

B/L's tenth anniversary issue

Issue No. 34/35 \$6. Cdn. \$5. U.S.

# BORDER/LINES



**On The Past: A Retrospective**

**The Appeal of "Natural Born Killers"**

**Homelessness in Germany: A New Wall Imperilled**

**On The Present: M. Nourbese Philip on the Aftermath of the Just Desserts Shooting**

**Black Women and Carnival . . . and more**

# 10





**Editorial**  
**No. 34/35**

**A simple, self-generated mandate after ten years: to be borderline...and self-conscious enough to investigate what that means. We'd also like to continue to be lively and provocative, Canadian and international. We're committed to the politics of representation—and to how race, gender and sexuality are mis/represented in mainstream media and pop culture. (So-called high art, too, is not above critique.) Some things to look forward to from us in 1995 and beyond: we'll be on the Internet; we'll have regular columnists; we might even have a co-op/hotel project that comes to fruition. Stick around, please... for ten more years.**

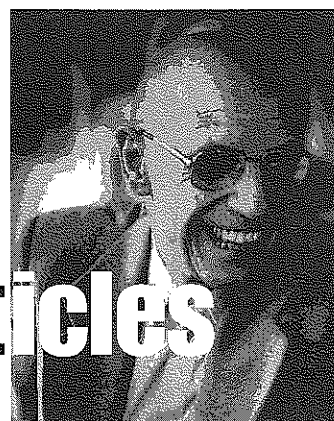
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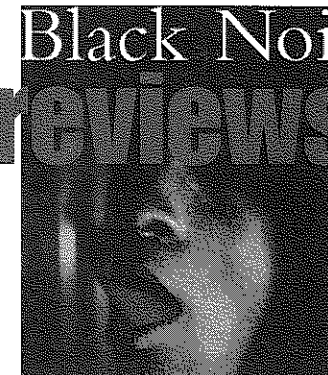
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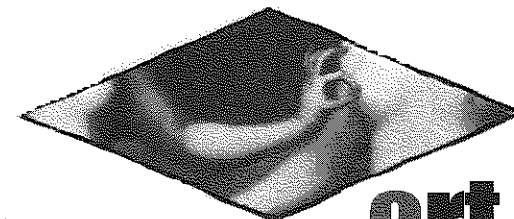
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**Copy Editors (no. 34/35):**  
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**Editorial Assistant**  
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**Design:**  
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**Auditor/Accountant:**  
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**Editorial Address:**  
The Orient Building  
183 Bathurst Street, Suite No. 301  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5T 2R7  
Telephone: (416) 360-5249  
Fax: (416) 360-0781

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# ton

Ten Years Of Border/Lines

## A Reminiscence. A History.

In 1983 some of us took part in a conference organized at York University on "The Alternative Press in Canada," which explored various journals and magazines operating outside the commercial mainstream of Canadian publishing. These included *This Magazine* (represented by Susan Crean and Rick Salutin), *The Canadian Forum* (represented by John Hutcheson), *Rampike* (represented by Karl Jirgens), *Impulse* (represented by Eldon Garnet), *The Body Politic* (represented by Alex Wilson), *Last Post* (represented by Patrick McFadden and Rae Murphy), *Shades* (represented by Sheila Wawanash and Paul Wilson), *C Magazine* (represented by Richard Rhodes), *La Vie en Rose*, *The Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* (represented by Arthur Kroker), as well as stringers for *Canadian Dimension*, *Parachute*, *Fuse*, *Vanguard*, *Parallogramme*. Even the student press was there (the editors of *Excalibur* at York who are, for instance, now the proprietors of *Now*); so was Luc Jutra from the Canada Council. Of these magazines at least six do not exist anymore and one, *CJPST*, lives on in an electronically mutated form.

