting my head with a dead certainty, unable to implicate myself, terrified of implicating the others, afraid of thinking too vigorously in case I implicate us all. I'm sick of the Guilt. I can only be a transvestite. I refuse to be a feminist impersonator. I am a woman and a castrate.

Although my pla(y)giarism advocates the Death of the Eternal Feminist, it does not advocate the death of feminisms. I am simply calling the static and idyllic feminist identity into question. As Jane Gallop explains in *The Daughter's Seduction:*

> ... any identity will necessarily be alien and constraining. I do not believe in some "new identity" which would be adequate and authentic. But I do not seek some sort of liberation from identity. That would only lead to another form of paralysis – the oceanic passivity of undifferentiation. Identity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question.

To Gallop's assertion that "any identity will necessarily be alien and constraining," I would also add that it will necessarily be insightful. While the feminist identity has been both alien and constraining (indeed, cuntstraining), it has also offered insights into ourselves and our contexts that other identities could not. I believe it is crucial that we as feminists be the ones to call our identities into question; otherwise, we risk losing our insights, our political voice, and our power (however marginalized our power might be) to statements like this one:

> Feminism is nothing but the operation of a woman who aspires to be like a man. And in order to resemble the masculine dogmatic philosopher this woman lays claim – just as much claim as he – to truth, science and objectivity in all their castrated delusions of virility. Feminism too seeks to castrate. It wants a castrated woman.

Speaking of "masculine dogmatic philosophers," it was Jacques Derrida who brought us that four-sentence fuck. After encounters like that one, feminists may never walk again. For it to be good for us too, we need to be the ones to play up our contra/diction, to de-sanitize THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE, and to decuntstruct the ideal of the Eternal Feminist.

Certainly, postmodernism appears to offer feminists an identity that allows for such a playing up, de-sanitization, and decuntstruction. Because it "riotously

Am I

a feminist? I've never really thought of myself as an actual feminist but now that I think about it I guess I sort of am.

I wouldn't say

that I'm a feminist. I don't know enough about it to be one.

embraces indeterminacy, fragmentation, decanonization, selflessness, irony, [and] hybridization," as Ihab Hassan put it, and the postmodern perspective allows us to centre contradictory play and de-sanitize THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE. And because the postmodern perspective is as Linda Hutcheon says "paradoxical in its conservative installing and then radical contesting of conventions," it allows us to play up our paradoxical association and dissociation with the patriarchal ideal of the Eternal Feminine and the feminist ideal of the Eternal Feminist. However, as Gallop would insist, the postmodern identity, like any identity, must be "immediately called into question." As we do so, it appears that a feminist identity that

I started

with my boyfriend.

I turned to him and said,

"My cunt is itchy."

doesn't down-play our play does not equate with the compla(y)cent parodic(k) postmodern identity.

Daddy says I can play

Postmodernism in academe reminds me of PlayDay in public school. It was more fun than the work days and there were pretty good prizes and we got to see the teachers in their play clothes, but they were still the ones in charge and we still had to be there and be nice all day long and some of the games were just plain stupid. I remember doing three-legged races tied to some nerd hopping across the playground towards Mr. Copeland worrying that I might let the blue team down and hoping that the hunk Robin Sayner and the cute John Thompson couldn't see me and wondering whether this was really any more fun than math class. Like the institutionalized play I knew in grade school, the institutionalized play of postmodernism regulates and contains our play. In the same way that PlayDay sucked the fun out of three-legged races, the institution of postmodernism sucks the playfulness out of play.

Reminiscent of the systemic sanitization of THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE, the systemic sucking of the THE POSTMODERN DISCOURSE allows us to comfortably advocate discomfort, to profess dis/ease with ease, to offer one (gendered) perspective on diversity, to dismiss the author with authority, and to confidently assert incredulity. Borrowing Barthes' ideas in *Mythologies* about metalanguage, we can see that THE POSTMODERN DISCOURSE is "depoliticized by a general metalanguage which is trained to celebrate things, and no longer to 'act them';" such language "does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them." Barthes explains that, by talking about it, metalanguage "constitutes a kind of preserve for myth." THE POSTMODERN DISCOURSE preserves myths of contradiction, multiplicity, subversion, and incredulity.

It appears that while theories of estrangement can exist in a context that eliminates estrangement, estranging theories and estranging praxis cannot. By submissively pla(y)cing her play next to the (paro)dick play of the postmodern playboy, the post-feminist professor pla(y)ces herself within a context that plays down the very play that it professes to play up. As playmate to the compla(y)cent playboy, the feminist's necessary power play is reduced to mere powder play; as she plays the postmodern player, she finds herself back in the Powder Room that Greer encouraged us to escape from 21 years ago.

For example, discussing her PlayBook, *Reading Lacan,* one post-feminist explains that the publisher found

> *the text was not worthy of publication because it demonstrated inadequate command of the subject matter, adding that I even admitted as much. Returning to this issue at the report's end, the reader suggested that I did not sufficiently grasp the Lacanian theory of sexual identification and that I should wait to write about Lacan's theory until I was no longer confused.*

Of course, Jane later found a publisher to accept *Reading Lacan.* In its preface, she discusses the text's initial rejection, explaining that "rather than present my mastery I am interested in getting at those places where someone who generally knows the text well still finds herself in a position of difficulty." While she may refuse to play up her mastery over Lacan, however, Jane does play up Lacan's mastery over her by telling us that her approach is "in the spirit of Lacanian reading" and "in the keeping with the French revolution in discourse." In other words, Jane pla(y)ces her play to demonstrate that her play is fair play and consequently worthy of publication. She makes a metaplay which, like the play it describes, is the kind of play that the professional discourse can (and in this case, should have) legitimize(d).

Both the initial rejection of Jane's text and her prefatory remarks about it remind me of a game I used to play called Simon Says. As you may recall, everyone lines up facing the person appointed Simon who stands at the other end of the yard. In that game, you can only move if Simon says *Simon says.* For example, if Simon says *Simon says take three giant steps forward,* everyone should take three giant steps forward. If Simon just says *Take three giant steps forward,* everyone should stay put. And, as eight-year old Rachel MacArthur confirms, "if you don't, you're out." Jane makes the point that her moves have been legitimized in the professional playground; that *Lacan says* she should write and publish her text; that *Lacan says* she should foreground difficulty rather than mastery; that the entire French revolution in discourse says so. They all said she could play! While Cornell University Press knows that (or perhaps knew that after Jane reminded them in the revised preface), the first publisher she approached apparently didn't hear the *Simon says.* Perhaps that publisher had appointed some other Simon. Whatever the case, in that game there was no *Simon says,* so as any eight-year old could tell you, Jane was out, fair and square.

Suspecting that Simon didn't say that this Jane's pedagogical play is fair, my students consult their own Simons. For the most part, their Simons – like the other Jane's initial reader – dismiss my play as foul play. In her journal, one student writes "I tried to explain it to my boyfriend and he seems to think it's a 'load of shit.' Now, each Tuesday night, he wants to see my notes to see what we talked about." Another writes "Wow! Hilarious pieces! I showed them to my boyfriend. What a reaction!! His mouth just dropped open: 'More fucking feminist articles,' was what he said. I'm just very glad that he's open-minded. I don't think that this is good stuff for men to read." Appointing grandpa as Simon, another says "The article was vulgar and I would absolutely die if my grandfather ever read it .... It was an interesting article, but not written for the general public to learn from and enjoy."

Others want me to bring Simon into the classroom. For example, when asked what she would like to hear more about this term, one student requests that I dedicate a class to "men's views on feminism." Another requests that we hear more from the Simons in the class: "I am also curious to know how the guys (the entire four or five in the class) are relating to this. I think its cool that they'd want to be in a Women in Literature class – regardless of the fact that I think they think it is a great pick-up place – the ratio of guys to girls is great!" Despite this student's use of the word "regardless" (she wants to hear more from the men "*regardless* of the fact" that they are here to pick up women), it's more likely that she wants to hear from them

She said,

"Angela, you are a Goddess!" Then she took my fancy calligraphy pen and on a piece of paper she wrote *GODDESS,* folded it up, and gave it to me.

because of the fact that she believes they are here to pick up women. If they are here to pick up women, they are Simons rather than students. As she witnesses my pedagogy and listens for the *Simon says,* this student will know how to distinguish between fair play and foul play; she will know what play she can indulge in without abandoning her compla(y)cency and what play she must be sure to avoid.

Of course, while feminist play pleases (her sugar) Daddy, it must also dis/ease Daddy. As we compla(y)cently play in his context of the postmodern playground, feminists must cuntaminate that playground by pla(y)cing it in a cuntext. Unless we suck the "dick" out of parodic(k), with all the complicity and subversion that that sucking suggests, that playground will render our potent(ially foul) play fair play.

Play for all

In our efforts to achieve free play or at least a freer play, I suggest that we indulge ourselves and our students in a play for all. As we profess feminism, we need to continue to play down compulsory play for women, but we also need to play up our play – not only as the carefree playmates of the compla(y)cent playboys of postmodernism, but also as dirty players dedicated to messing up the playground that is so quick to render our foul play fair play. In cuntclusion, let me return to where I began, to the play that is already taking pla(y)ce. I leave you with a journal excerpt from a student who may well be the most down-to-earth Goddess in Waterloo:

> *My friend Karen (who is in this class) and I decided we would get together on the full moon, which happened to fall on the day after the class on Goddess Religion and celebrate our womanhood and the fact that we are goddesses. We got together and talked about how CUNT is beautiful and how we are unafraid and proud of beautiful CUNT. I drew up her birth chart and we looked at that, and then I spilled my guts about the problems I have been having with my boyfriend and how I don't really feel like I have been treated much like a Goddess lately. To my surprise, tears came as I told her the story (it is very hard for me to cry), and she hugged me and gave me a back massage. We talked about what I could do to patch things up with Steve and she said, "Angela, you are a Goddess!" Then she took my fancy calligraphy pen and on a piece of paper she wrote GODDESS, folded it up, and gave it to me, saying, "Go talk to him." I did, and I told him everything that has been bothering me .... Since then he has treated me like the Goddess I am. A Goddess appreciates herself enough to not need anyone worship her, but loves herself enough to ask for what she needs, and if she is rejected, she loves herself enough to leave. Well, Steve and I are still together and he has dubbed me the Honourary Goddess of "Black and Tan" beer at the Lion's Brew Pub. I have never had a more bonding experience with a female than I did yesterday with Karen under the fat full moon.* ◆

NOTES

1. Many thanks to the students of the Winter 1991 Women in Literature class at the University of Waterloo for generously allowing me to quote their journals here and throughout.
2. Jane Gallop states in *The Daughter's Seduction* that "[p]recision must be avoided, if the economy of the One is to be unsettled. Equivocations, allusions, etc. are all flirtatious; they induce the interlocutor to listen, to encounter, to interpret, but defer the moment of assimilation back into a familiar model. Even if someone asks for precisions, even if that someone is oneself, it is better for women to avoid stating things precisely."
3. In 1970, Greer defined the Eternal Feminine as "the dominant image of femininity which rules our culture and to which all women aspire.". While the physical characteristics of the ideal feminine image have changed since then, the construct is still with us. You know her as the good girl, the nice girl, daddy's little girl, the Ivory girl, the Breck girl, the Covergirl, the girl-next-door; she's the girl of his dreams, the kind of girl he can take home to mom, the kind of girl who makes him wait.
4. In "Gender Theory and the Yale School," Johnson states "it is not enough to be a woman writing in order to resist the naturalness of female effacement in the subtly male pseudo-genderlessness of language."
5. Feminists have transformed the patriarchal cunt – dirty, smelly, ugly, a construct that is surely fucked – into the feminist cunt – beautiful, magical, natural, a construct that Greer insists tastes like "expensive gourmet food." Consider, for example, Monique Wittig's intoxicating descriptions in *The Lesbian Body.*

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REVIEWS

WILLIAM **WALTERS**

Groovy Times

New Times:
The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s
Edited by **Stuart Hall** and **Jacques Martin**

London: Verso, 1990.

New Times is the rather unimaginative rubric under which these essays gather various social developments elsewhere associated with post-industrialism, post-modernism, post-Fordism and the so-called revolution of the subject. Most of the articles, many first published in the British Communist Party's monthly, *Marxism Today*, take as their base-line an epochal shift from a characteristically Fordist society to one that is post-Fordist. In the introduction editors Hall and Martin inform us that the world has changed not just incrementally but qualitatively; Britain and other advanced capitalist countries are increasingly characterized by diversity, differentiation and fragmentation whereas under Fordism homogeneity, standardization and the economies and organizations of scale were the rule.

New Times is also about Thatcherism. Hall and Jacques' previous collection – *Politics of Thatcherism* – was mostly about its coming to power. *New Times* sets out to explain why it has been a resilient political force once in power. Throughout, Thatcherism's success is attributed to its superior understanding of the changes that distinguish New Times and its ability to take credit for them. Much more than the Left, the Thatcherite right has been alert to popular dissatisfactions with the monotony and stratification of everyday life under Fordism.

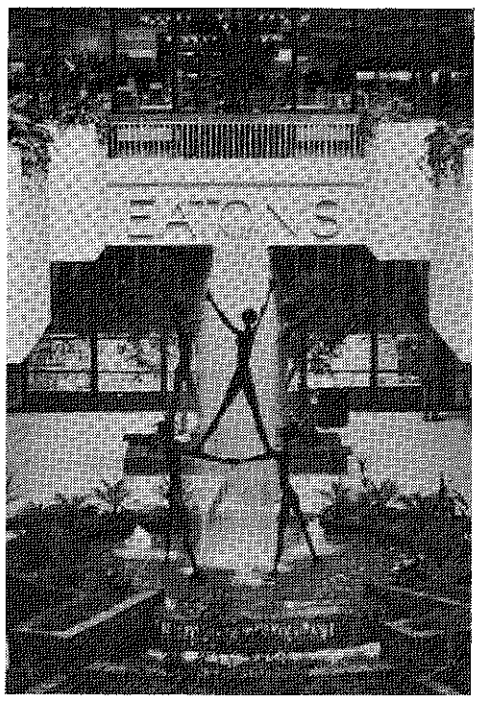
Robin Murray's two essays develop this theme. He claims that Britain has an emerging culture of post-Fordism. But it is not put in place instrumentally by Thatcherism, nor is it reducible to economic restructuring. Instead, he sees post-Fordism as a contradictory, partially open cultural formation. Its genealogy must take in the proliferation of resistances to Fordist bureaucracy and homogeneity which flowered after 1968. If post-Fordism is closely associated with Thatcherism, this is because the right has been good at recuperating aspects of local alternatives to Fordism, at colonizing resistances to it. Hence, as Murray indicates, "counter-cultural" organizational forms – networks, work-place democracy, cooperatives – are echoed in contemporary managerial strategies.

That *New Times* is not so much invented as organized by the right to its advantage is a constant refrain of this book. So is the related point that any viable socialist alternative to Thatcher-ism must also be situated on the terrain of New Times. For Murray, this means developing alternatives to the semi-authoritarian modes of administration and planning which the left inherited from Fordism (and for which Thatcherism's alternative is privatization). Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council (Murray's former employer) was suggestive in this respect. It demonstrated that a socialist administration could relate to civil society in a way that empowered existing producer, consumer and welfare networks and groups. By funding social movements and self-help organizations – thus de-centring its operations – the state can enable a diverse and participatory political culture. Hitherto, social democracy has more often disabled the constituencies it claims to represent.

New Times witnesses the further elevation of a culture of popular consumption. Here again Thatcherism has made most of the running. Hall and Frank Mort argue that until it was derailed by unaddressed weaknesses in the British economy, Thatcherism's brand of economic populism won it widespread support. The Thatcher government's facilitation of consumer credit, and its cut-price sales of public housing and shares in public industries encouraged the popular association of Thatcherite economics with various pleasurable experiences of consumption.

By playing consumption as a trump card, albeit regressively equating political and cultural freedom with private pur-

How are we to read the Legoland aesthetic of the shopping mall, its contents or the experience of shopping in it?



chasing power, Thatcherism exposed an historic weakness on the British left, and more broadly within the Marxist tradition. For both have been characterized by an almost exclusive concern with questions of production as well as a deeply ingrained and sometimes puritanically motivated suspicion of popular consumption as "diversion from the cause." Hall doubts that socialism will start the next century unless it manages to connect with the landscapes of popular pleasure, however contradictory and commodified a terrain they represent. This is particularly so in light of what he calls the "revolution of the subject," or what Rosalind Brunt recognizes as the emergence of a new politics of identity. Poststructuralism, cultural studies and certain strains of feminism have all emphasized the fragmented, incomplete and plural nature of the self. To recognize that subjectivities are provisionally formed through everyday processes of consumption – as well as production – and that desire is a legitimate basis for action, is then to broaden a space on the left for treating consumption and popular culture politically and strategically.