Some of us, who had tried to establish a Canadian Studies association (lethargy and disorganization prevented it from getting too far), decided that it was time to establish a magazine - not a journal - which would create a different presence on the magazine scene. We had all worked with different magazines or journals (I with *CJPST* and the *Forum*), but in many ways the conference showed some of us that there was an evident gap in combining academic perspectives and cultural/social happenings. Thus, two groups were drawn together, one academic (which included Philip Corrigan, Jody Berland, Ian McLachlan, Bruce Elder, Peter Fitting, Ivan Varga, Alan O'Connor, Jody Berland, Geoff Miles, Monika Gagnon, Andy Payne, Gail Faurischou, Janice Williamson and Michael Boyce) and one practical (Rosemary Donegan, Alex Wilson, Christine Davis), though practice and theory

necessarily overlapped. We debated titles, format, editorial structure, funding, printing, everything that a magazine needs to think about. We settled on *Border/Lines* as a name (not without disagreement), a large format, and a collective structure. We found some seed money from York University and individual donors and somehow came out with issue #1 in October 1984. The editorial collective formed and reformed, and we struggled to find money to put out enough issues so that we could apply for public funds. Alex Wilson, in effect, became the (unpaid) Managing Editor, and the offices were split between York for business and his house for editorial work until, in 1986, we found editorial offices in the basement of a Christian charity on Madison Avenue.

There were disagreements on the direction we were taking. In 1988 some of the collective split off to establish their own journal, *Public*. As the *Public* exit showed, debates within the collective formed an ongoing exercise in thinking about what cultural critique was for, and also what our collective purpose was. (Canada Council juries regularly asked the same questions.) We realized, however, that we were nothing if not monitors of discourses in cultural analysis everywhere and that, at best, we were the only magazine in Canada that tried to establish a bridge between academia and a wider public on a whole range of cultural issues. With the scarce resources that were at our disposal, we were able to give our readers a sense of the critical issues that emerged in Russia, Hungary, feminist discourse, Britain, South America, India, the culture of nature, TV news coverage, the Vancouver Expo, prison writing, First Nations.

We decided that we had to keep going and try a slightly different tack. The cost of publishing was a major issue. We had always employed a designer (in particular David Vereschagin who produced some marvellous work), but this cost us one-third of our production costs. For two issues we had employed Lachlan Brown as Managing Editor, but we

also retained the services of David. The budget could not cope. Why not merge the post with that of managing editor, reduce the size to the standard 11 X 8, and systematize special issues? In this, we could put our budget to good advantage and also consolidate what was best in our work. Thanks to Stan Fogel, who joined the collective in 1991, and also to Joe Galbo, Kass Banning, Gary Genosko, Michael Hochsmann and Alan O'Connor, we put the magazine on a course which alternated theme issues with general ones. Above all, we found Julie Jenkinson. With her appointment as Managing Editor, we found a designer, office manager and friend, who would keep us all in place and produce the magazine in a style within which we would all feel comfortable.

The issues that have appeared since 1991 display this new organic sense. The issue on First Nations was established when Lauchlan Brown was Managing Editor, but, in many ways, set the pattern for subsequent special issues on Latin America, Race, Queer Culture and Virtual Reality where guest editors, in or outside the collective, put the issue together. With the general issues, which Palternated with them, we tried to be both Canadian and international. We would like think that the new *Border/Lines*, will be taken into classrooms, onto picket-lines, into the different workplaces within which we all spend a large part of our creative lives, so that it informs the culture of the everyday as practice.

As you read through this Miscellany and Index, which we hope you will find useful in finding us in libraries or in buying past issues, we hope that you will also think about your part in a wider collective. We would like your input. There has been a moral basis to our work: there has to be an alternative voice to the suffocating, smelly subterfuge of those who would take culture as that which is only commercially viable. Are we that voice? How can we improve?

Please let us know. **Ioan Davies**

# MISCELLANY: A B/L RETROSPECTIVE: 10 PROGRESSIVE YEARS

Selected by Stan Fogel

## 1984

#1: "From time to time literature must be revitalized by new materials and new techniques. As Synge, who wanted to give utterance to the peasantry of Western Ireland, said to Yeats, style is born out of the shock of new material. We have the English novel in part because of the English Dissenters and their preoccupations - money and the growth of the soul. Recently we have seen the impact of various submerged groups on Canadian and American literature: Blacks, women, gay men and lesbians, all with compelling stories to tell. New writing by newly vocal communities may become fashionable for a while, but the only enduring ways to keep the work available are the alternative networks of presses, bookstores, and magazines, enterprises which are often run as co-ops."

Bert Almon, review of *The Republic of Letters: Working Class Writing and Local Publishing* and *Dockers and Detectives*

#2: "Until Canadian country music songwriters feel able to draw with equal facility for their images, analogies, and metaphors from within Canada as well as from the geographical mythology of the United States, they can do little to further the cause of Canadian identity. In the meantime, Canadian country music will simply have to remain as Canadian as possible...under the circumstances."

John C. Lehr, "As Canadian As Possible...Under The Circumstances"

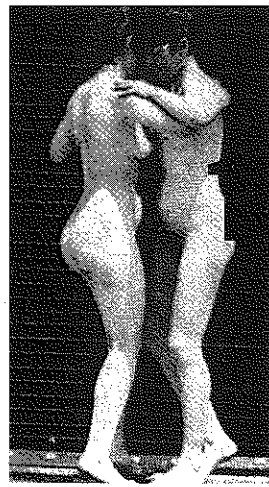
#3: "One of the most consistent and public statements about the Kreuzberg area and the Instandbesetzer movement is the local graffiti which permeates the entire district and speaks the politics and emotions of the neighbourhood. . .

the symbol of the squatters who repair both the architecture and the community fabric  
 Occupied - that is enough  
 Too bad cement doesn't burn  
 Unrest in the deep freezer  
 You have the power but we have the night  
 Power is always without Love  
 Love is never without Power  
 Taking a house is better than waiting to be given one  
 It is better that our youth squat houses than foreign countries  
 Be realistic - demand the impossible  
 It is better to squat and repair a house than to own a house and let it fall into ruin  
 Under the paving stone - the beach"

Rosemary Donegan (ed.), "Tom Burrows on Squatting, Instandbesetzer Graffiti"



South Bronx, 1984. Photo by Tom Burrows



Eadweard Muybridge

# 1986

**#4:** "Love of the Same is necessary for there to be love of the Different. And from this point of view, it is true that the mother-daughter relation is the most complex and much more potential, productive..."

"An interview with Luce Irigaray," conducted and translated by Heather Jon Maroney

**#5:** "By removing the lace *bustier* and stockings, bracelets, hair ribbons, objects upon which the fetishization of Madonna, the stripper, are pinned, the structural function of these fetish objects is destroyed, for they no longer cloak her 'lack.' Revealing the naked body and genitals of Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone, is, well, *not* pornographic."

Monika Gagnon, "Bella-donna: Madonna at a Glance and in Retrospective"

**#6:** "in grade school i learned our notorious *p'tit catéchisme* and read Katy Keene comix "In My Room" with the Beach Boys. at convent i went to mass every a.m. and fantasized about Marianne Faithfull up through grades called *syntaxe versification, rhétorique*. my friends turned *péquistes* and fans of our *chansonniers* (folksinger- songwriters) but the Stones had put the touch on me so i defected. exil-e in Anglophonia. so close yet so far away West of the Main. says Ahmed: "Excessive assimilation of the dominant model is a typical language attitude of the colonized, the bourgeoisie being the class most affected."

Susanne de Lotbiniere-Harwood, "I Write Le Body Bilingual"

**#7/8:** "In both Québec and Catalonia, the current situation suggests that little respite is in store for those who feel that there are specific national communities worth defending. Those Québécois who expected that economic progress would obviate the basis for national demands should look at the history of Catalonia, whose development demonstrates that such a pattern can never be taken for granted. In fact, despite unequal and even diverse patterns of development, the specific national concerns experienced in Québec and Catalonia today are fundamentally similar. To the extent that those concerns are born out of resistance to operations of delimitation and marginalization on the part of larger central states, their respective responses will have much to learn from each other. At first Catalans may be tempted to look toward Canada for glimpses of a more generous federal system and Québécois toward Spain for a peek at the successes of a minority national bourgeoisie. But in the long run I would suspect they would do better looking at each other, learning from their respective interrelations with their central states. Thus they may plan the political and cultural forms of intervention that will make their collective futures viable."