Accordingly Hall points to an "enormous expansion" of civil society that he relates to the multiplication and diversification of social worlds in which men and women now operate. Like Foucault, he equates these micro-worlds with different economies of pleasure, each possessing distinct codes. Frequently, he admits, these sites get thoroughly commodified. Nevertheless, these micro-worlds are often imaginatively created through the practices that make up popular culture; they entail ordinary people actively expanding the identities available to them in their everyday working, social, familial and sexual lives. As such, the proliferation of micro-worlds is a potentially democratic experience.

New Times' political project calls in part for extending and deepening the democratic promise held out by the pluralization of civil society. This involves winning over the tendencies of New Times to the left. Responding to widespread annoyance at state intrusions and public sector deficiencies, Thatcherism struck a chord by proclaiming the merits of individualism. But only in a limited sense: as they pertain to property owners and consumers in the market. According to Charlie Leadbetter, the left needs to respond with an expansive vision of individualism. It can subvert Thatcherism by re-inscribing its advocacy of self-reliance and individual choice with the insistence that only collective provision can realize these goods for the vast majority. This must be accompanied by the call to extend and multiply spheres of rights in recognition of the new areas of the political exposed by new social movements.

Not surprisingly, *New Times'* themes have come under attack from more conventional quarters. For orthodox Marxism, Thatcherism is ample evidence that class struggle is alive and literally kicking. Moreover, certain left-wing intellectuals would do well to put aside their esoteric concerns and get on with the job in hand: namely, organizing and educating the working class. This argument is particularly attractive to the faithful since it suggests that leftist intellectuals' purported eschewal of the cause is in part responsible for the proletariat's stubborn refusal to become the political force that Marxists know it can be.

As a political strategy and as a means of theorizing, orthodoxy often works with what I call a logic of displacement: "our" truth will expose bourgeois obfuscation, "our" rationality will replace capitalist irrationality, genuine socialist democracy will displace sham bourgeois democracy, and so on. In his critique of the *New Times* line, Mike Rustin boldly asserts that "consumption is no moral substitute for the values and experience of production: for socialists there has to be more to life than shopping, enjoyable as this on occasion may be." Production stands for the real world, "shopping" a pleasurable diversion.

But *New Times* does not posit "shopping" – nor for that matter consumption – as an alternative to production as an anthropological grounding for its politics. As critique, *New Times* performs a quite different operation from that of one-to-one displacement. It sees a more plausible foundation for a popular and progressive politics in Britain because it takes as its operative principles recuperation and rearticulation. Learning from Thatcherism, it begins with certain culturally embedded popular aspirations and works them in terms of their tensions and contradictions. These cultural elements are not so much replaced as recuperated from the existing cultural formations for broader critical projects. Numerous foci for popular politics can be generated in this way. Dick Hebdige refers in this respect to the need for a "sociology of aspirations" that might reconcile plural desires with socialist first principles of equality, social justice and social welfare.

That said, all too often the essays in *New Times* don't explore concrete openings for recuperative politics in much detail. For instance, what of the possibilities for progressive mobilization around football in Britain? Thatcherism deployed the "football supporter" for purposes of social control. Now, with the establishment of the Football Supporters Association (whose rallying cry is "reclaim the game!"), and myriad grassroots fanzines expressing supporters' intuitions and experiences of the contradictions between the game and the commodity, "football" potentially condenses a local critique of the commodification of culture.

But if *New Times* has largely broken with the conventional critical strategies of orthodox Marxism, it retains the latter's holistic understanding of history. Fordism and post-Fordism are not only distinct epochs, but appear to be systems embodying respective meta-logics. Every social feature is then inscribed with the "logic of the system." This leads *New Times* to overstate the break between the present and the past, obscuring significant continuities. Now, I would grant that Corbuserian housing projects and Liesian governmental offices eloquently herald Fordism as the apogee of modernity. But how are we to read the Legoland aesthetic of the shopping mall, its contents or the experience of shopping in it? Do they announce that we have left behind the boring old homogeneity of Fordism/modernism – as *New Times* seems to think? Or does mall culture not symbolize more accurately a different sort of serial sameness, at best a shallow, market-bounded diversity? To come at the problem from the other direction: while there has been a proliferation of political and social identities in the last 20 years, were they really restricted to stable class identities in the post-war period? That we recognize the plurality and unfixity of political subjectivities now has as much to do with epistemological as it does sociological change.

New Times has been over-zealous in its adoption of the post-Fordism theoretical paradigm. While post-Fordism may offer a useful heuristic handle on change as well as an antidote to the platitude "It's still capitalism," it threatens to blot out historical specificity. This is most evident in the book's treatment of the British economy. *New Times* has taken Fordism and post-Fordism to be universal stages of Western capitalism and applied them to an economy that was arguably neither. Britain was never conventionally Fordist: much of its industry was not vertically or horizontally integrated, the production process was only tardily and unevenly Taylorized, its domestic markets were highly permeable, and the state's powers of intervention restricted. Likewise, Thatcherism has not prepared Britain for a post-Fordist future: its manufacturing is now a basket case, performance in high-tech export sectors is poor and inadequately coordinated by the state, and schemes for re-training and broadening workforce skills are virtually non-existent.

Thatcherism has since collapsed under the weight of its economic failings whereas *New Times* gave it the veneer of something more permanent. With unemployment climbing back towards three million New Times are looking a lot like old times. Nevertheless, many of the cultural changes *New Times* identifies are deep-seated; Labour could do more than win the next election if it would start to read culture politically. ◆

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The Cartographer's New Clothes
Recent Jameson

JOSEPH **KISPAL-KOVACS**

Rewinding the Reel

Signatures of the Visible
by Fredric Jameson

New York: Routledge, 1990.

Jameson's *Signatures* is a collection of essays on film written between 1977-1988. Part one of the book contains seven short essays ranging in topic from reviews of specific films to general theoretical pieces. A loner essay entitled "The Existence of Italy" occupies the book's latter half.

Signatures continues Jameson's investigations into the status and shape of mass culture in the era of postmodernism. It is an exercise in what Jameson calls "cognitive mapping." This spatial metaphor brings to mind images of the alienated urban individual without bearings in an increasingly complex, cultural, social and political landscape. The task of the cultural critic thus becomes the mapping of our individual relationships to the complex class realities of our society.

As a collection of occasional writings on film it does not purport to offer a full-fledged theory of contemporary cinema so much as offer a prolegomenon to one. In this effort it is a fairly successful addition to the corpus of recent Marxist writings on the cinema.

One of the strands that runs through the various essays is an attempt by Jameson to construct a chronology of the development of the cinema. This approach is not dissimilar to the one taken in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), where he outlines a model for a Marxist literary criticism and then explores the historical development of narrative in the novels of some of the key writers of the 19th century.

Situating film in the history of aesthetics presents certain problems unique to the medium. One of which is the fact that film does not emerge until the epoch of aesthetic modernism is well under way in the other arts. Hence the development of the cinema cannot simply follow the trajectory of, say, the development of the modern novel.

Jameson, among others, maps the transitions of the novel's form through its realist, modernist and finally postmodernist stages as narrative articulations of corresponding economic stages. For Jameson, there are the early, the industrial, and the late stages of capitalist development respectively.

While the silent cinema did not, and arguably, could not emerge until the development of industrial capitalism and the mass market, it followed a consistently "realist" aesthetic through most of its history. It is only at the end of the silent era that a characteristically modernist moment develops (in the works of Eisenstein, Stroheim and others).

The emergence of the sound film, an entirely new medium, changed all that. The Hollywood films of the 1930s represented the emergence of a form of domestic realism which sought to reassure a middle class' collective despair over the effects of the Great Depression. This was reinforced with the development of the multiple genre system in Hollywood which, while ostensibly a marketing strategy, revived the older formal traditions of novelistic realism.

The immediate post-war period gave rise to what Jameson labels a "legitimation crisis" in the Hollywood aesthetic, first in "auteur theory" and the actual filmic practices of the great auteurs (e.g., Hitchcock). This was represented, partly, through the end of genre (killed off in its traditional forms by the rise of the media society and television) and its replacement by "style," as well as the problematization of the older film genre conventions when they were still used.