Robert Schwartzwald, "Wealth and Nations: Modern Nationalism in Catalonia and Québec"

**#9/10:** "Telemarketing is a contemporary instance of the interplay between speech and writing, and of our belief in the presence and precision of speech and verbal communication over the indeterminacy of the post and the written word. The phone gives you three to five minutes of the undivided attention of the other which you must use expeditiously: make your sale, disguise your intention, for telemarketing - aural sex - is capitalism's ultimate talking cure."

Kim Sawchuk, "Telemarketing and the Disembodied Voice"

# 1988

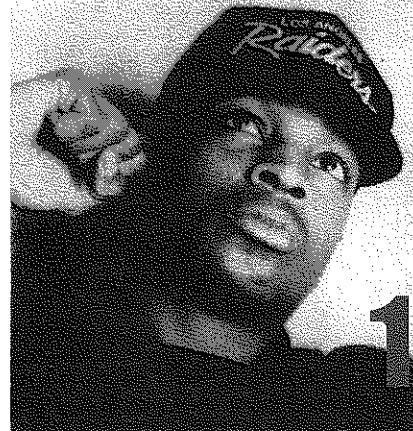
**#11:** "I will not place the word race in quotation marks as Gates ("Writing", "Talking") and Tzvetan Todorov have suggested because, although I believe it is important to point out how racial difference is *constructed*, I do not believe the concept can be discounted entirely. It persists as a mode of ordering: Gates in particular still works with an idea of "black" as being essentially different from "white" at the core of his writings. Although he wants to locate black criticism in *culturally* derived manifestations, he still refers to "black" or "white" authors and critics. This seems to connote something like race."

Cameron Bailey, "Writing B(l)ack: The Call and Response of Black Literary Criticism"

**#12:** "As rural tourist development proceeded, its geographical focus shifted from natural features of the landscape to 'artificial' ones like golf courses or African animal safari parks. The reasons for this are complex, but they had mostly to do with the need for the industry to differentiate its products in order to serve a rapidly expanding market. Scenic legitimacy came to rest on the marketing strategies of the tourist industry as well as the vagaries of land speculation."

All of these changes led to new fields of study like tourist motivational assessment and scenery evaluation, which by the 1960s had become the subject of intense scrutiny within the industry."

Alexander Wilson, "The View From the Road: Nature Tourism in the Postwar Years"



Chuck D., Public Enemy. Photo by Rick McGinnis



ad for the Asphalt Institute, mid 1950s

**#13:** "With the rise to power of Pierre Trudeau in 1968, the pressure was on to settle the Indian lands "problems" once, and for all. Accordingly, Trudeau and Jean Chrétien, then Indian Affairs Minister, concocted the ironically-named White Paper policy. Its objective was to complete the job of assimilating the Indian people by placing them under the jurisdiction of the provinces. They proposed repealing the Indian Act and amending the constitution to eliminate all references to Indian people."

Christopher Plant, "Indian Self-Government: Triumph or Treason?"

**#14:** Corporations like Petro-Canada may call themselves "proudly Canadian." But the same federal government that owns both Petro-Canada and Canada Post did not hesitate for an instant to employ scabs to attempt to break the strikes by Canadian postal workers in the summer of 1987."

Tom Wayman, "What Use is Canadian Culture?"

**#15:** "In (practical) audiophonic terms, Lacan's thesis allows us to understand a range of listening behaviours described by those studying the social behaviours of audio consumers: why, for instance, many people listen to the radio or other audiophonic equipment in darkened rooms, or just prior to sleep; why listening aids digestion; why muzak increases commodity production in factories and commodity consumption in shopping malls."

Bruce Barber, "Radio: Audio Art's Frightful Parent"

**#16:** "Justice MacKay, in a remarkable departure from conventional courtroom practice, allowed the Haida to give testimony in traditional oral fashion, without lawyer intercession, and it is this element which drew me to the text. Working from the printed transcript (for which I thank the Council of Haida Nations) I attempt to "hear" Diane Brown's words in a way that might, hopefully, give them meaning in the white, Eurocanadian context of this magazine."

The reader might situate her or himself, in approaching this text, as a kind of eavesdropper on an ongoing interethnic, intercultural conversation. Part of the problem of Eurocanadian-aboriginal communication and discourse is the question of place: how, and therefore where, does the discourse happen? On the printed page, the oral, which is essential to the Haida way of speaking, is rendered mute. On the other hand, if the text that oral testimony produces does not get "out," beyond the specific location where the words happen, its political potency is reduced."

Norbert Ruebsaat, "Speaking With Diane Brown: A Text in Progress"

**#17:** "I really am asking writers how we can develop and popularize a language of reproductive freedom; how we can convey and clarify the subtlety and complexity of our concepts? We need to hear from media workers how we can influence the media to take up our frame of reference and how we can stay on the media's agenda, even when our issue is not "hot." I think cultural workers exploring how theatre, poetry, fiction, painting and other media could portray women's strength and independence as they fight to control their reproduction can make a significant political contribution to the choice movement."

B. Lee, "Whose Bodies/Whose Lives? Cultural Struggles Around Abortion"

**#18:** "The moist, wet, inner pink space of her mouth had become a tender womb to bad words, any words - mother's cunts, pricks, dicks - the words were embedded deep inside Miranda filling up all the secret places and spaces created by the forbidden. Like Chaucer's male characters the words had plumbed her depths - mother's cunts and all. No one, not even the guardian of space and words, her mother, could take them or any of her words from her. They're all mine now, Miranda thought as she lay in bed, remembering how she had panted and her forehead had broken out in sweat after she was done swearing."

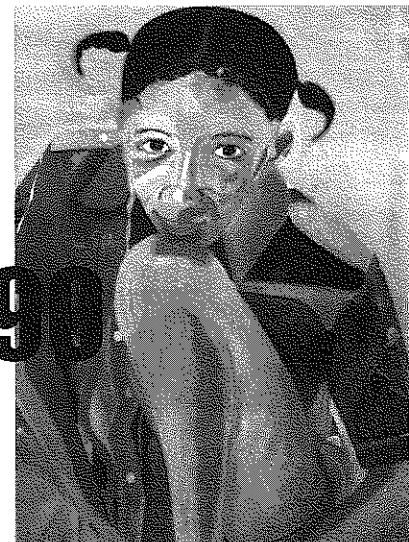
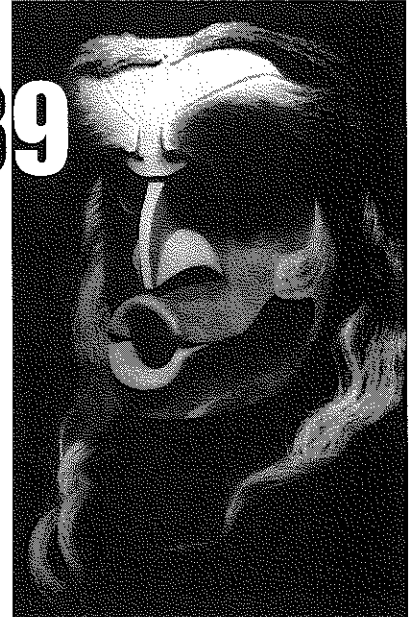
Marlene Nourbese Philip, "Bad Words"

**#19:** "The message implied by the promoters of the Wall fragment is clearly a thinly veiled ideology. Capitalist free market ideology asserts itself by offering itself to the consumer, thus negating in one fell swoop any hint that there might be any choice. What makes it a collector's item is not really that it is in limited supply; it is a collector's item only while it still contains an aura of the Cold War. In its commodity form it's sold as if it were a cultural treasure. In the examples on display at the major shopping malls you'll find it enclosed in a velvet draw-string bag."