It is with the emergence of late or multinational capitalism that the conservative culture, now called postmodernism, appears. For the first time there seems to be a loose temporal conjunction between film and the other arts. The postmodernist film, Jameson argues, is characterized by a glossiness in its appearance and a nostalgia in its sensibility. Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970) represents its inauguration. In a sense, this "microchronology of film recapitulates something like a realism/modernism/postmodernism trajectory at a more compressed tempo."

Signatures of the Visible does not simply end with the neat schematicization just outlined. Jameson takes great pains also to problematize the categories of realism and modernism themselves.

The final and longest essay begins with an epigraph from Adorno and Horkheimer's famous essay on the Culture Industry. However, unlike the earlier pieces, Jameson's essay is not an attempt to theorize the character of the industry at a particular conjuncture and to extrapolate its possible developments. Rather, Jameson tries to lay the groundwork for a Marxist theory of film in light of previous attempts to theorize it.

In large measure Jameson attempts to show the inadequacies of some of the

▲ *The Conformist*
STILL COURTESY OF CINEMATHEQUE ONTARIO

conceptual categories that have been used to understand the medium. The term "realism," he argues, is an essentially unstable one. It suggests simultaneous but incompatible aesthetic and epistemological claims. On the one hand, the term invokes a set of historical aesthetic conventions (often associated with notions of passive reflection and copying). On the other hand, it is associated with the idea of the scientific representation of reality. Modernism, in contrast, has often been characterized as an aesthetic that draws attention to the conventionality of forms and hence has a critical reflexive standpoint.

It is Jameson's argument that realism as a category cannot be simply dismissed. In fact, in another essay in *Signatures,* he holds up the relatively new magic realist form (primarily in Latin American art but not limited to it) as a critical alternative to the sterile nostalgia of the Hollywood postmodernist film.

The argument turns on what he perceives to be an inadequacy of the Adorno and Horkheimer thesis that mass culture is a totally instrumentalized and reified phenomenon which can only be countered in the "autonomy" of high modernist art. The distinction is not as simple as they allow:

> Both modernism and mass culture entertain relations of repression with the fundamental social anxieties and concerns, hopes and blind spots, ideological antinomies and fantasies of disaster, which are their raw material; only where modernism tends to handle this material by producing compensatory structures of various kinds, mass culture represses them by the narrative construction of imaginary resolutions and by the projection of an optical illusion of social harmony.

The postmodern film, Jameson argues, is characterized by a glossiness in its appearance and a nostalgia in its sensibility.

This dialectical opposition and convergence of modernism and mass culture requires that film theory begin to look for new ways of situating its object. Jameson has recourse to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the "minor," which works within the dominant while appropriating from it and undermining it. It is on this basis that he valuates oppositional realist film making, including examples from the Third World cinema.

The other historical move that Jameson makes throughout the book is to continue the kind of critique of mass culture products begun by the Frankfurt School and others such as Ernst Bloch:

> Our proposition about the drawing power of the works of mass culture has implied that such works cannot manage anxieties about the social order unless they have first revived them and given them rudimentary expression; ... that anxiety and hope are two faces of the same collective consciousness.

In a number of essays, Jameson illustrates this by analyzing some of the popular films of the 1970s. His rather lengthy reading of *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) provides a "cognitive mapping" of shifting power relations in American society during this period. The various characters in the film articulate different and conflicting class and political positions. While the film tries to resolve the contradictions inherent in such relations, it must give voice to them.

It is precisely this phenomenon that provides the continuing fascination of the contemporary Hollywood cinema. ◆

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SAMIR **GANDESHA**

Dear Theo

Late Marxism: Adorno, or The Persistence of the Dialectic
by **Fredric Jameson**

New York: Verso, 1990.

Jameson's *Late Marxism* is yet another welcome contribution to the burgeoning literature on postmodernism. It comes as little surprise that Jameson has dedicated the book to Perry Anderson, a long-time editor of *New Left Review* and a prolific writer in his own right, who inaugurated a Marxist analysis of postmodern discourses in his *In The Tracks of Historical Materialism* (1983). However, unlike the broad brush strokes of Anderson's lectures, Jameson promises to provide a substantive response to the postmodern problems of late capitalism. Hence Jameson does not engage in the sort of interpretive *ressentiment* vis-a-vis postmodern discourses characterized by Ellen Wood's *Retreat from Class* and Noman Geras's collection of essays *Discourse of Extremity.* Nor does Jameson confine himself to a purely symptomological approach. Rather, in *Late Marxism* he synthesizes the subjective and the objective, the polemical and the symptomological.

The polemical dimension of Jameson's interpretive project is inscribed in the very subtitle of the text – "The Persistence of the Dialectic" – which can be read as a critical rejoinder to both Habermasian critical theory and postmodernist discourses which reject totality and, with it, dialectics. The symptomological aspect of the book is found in Jameson's attempt to provide a sophisticated theoretical response to the cultural problems of late capitalism. To this end, Jameson engages in a recuperative reading of Adorno's Marxism. He argues for "if not a 'postmodern' Adorno, then at least for one consistent with and appropriate for the current postmodern age."

Jameson's aims in this text are, broadly speaking, twofold: first, he attempts to argue against those who would suggest that Adorno was more of a Hegelian than a Marxist, that he remains firmly within the tradition of historical materialism; secondly, he attempts to draw attention to the similarities and differences between Adorno and poststructuralist theorists such as Derrida and Foucault in the interest of suggesting the superior acuity of the former over the latter because of his dialectically nuanced, rather than "totalizing" critique of totality.

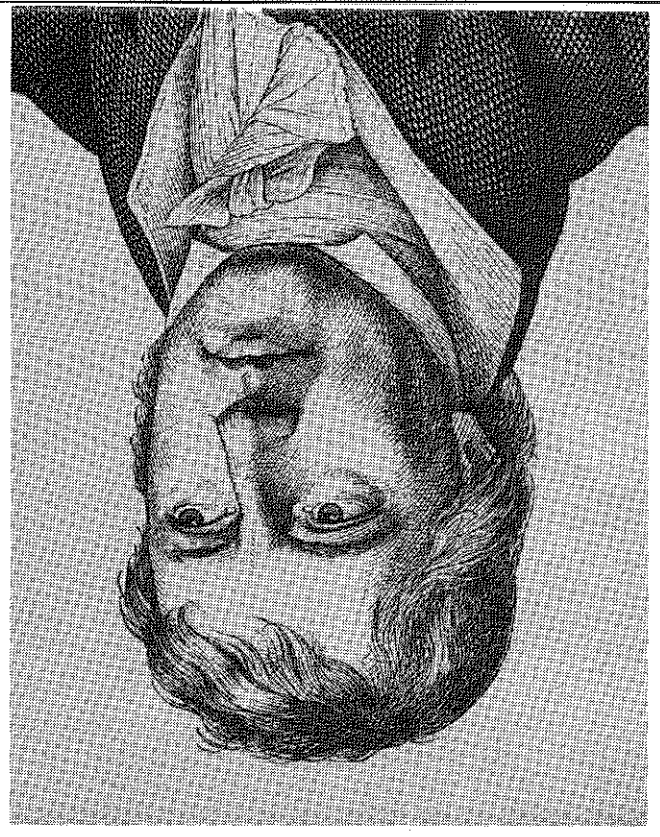
To the first end, Jameson offers a masterfully comprehensive interpretation of Adorno's discourse, availing himself of the "productiveness" of the hermeneutical circle. That is, Jameson's reading situates the parts – comprised of *Negative Dialectics, Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Aesthetic Theory* – in relation to the discourse as a whole which is itself only intelligible through these parts. Such an interpretation brings out with exemplary clarity the historical materialist structure of Adorno's discourse. At the same time, it reveals Adorno's own transformation of that structure through his introduction of the concept of "natural history."

Foregrounded throughout Jameson's reading is the centrality of the concept of "totality" in Adorno's discourse which, as Jameson notes elsewhere in his work on postmodernism, has fallen into disfavour among poststructuralists. It is thought that, with different degrees of subtlety, it is possible to trace a direct, genetic link from Hegel to Marx to the Gulag, based on the (totalitarian) concept of totality. For Jameson it is indeed a cruel irony that at the very moment that capitalist relations of production are being reconstituted on a global level the concept of totality is being rejected in favour of an undecidable logic of textual play.

Adorno's discourse, then, is well-suited to our age for his work stands or falls on the concept of totality. Or, to be more precise, the concept of totality dialectically both stands *and* falls within Adorno's discourse; the concept is both true and false. It is true inasmuch as it serves to elucidate the very process of reification attendant on the logic of exchange culminating in what Adorno calls "total administration." It is false insofar as it is not a normative ideal in which all of the conflicts and diremptions to which capitalist rationalization gives rise are finally reconciled within the praxis of the proletariat. As Jameson indicates, Adorno ironically inverts Hegel to suggest that "the whole is false;" this is no simple inversion, however. In contrast to poststructural denunciations of conceptual thinking and totality, Adorno states that the task of negative dialectics is "to strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept." In other words, Adorno suggests that a random denunciation of identity thinking from outside is aporetic; what is necessary is a Benjaminian brushing of identitarian discourse "against the grain."

Though Jameson draws attention to the manner in which Adorno's critique of totality is similar to "poststructural synchronics," he ultimately fails to bring Adorno into a sustained dialogue with Foucault or Derrida on the horizon of the eternal present which is postmodernity. Instead, in a footnote, he refers the reader to Peter Dews' excellent book *Logics of Disintegration* which offers an acute, philosophically nuanced comparison of poststructuralism and Critical Theory. However, if Jameson is truly committed to a historicist approach, it is incumbent on him to foreground the precise manner in which the concerns of the (postmodernist) present animate and motivate his reading. This is where Jameson unfortunately comes up short.

Jameson would do well to follow Marx's reflections on the nature of the relation between totality, history and repetition which he presents in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon.* In this text, Marx attempts to come to terms with the "effectivity" of the past on the present and future. He thus follows Hegel in asserting that history repeats itself twice, adding: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. In his analysis of the "farcical" ascension to power of Louis Napoleon, Marx recognizes the profound weight of the past on the present in the form of the



eternal return of the same, as that which places limits upon what Benjamin called the attempt to take the "leap in the open air of history."

Marx's reflections on the nature of repetition can serve as an interpretive key to unlocking the similarities and differences between Critical Theory and poststructuralism. Indeed, these reflections can provide an inoculation against the postmodern intoxication at having made the "leap" out of modernity and, presumably, out of capitalism. While Critical Theory tells a tragic story, a story fraught with paradox, of the demise of subjectivity at the hands of its own (instrumental) reason, Foucauldian discourse evinces a repetition of such a narrative with the difference that this story turns into *farce.*

For Critical Theory, the subject's liberation of itself from nature in the interest of self-preservation leads to its own, paradoxical, naturalization or reification. Hence, the "natural history" of the subject for the Frankfurt School comes very close to Nietzche's meditation on tragedy. In the *Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche suggests that "the myth of Oedipus seems to wish to whisper to us that wisdom ... is an unnatural abomination; that he who plunges nature into the abyss of destruction must also suffer the dissolution of nature in his own person." In other words, Critical Theory views the passing of the subject, with the advent of total administration, with mourning. For Foucault, in contrast, the death of the subject or the death of "man," is an event that must be met with "laughter." This very death indicates the disclosure of a multiplicity of possibilities which had been excluded by that recent discursive formation called "man."

Both Critical Theory and poststructuralism, then, can be seen to critique the disclosure of totality in order to think difference and particularity outside of its interstices. Foucault understands the overcoming of totality in terms of a discursive intervention – a Nietzschean transvaluation of values – through the inscription of discontinuity, reversal, specificity and exteriority within the very process of interpretation. Adorno, in contrast, endeavours to show how the object – that which itself resists discourse – constantly and inexorably undermines the pretensions of the sovereign subject. In other words, Adorno's reconstructed materialism leads him to suggest that the subject is dependent on the object; indeed, the subject *is* itself suffused with objectivity.

The manifold and complex implications of the two forms of critique cannot be discussed in any length here. Suffice it to say that if Foucault's discourse is completely denuded of a conception of "nature," it can scarcely contribute to the increasingly immediate and urgent debates on technology and the relation between humanity and the ecological systems in which it plays an increasingly destructive role. A philosophy which leaves no discursive space for an alterity which, paradoxically, refuses discourse must succumb to the hubristic narcissism which it seeks to critique in the guise of humanism. This consideration of external nature (or ecological systems) at the same time brings once again to the surface – despite its rank unfashionability – the question of ontology.

The "persistence of Adorno's dialectic," its relevance to our historical moment, lies in its sustained attempt to engage in a retrieval and recollection of this relation – a relation all too easily forgotten in poststructuralism; it lies precisely in its insistence on the inextricability of social domination and the violence directed at nature. As Adorno states: "World domination over nature turns against the thinking subject himself .... The more the machinery of thought subjects existence to itself, the more blind its resignation in reproducing existence." ◆

For Jameson it is a cruel irony that at the very moment that capitalist relations of production are being reconstituted on a global level the concept of totality is being rejected in favour of an undecidable logic of textual play.

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GIOSUÈ GHISALBERTI

Humanism with an Apology

The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes
by **G.B. Madison**

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

To write that postmodernism is a fiction may be an exaggeration; certainly, it has become the mythology of our distressed present. At a time when the traditional problems of knowledge, meaning and history are looked upon with that pecu-liar disavowal any monumental danger deserves, the inherited tradition is usually discarded or becomes vulnerable, if only as a desire.

Writing with urgency, perhaps with some apprehension if not anxiety, Madison attempts to redeem modernity from the relentless critique it has endured in recent years. Sensing the danger of a "revolutionary" movement which has the tendency to neglect tradition, Madison questions the assumptions and, ultimately, the aims of postmodernity by reminding the reader that the problems of truth, meaning and reality cannot be discarded. Postmodernity is yet another "movement," or simply an "attitude" which raises important questions and is rigorously sceptical if, at times, a little "wild." Postmodernity is, no doubt, a child of its times, reenacting, once again, the repetition of the Oedipal drama; this, after all, is the stuff of history. As such, it is hardly surprising that postmodernity would contest the authority of tradition and perhaps reveal, during its most hysterical episodes, what Nietzsche called *ressentiment,* the resentment of the past and the "it was." Unwilling to dispense with tradition, Madison undertakes to evaluate the recent history of hermeneutics, providing an assessment of the theory of interpretation in terms of the "condition" of postmodernity.

Madison's critique of Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation,* certainly a text which most hermeneuts now consider extravagant in its demands, and perhaps, even irrelevant, involves a comparison with Popper's positivism; the pretensions of "establishing the bases of a *science* of interpretation" seem antiquated, slightly delusional. Hirsch's methodology of interpretation requires an objective status, the age-old dream of objectivity which, strangely enough, is found, no less, in that peculiar reliance on authorial intention, as if reading, access to language, and the interpretive practices of the reader, had to be submitted to the "sovereign" intention of the author. The objective status of a text demands a universal meaning which progresses through time and may be reconstituted by a reader in the present, as if it were really there, waiting to be understood. It is not difficult to recognize a Greek problem here, a present-day Plato who is attempting to move beyond all appearances and determine the universal idea originating in the author's

intention. However, Hirsch seems either confused or inattentive to his own language, for in defining the "root problem of interpretation," he answers, in a startling manner: "to *guess* what the author meant." The meaning to be found in any reading is a riddle. Hirsch is anxious, no doubt, about the uncontrollable, potentially chaotic, always elusive possibility of meaning. Madison writes that "the main value of Hirsch's book lies in its deficiencies" (always generous to find a positive evaluation in intellectual blunders) and in its "misguided" attempt to ensure objectivity.

For anyone to be discouraged from pursuing the "objective" pretensions of a scientific method, as if science could become an insurance against doubt and scepticism, it is relevant to remember Nietzsche's radical hermeneutic statement: "it is perhaps just dawning on five or six minds that physics, too, is only an interpretation and exegesis of the world (to suit us, if I may say so!) and *not* a world-explanation." Nietzsche affirms that every world-view, every attempt to define the order of the world, is made possible by limits, exclusions, by an understanding which requires order and forgetting. Freud too advised that the rejection of meaning, the scepticism which refuses truth, is more often than not a danger.

Similarly, Merleau-Ponty, near the end of his life, when he had apparantly rejected perception and replaced it with *flesh,* desires to go back to the "beginning," to a recommencement which attempts to remember the lost and buried monuments. Hermeneutics, of course, is the philosophy which advises against attempting the impossible: to "recommence everything," as Merleau-Ponty desires, is not another philosophical delusion, for every return is always "destined" from the beginning.