Joyce Nelson, "Culture and Agriculture II - Monoculture"

# 1989

photo source not available



Buseje Bailey

# 1990

**#20/21:** "Cultural Studies Now and in the Future? Within the academy, what should the future of cultural studies be? Should it aim to become a "discipline," thereby imparting a set of skills to students and perhaps reconstructing the university, yet probably capitulating to the forces of deradicalization and institutionalization? Should it remain instead a program or centre, thereby regaining its radical edge, yet probably remaining highly eclectic and peripheral within the university?"

John Rodden, "Cultural Studies and the Culture of Academe"

**#22:** "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 Honorary 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."

Jane Kalbfleish, "See Jane Play, See Dick (Run)"

**#23:** "My brief excursion into the prostitution of Hawaiian culture has done no more than give an overview. Now that you have heard a Native view, let me just leave this thought behind. If you are thinking of visiting my homeland, please don't. We don't want or need any more tourists, and we certainly don't like them. If you want to help our cause, pass this message on to your friends. Thank you."

Haunani-Kay Trask, "Lovely Hula Lands: Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture"

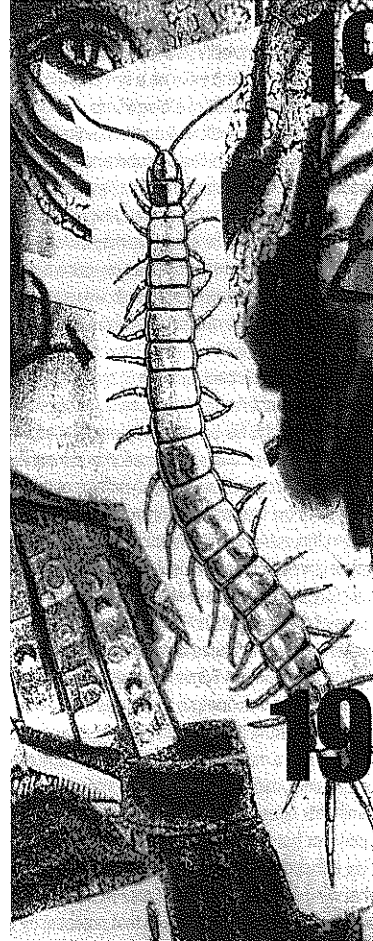
**#24/25:** "In *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, Cronenberg states that he felt so close to Burroughs when writing the screenplay that had Burroughs died he could write his next novel. The limit to this fusion is quite explicit—Cronenberg implies that it is his heterosexuality which dissociates him from Burroughs and which forced him to make his own very different *Naked Lunch*. This oedipal dissociation gets rehearsed throughout the film."

Danny O'Quinn, "War On: Naked Lunch"

**#26:** "Hallelujah!  
It works.  
We blew the shit out of them.  
We blew the shit right back up their own ass  
It works.  
We blew the shit out of them.  
They suffocated in their own shit!  
Hallelujah.  
Praise the Lord for all good things.  
We blew them into fucking shit.  
They are eating it.  
Praise the Lord for all good things.  
We blew their balls into shards of dust,  
Into shards of fucking dust.  
We did it.  
Now I want you to come over here and kiss me on the mouth."

Harold Pinter, "American Football (a reflection upon the Gulf War)"