If, according to Merleau-Ponty, "language is a power of error," we may well concede that being as such is always in errancy, a notion certainly not foreign to Heidegger; however, Heidegger does not withdraw in this error, but returns to *logos,* to the word of the Greeks, in order to discover truth as *aletheia,* as *a* (not) *lethe* (forgetting). Thus, beyond Merleau-Ponty's formulation of a "complete reconstruction" lies Heidegger's attempt to reconstruct not from the beginning, but from the very past, from the very history, which has been forgotten and concealed, including the relation of language and subjectivity which poststructuralist thinkers have never ceased to strenuously emphasize.

Madison, however, compares Merleau-Ponty's "complete reconstruction" with the "complete destruction" of postmodern thinkers, certainly an uneasy relation if one considers that every reconstruction, or, deconstruction, can never be complete but must be, as Derrida suggests, "interminably" undone. To make this comparison is to forget the most fundamental hermeneutical belief: however rigorously the thread of a return is affected, it is always cut from the same cloth. The so-called overcoming of dualism, as the suspicion of order and distinctions, of definitions and hierarchies, nevertheless cannot presume to overcome the historicity of a thought which always hands over such a task as the interrogation of modernity as such; the problem of postmodernity's self-understanding, then, is the belief in the exhaustion of modernity and the *cogito* without recognizing that the very articulation of the postmodern is made possible

as the most radical – that is, "rooted" – questions of modernity itself.

Since postmodernity has so rigorously contested the status of the subject (the self), Madison, who admits to having a pragmatic "strain," is ultimately more than a little uncomfortable with the subject's "disappearance." As he firmly believes, the subject of metaphysics is not a totalizing relation; in fact, by relying on the important work of Paul Ricoeur, Madison believes that subjectivity is not necessarily doomed once metaphysics has been "deconstructed." Ricoeur does not defend a subject who is foundational nor does he presume in the subject's attainment of absolute self-transparency, the "transcendental subject immune from history. Since Ricoeur explicitly writes that "there is no self-understanding that is not *mediated* by signs," he cannot, obviously, presuppose a subject independent of the contingent relation to history and culture. His "hermeneutics of suspicion" stresses that the immediacy of consciousness is ultimately deceptive if not a dangerous illusion. Like the three great "masters of suspicion" (Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche), Ricoeur problematized the subject and rationality only to further contribute to the "interminable" task of self-understanding despite the threat and vulnerability of neurosis, error and delusion.

Madison's limits soon appear painfully clear, for in defining Ricoeur's hermeneutics as deconstructive, he attempts a difficult, if not impossible, mediation. The moment Madison quotes Derrida's often cited *il n'y a pas de hors texte* he is forced to "take sides" and to more anxiously define his own hermeneutic position. It is obvious that Derrida's deconstruction, as the controversial philosophy which has cost thinkers more than a few nights sleep, not to mention the reviewers of the "literary" sections of our newspapers which in making their banal comments only reveal their cocktail party stupidity, is perceived as a threat, an effrontery to so-called common sense and clarity. Madison is hardly in the company of literary reviewers and encounters the sophistication of deconstruction with integrity and intelligence. Since Madison has "an ontological commitment to meaning" based on the lived experience of the subject, he is reluctant to adopt a philosophical strategy which continually threatens the closure of meaning. By relying on Ricoeur's notion of the *poétique du possible,* Madison argues for the importance of the inventiveness of metaphor and centrality of the imagination in order to think the situation of being in the world with the renewed hope which marks not only a principle, but also an ethos of being. Instead of placing himself in extremes, either the positivism of Hirsch or the radical deconstruction of Derrida, Madison remains faithful to the hermeneutic project inherited from Heidegger by attempting to introduce the "unthought" into the world.

Madison, not without considerable ambivalence, sympathizes "wholeheartedly" with Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence only to return him, as it were, back into the hermeneutic project. The accusation that Madison makes about Derrida's deconstruction, which is unfortunate, and perhaps, too conventional to deserve serious thought, is that it leads inevitably to "philosophical nihilism."

Madison's critique, however, far from being dismissive, turns to texts such as *Spurs* and indicates that Derrida's critique of hermeneutics is unfaithful to its intent. Madison emphasizes, quite correctly, that one must make the crucial distinction between traditional and critical hermeneutics. On the other hand, Madison is unable, or unwilling, to see in Derrida's deconstruction more than a "theoretical vandalism" which simply "destroys without providing a project beyond demonstrating the text's undecidability." Madison's final hermeneutic decision is that tradition places itself in a "game" which can be revised rather than played interminably, pessimistically and nihilistically.

Since postmodernity has so rigorously contested the status of the subject, Madison, who admits to having a pragmatic "strain," is ultimately more than a little uncomfortable with the subect's "disappearance."

Although Madison is committed to knowledge, meaning and history, for his part Derrida would remain cautious, refusing this still human, all too human metaphysical hope and therefore resist that "overcoming" or revolution which, more often than not, merely reinstitutes the very confinement and restrictions one attempted to question in the first place.

The courage of Madison's *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity* is the commitment to preserving that perhaps unfashionable but nonetheless important task of revealing the truth that we are; better still, the truth we have not yet become. At a time when the most dreaded of all words, "humanism," has become an object of derision, when postmodernity is intent on refusing metanarratives and providing a considerable distance between itself and the past, Madison does not simply reject or overturn in a gesture of disregard, but continues to think with and against tradition if only to take seriously the ontological imperative of understanding and interpretation. ◆

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BEN **FREEDMAN**

Blue Lacunae

Heidegger and "the jews"
by **Jean-François Lyotard**
Trans. Andreas Michel
and Mark Roberts

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

The two interlocking essays that constitute Lyotard's book – "the jews" and "Heidegger" – each include discussions of themes that have been important for Lyotard: the Kantian sublime, his relation to Freud and Adorno, the concept of the différend. Thus they lay claim to more than a purely momentary interest. But they do appear on the occasion of the recent eruption of the controversy surrounding Heidegger's involvement with Nazism. Although the controversy is not entirely new, it flared up vehemently with the publication in France of Victor Farias's *Heidegger and Nazism*. And while partisans and participants can be found wherever there is a concern for what is called continental philosophy, the intensity of emotion surrounding the "Heidegger affair" has been greatest in France. This is not so much due to the fact that Farias published his book there, but rather because of the impact Heidegger has had upon so much of recent French thought. His profound influence can be seen in such significant thinkers as Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard himself. Lyotard takes the opportunity to engage with a number of writers involved in the affair.

That Heidegger had some involvement with Nazism has always been known. But accepting the Rectorship of Freiburg University, as he did early in the Nazi period, is not, after all, a war crime. Moreover, his long-standing relationship with the German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt, and the fact that his mentor Edmund Husserl was a Jew, have tended to mitigate the unsavoury impression. But it has now become clear that his involvement with the party was far more extensive than had long been believed – he continued as a dues-paying member up to the end, and so on. Nevertheless, it is argued that Heidegger was not a Nazi like the others. Lacoue-Labarthe, for example, insists that he was not anti-Semitic and that, therefore as Nazism is a racist ideology, Heidegger could not really have been a Nazi at all. The argument that Lacoue-Labarthe derives from this – that what is truly at issue is not in fact Heidegger's Nazism, but his general silence about the Holocaust – is taken up by Lyotard.

Thus, the combination of the two main themes of *Heidegger and "the jews"* is intended to interrogate both Heidegger and Farias, in effect. Attempting "to think the Heidegger affair," in the essay devoted to him, Lyotard generally dismisses Farias for having missed the point. For "thought exceeds its contexts," he says, by the same token as there are not extenuating circumstances for thought of the stature of Heidegger's. Farias's dossier sticks far too close to the context and to the circumstantial, according to Lyotard. To really think this affair, to interrogate this *unheimlich* business, as he calls it, in which we seem to have known all along what is only now brought home to us by the weight of evidence, we must avoid simplistic dismissals or apologies. For even if we do not simply dismiss this "great" thought (Lyotard finds it a distasteful journalistic affectation to characterize Heidegger as "the greatest" thinker of the century), there is still something terribly amiss, something that calls forth accusation. The plea that Heidegger was not personally anti-Semitic is inadequate. Why did he remain all but silent about the Holocaust? What prevented him from speaking, or caused him to be silent? This lacuna, this gap, is not a peripheral question.

It might be peripheral if it were a matter like his "politics," which Lyotard usually places in quotes. But the lack indicated by this silence takes us beyond the "politics" as such, and beyond the circumstances – extenuating or not – under which he threw in his lot with the NSDAP. These are extraneous things, Lyotard insists. If we are to interrogate the thought that exceeds those circumstances or context, if, in other words, we are to re-examine the thought as it still matters to us, we cannot move directly from his involvement with the Nazi party, as personally damning as that may be, to damn his thinking merely by association. We need to find out more, we need to find out why.

Thus, we cannot find the program of the party in *Being and Time* and Lyotard is impatient with those who would read it there. Nevertheless, he finds "[i]t is difficult to attribute an apolitical quality" to such a work. For if Heidegger "was not a Nazi like Rosenberg, Kriek, or Goebbels," it is precisely because his decisions in 1933 were determined "by his most "profound" thoughts at the time, and by what he wrote in 1927." [*Being and Time* actually goes back a little earlier than this. It was published in the spring of 1927.] Thus, echoing many of his defenders, Lyotard writes that Heidegger "takes, even throws himself, furiously, much further than Nazism, well beyond and outside it." His decision to ally himself with the Nazis, then, derived from his belief that the German *Volk* had made a decision in favour of its authenticity, on behalf of its tradition and its future. The Nazi party was in effect the vehicle through which this decision was to be carried out. As things unfolded, the party proved itself to be, in Heidegger's eyes, inadequate to the greatness of the movement of 1933.

> The plea that Heidegger was not personally anti-Semitic is inadequate.

"Do not mix things," Lyotard warns. Heidegger's "politics" are one thing, his thought another. Anyway, he was critical of the party, and struggled against its educational policies. He engaged in a struggle "against the threats of: everything is political, even knowledge, and: knowledge has nothing to do with the political." The reasonableness of this struggle may or may not be self-evident. It may seem a fairly reasonable position for an intellectual to take. Indeed, Heidegger may have felt that the "great moment" of the 1930s might have succeeded against these threats had the NSDAP not betrayed it. But this is still unsatisfactory. What shape could possibly be taken by a movement that would, however mistakenly, embrace Hitler's party? If it were to leave the Jews and traditional intellectuals alone while massacring communists, socialists, unionists, and gays, one might be forgiven for still finding the thing objectionable.

Put this way, we may perhaps remove the quotes from around Heidegger's politics, and consider what the nature of the movement might have been that compelled his most considered involvement. We must resist being overwhelmed by the astounding fact and horrifying specificity of the Holocaust. For the overpowering revulsion it elicits can tend to dim the impression of what else the Nazi regime was about, and everything that led up to it. The enormity of the genocide can obscure the circumstances under which it

was possible. This is why we are likely to mix things, as Lyotard puts it. The danger here is that some ways of trying to understand how this was possible in the West can, by default, normalize the fascist context. By extension, Mussolini's, or Franco's, or Pinochet's fascism may be legitimized – so long as it disavows genocide.

Why did he remain all but

silent about the Holocaust?

What prevented him from speaking,

or caused him to be silent?

This sort of concern informs Lyotard's first essay. For him, then, "the jews" are all those outsiders, whether by virtue of religion or nationality or quite different factors, who are viewed as fearsome and profoundly strange. Actual Jews are the paradigm for him, however, because of their adherence to memory: any group that concerns itself with memory, and identifies itself through remembering, will be an irritant, Lyotard says, in a society which prefers to mark the past – memorialize it – and proceed to forget.

Thus, Heidegger's thought, with his desire to return to the forgotten question of being, touches that of "the jews" he says. In fact, "the jews" seem in a way to occupy the place of Being in the psyche of the West: they seem to personify it. For the "European Occident," Lyotard says, has always sought to designate some people or other as the demonic source of a ubiquitous but unnameable horror.

Employing an unorthodox version of Freud, Lyotard maintains that we must experience as a terrifying shock the inevitable encounter with "a certain something" that violates our infantile solipsism. This shock so wounds the psyche that on the one hand, it attempts to engorge the foreign agent, covering over the irritant with its own excretion the way an oyster forms a pearl. On the other hand, at its core, the psyche retracts into itself, remaining deeply infantile. This infantile self devotes considerable and continual energy to the forgetting of the limitation of its self. It seems less successful than the oyster, for the shock remains effective to the extent that it seeks to forget it. The anxiety of the "unconscious affect" lives on, its source being attributed to any people we might call the Others.

So Western anti-Semitism is not quite the same as its xenophobia. It seems to be more necessary, for it is an attempt to control the originary terror through an incomplete representation of it. We might think of it as a caricature that represents the thing only well enough to fix it as an object. In this way, the representation is an attempt, however futile, to displace the apparent origin of the anxiety away from its source within oneself, onto others.

For his part, Lyotard does give a plausible account of the workings of the Nazi psyche. It is, however, presented as the type of the mainstream Western psyche. There is an undeniable element of truth to this kind of assertion, as the fascist movements outside of Germany in the 1930s and today partly demonstrate. As Lyotard notes, "Nazism" in various guises is alive today: it is not a uniquely German disease (nor was it uniquely Western in the 1930s, but Lyotard does not mention Japan). The Holocaust appears to be the fullest realization of what these "Nazisms" still represent. While the horror of recognition may have tempered the impetus for its expression for a time, this potential remains endemic to the West. But this way of treating the thing, as force bent on its own realization, is hard to distinguish from the very aspect of Heidegger that Lyotard wants to distance himself from. At this point, I begin to lose sympathy with Lyotard's argument, despite his repeated specification that this is the nature of things in the West, presumably only in the West.

This is not because he is Heideggerian in an entirely orthodox way. If he were, he could not take issue as he does with Heidegger's merely remarking in passing in 1949 that the present danger of technology is revealed alike in agribusiness, the production of nuclear arms, Third World poverty and the production of corpses in the death camps. This does not answer the question Why the Jews? Lyotard argues that Heidegger's own conception is that technology was turned upon them simply because the Jews would remain Jews, irritating the Greco-Roman Western psyche by their difference. Lyotard turns this around: because the West remains infantile it needs its "jews."

Moreover, Lyotard seems to reject Heidegger's whole conception of the *Volk*, however non-racial that might be. Accordingly, he is dubious about the great movement that the Nazi party was not good enough for. But despite hedges and dodges, he cannot dissociate himself from what is after all a very Heideggerian way of thinking about the Holocaust. There is a telling lacuna in his own thought. For he entirely disregards the immense struggles out of which alone European fascism could emerge. Nor is this simply a matter of missing details. Rather, it derives from his understanding of the fate of European Jewry to have been written in the primordial history of the occidental mind. The history of the West is thus stripped of countervailing tendencies and traditions. Massive opposition movements, from Wat Taylor's 14th century rebellion, to the Chartists, to the German Communist Party are, by implication, reduced, if I read him correctly, to the status of dissenting minorities. Lyotard smooths over the rough spots, the disjunctions and discontinuities, those irregular and forbidding bits. Of these, the moments at the beginning and end of the Weimar Republic were likely the most full of promise in modern history.

To represent the working of the mechanism without the winding of the spring is to leave the picture incomplete. With the realization of one set of possibilities, murderous infantility seems inevitable: after the fact, we may discover an essentiality beneath the manifestation. But another set of possibilities existed at the end of the Great War, and these were just as genuine. They certainly inspired horror in the likes of Hitler and his supporters. They were shut down by him, a service for which the elites of the West were grateful. After this, the threat from the East could only return in caricatured versions. The Red Army could only install memorials to the promise of earlier times in several European nations and in one German half. On all of this Lyotard remains silent. ◆

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OUR KIND OF BOOKS

The B/L List

Nicole Brossard, *Mauve Desert.* Translated by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1990.

Brossard's book begins with the story of a 15-year-old girl, Melanie, and her repeated journeys into the desert. Her story is her intense relationship with the desert: its heat, shapes, and sounds. Melanie's description of her mother and her mother's lover's relations to the desert immediately suggests the experiences of the two main characters in Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart.* This impression, despite its strength, quickly departs – it is only a similarity of setting. The desert is deceptive. The book demonstrates that translation is a journey.

Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum.* Translated by William Weaver. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.
Le pendule de Foucault au Musée des Arts et Metiers. Paris: Musée National des Techniques, 1990.