Jennifer Stowell



1992

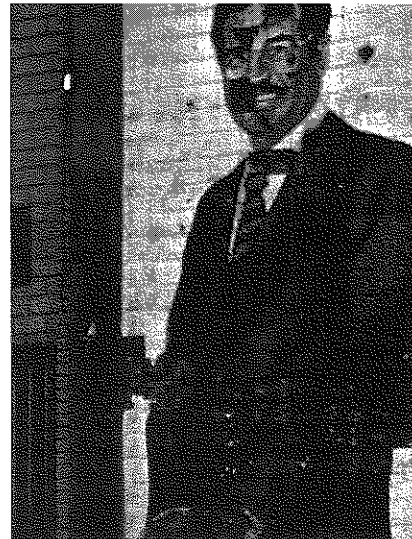


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**#27:** "When the first leather jackets and Elvis pompadours appeared on the streets of the *barrios*, the over-forty guardians of culture, nervous that Mexico City youths would arm themselves with switchblades and roar Harleys through elegant Zona Rosa establishments à la Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, mounted an all-out assault. Films like *The Blackboard Jungle* were pulled from movie theaters and newspapers apprised the populace of the dangers of *rocanroleando*: gang violence, lax morality, and, especially, the destruction of *la cultura nacional*. Maybe the single thing the government, the Catholic Church and the Marxist left could all agree on was that Mexican Youth was imperiled by the Protestant, decadent and individualistic North."

Ruben Martinez, "Corazón del Rocanrol"

**#28:** "the site:  
The subject area of "homosexuality. lesbianism" – Library of Congress designation, HQ75 – is not only a region within a map of the logic of power, but also a place and time made physically concrete. Here, the discursive taxonomic abstraction is made articulate within a non-discursive institution."

Nicholas Packwood, "Browsing The Apparatus"

**#29/30:** "...one cannot be a Latina without recognizing one's African heritage: without it, we are caricatures of the Iberians, or we are "American" simulacra, not Latinas."

Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz, "The Elusive Signs of African-ness: Race and Representation Among Latinas In the United States"

**#31:** "One Hundred Starting Points of the Post-Modern. . .

- "100. Yuri Gagarin manned space flight, 1961, orbit and weightlessness make time and space more relative than any person has experienced before.
- 99. Paolo Soleri's cave-house-studio, Scottsdale, Arizona, 1961, and his search for 'Arcologies' (architectural ecologies), the paradoxical blending of high tech and the eco-freak.
- 98. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961, the attack on artificial, order-imposing city planning begins.
- 97. Berlin Wall, 1961, the admission of failure by Soviet Communism.
- 96. John Cage, *Silence; Lectures and Writings*, 1961 mainstreaming the avant-garde notion of chance in composition.
- 95. Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison*, 1961, reempowering madness."

Dennis Sexsmith, "When Does Post-Modernism Begin?"

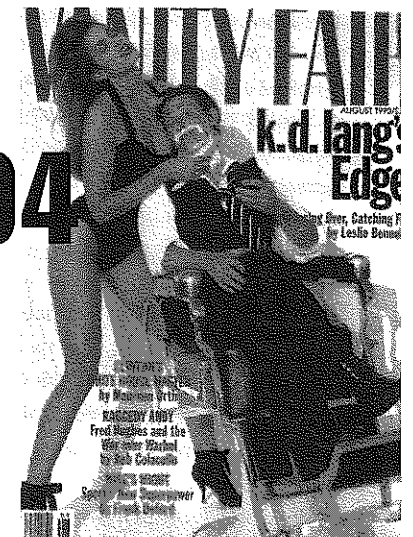
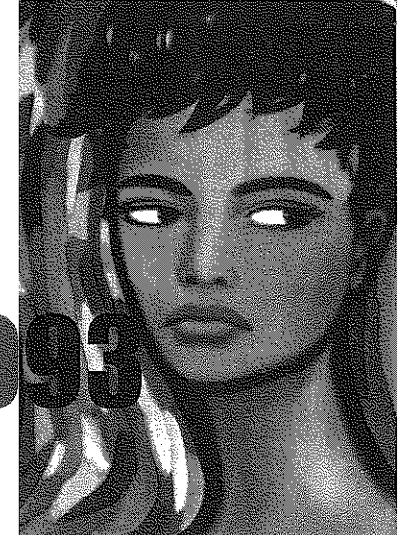
**#32:** "The high living of the 1980s gave way to the recessionary 1990s and the world needed a new sexual orientation to give meaning to the decade. The media seized upon lesbians. They were the perfect image for the scaled-down, nesting 1990s. Their sex was safe and their relationships were long lasting. According to the media, lesbians had shed the negative image that had plagued them in the 1970s—as man-hating separatists. In the intervening years, lesbians had apparently discovered sex, Nair and Armani. And the media was ready to discover *them*."