Remember Wittgenstein's remark about the standard metre in Paris that is merely a paradigm in the language game of measurement? Well, what he's on about is Lenoir's metre, which happens to be just down the hall from Jean Bernard Léon Foucault's pendulum. Spend a philo-literary afternoon in the place if you have the opportunity. But don't try to hide in the museum where the dramatic culmination of Eco's esoteric novel takes place because there are guards at all the appropriate spots. As dense as it is, it's really a travel book. Forget *le guide bleu.*

Kenneth Radu, *A Private Performance.* Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1990.
Carolyn K. Jansen, *Birds of a Feather.* Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1990.

Radu's short stories are populated with odd characters who are at once sympathetic and terrifying, warm and delirious. Uncle Uri has an almost abusive yet comically compulsive habit of scaring his nephew, while Amos, the gentle zoo worker, has a desire to save the Amazon rainforest which is driven by the screams he hears inside his head every time a tree falls in the jungle.

Jansen's set of related short stories sketch a disturbing vision of life set in the small town of Tilsol, Ontario. The antics at Beadleman's Poultry Processing Plant have turned me off chicken. The confrontations at the Tilsol Inn and Dolly's shack which pit herself and Ray, her violently evangelical and powerful friend, against their nemesis, the sexual offender Herman, put David Lynch to shame. Ontario has never seemed so perverse.

Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film.* Routledge: London and New York, 1990.

Dyer's latest book covers the history of lesbian and gay films from the 1920s through to 1980. The emphasis is on films from Europe and North America which have explicit lesbian and gay intentions rather than mainstream films with homoerotic subtexts. A useful and scholarly book documenting that lesbian and gay filmmakers existed long before Stonewall.

Peter M. Lewis and Jerry Booth, *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial and Community Radio.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989; Washington: Howard University Press, 1990.

A careful and cautious statement of the potential of radio in movements for social change. Describes public and commercial radio in Britain, commercial radio in the USA, community radio in the USA, Canada and Australia, the Free Radios of Europe and educational and popular radio in the Third World.

Iain Chambers, *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity.* London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

Chambers makes an argument that the hegemonic national culture of Great Britain is challenged by US film, black music, European fashion. "To imitate the slouch of a Hollywood gangster … was *temporarily* to extract yourself from the weight of a local past." Well, maybe. But Chambers seems uninterested in forms of internationalism such as participation in the Spanish Civil War or simply having parents from Ghana and Plymouth.

Gertrude J. Robinson and Dieta Sixt (eds.), *Women and Power: Canadian and German Experiences.* 1990. Available from Graduate Programme in Communications, McGill University, 3465 Peel St., Montréal, Québec H2A 1W7.

Papers from a 1990 symposium comparing the experiences of Canadian and German women in the public sphere. Papers deal with feminist movements in both countries, the experiences of women politicians and women in the mass media.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice.* London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

This collection of essays lives up to its title. "Whowe" discusses Susan Howe and women's writing as inevitably a palimpsest. Howe's work is a search for the "obliterated female culture." She makes a similar but subtler critique of "poetry" and its constant chiseling of woman into cultural artifact in "Otherhow." "H.D.: Family, Sexes, Psyche" takes apart the modern male writer's myth of the muse, and looks at H.D.'s manipulation of Ezra Pound into her own muse – a muse that is much more than the simple sexual switch Ezra would have expected. "Pater-Daughter" is the most moving essay. It rails against William Carlos Williams and his com-plete reduction of women and women's writing to muse, sex object, thing to be written on …. It is the cry of a subject denied subjectivity, even after she has wrested it from Williams's grasp. "Sub Rrosa" is disappointing. The theme of resistance is resisted while thanking Marcel Duchamp for giving us back our clitorises – even if they are in the wrong place.

Blau Duplessis's astute critique of modernist male writers and their constant denial of women's subjectivity is not limited by its application to Williams, Pound and Eliot. Her call to women to reclaim subjectivity through writing is just as important in a postmodernist context. While reading about the forcing of women into the role of unknowable muse, Italo Calvino in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* seems uncannily pertinent.

CONFERENCE

The Union for Democratic Communications is an independent radical organization of people who work or teach in mass media. Its next conference will be held at Trent University, Ontario, from the 7th to the 10th of May 1992. The theme is **Feminism(s) and Cultural Resistance in the Americas.** For more information write to Alan O'Connor, UDC Conference, Peter Robinson College, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada K9J 7B8.

Compiled by Rachel Ariss, Alan O'Connor, and Gary Genosko.

BORDER/*LINES*

Border/Lines is an interdisciplinary magazine about art, culture and social movements. We publish writing from many different positions and we are open to artists, musicians, filmmakers and readers. An indispensable companion to contemporary culture in Canada and elsewhere, **Border/Lines** is produced in a large format and is published four times a year by a Toronto-based collective.

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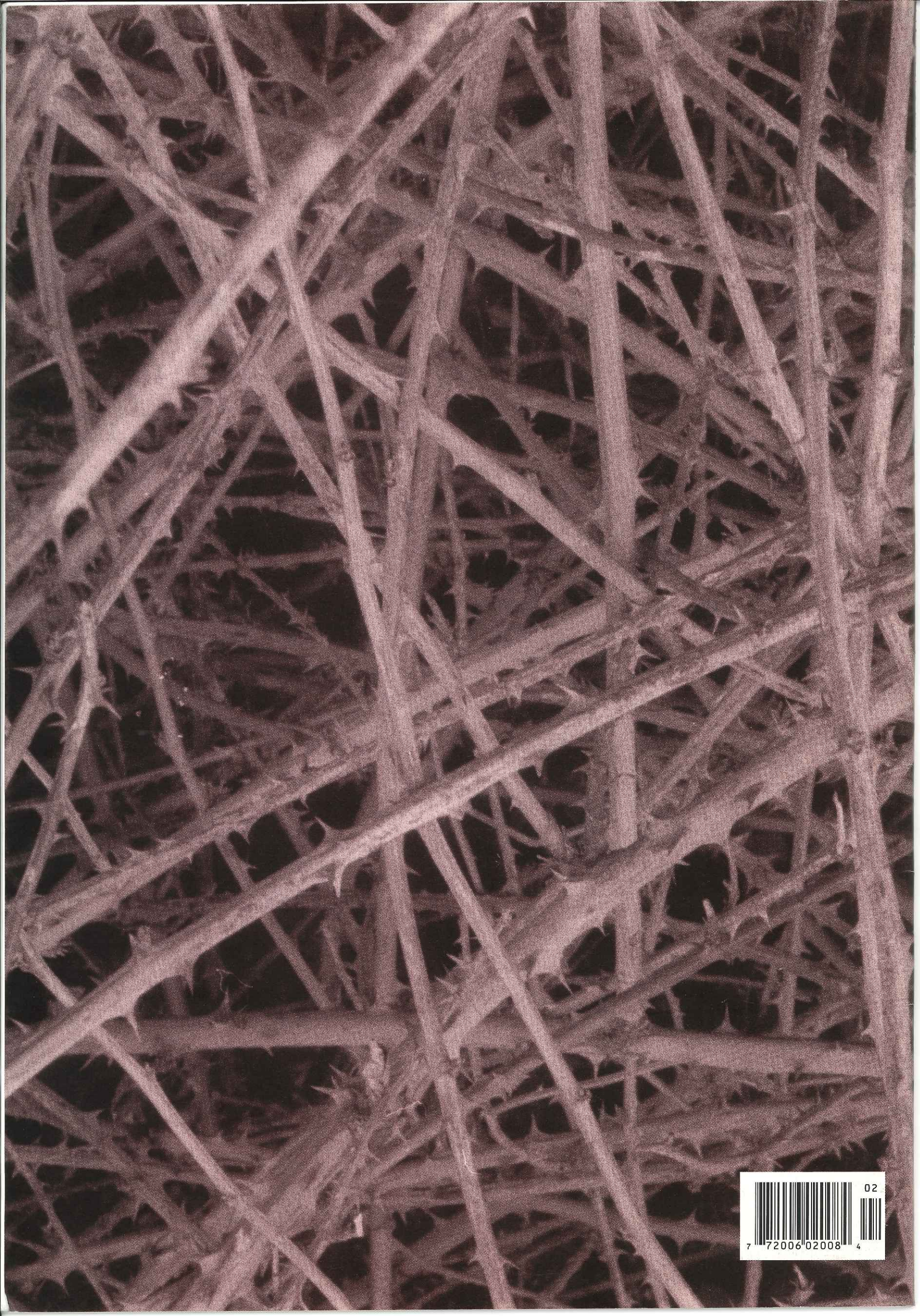

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