Rachel Giese, "Lesbian Chic: I feel pretty and witty and gay"

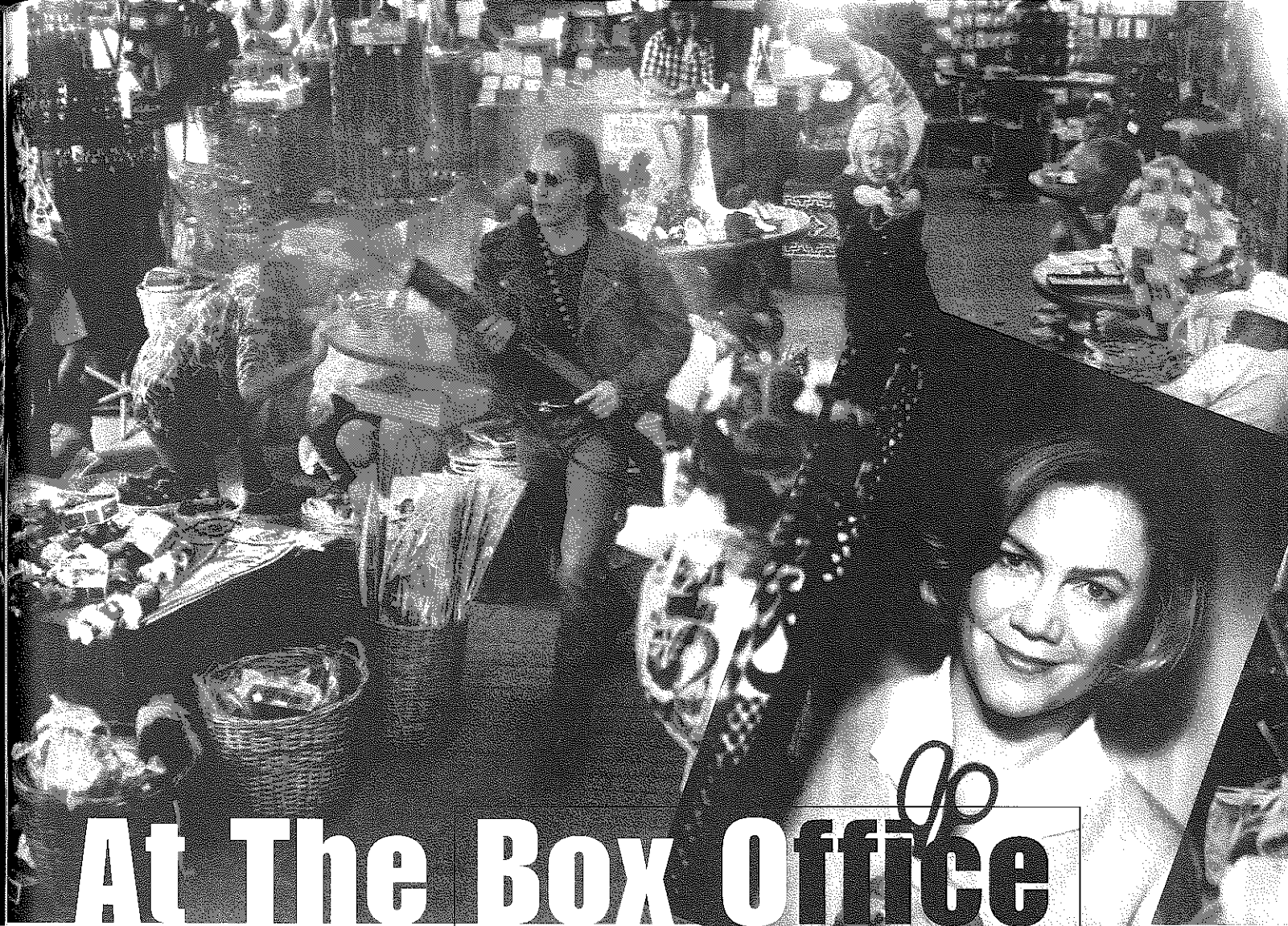
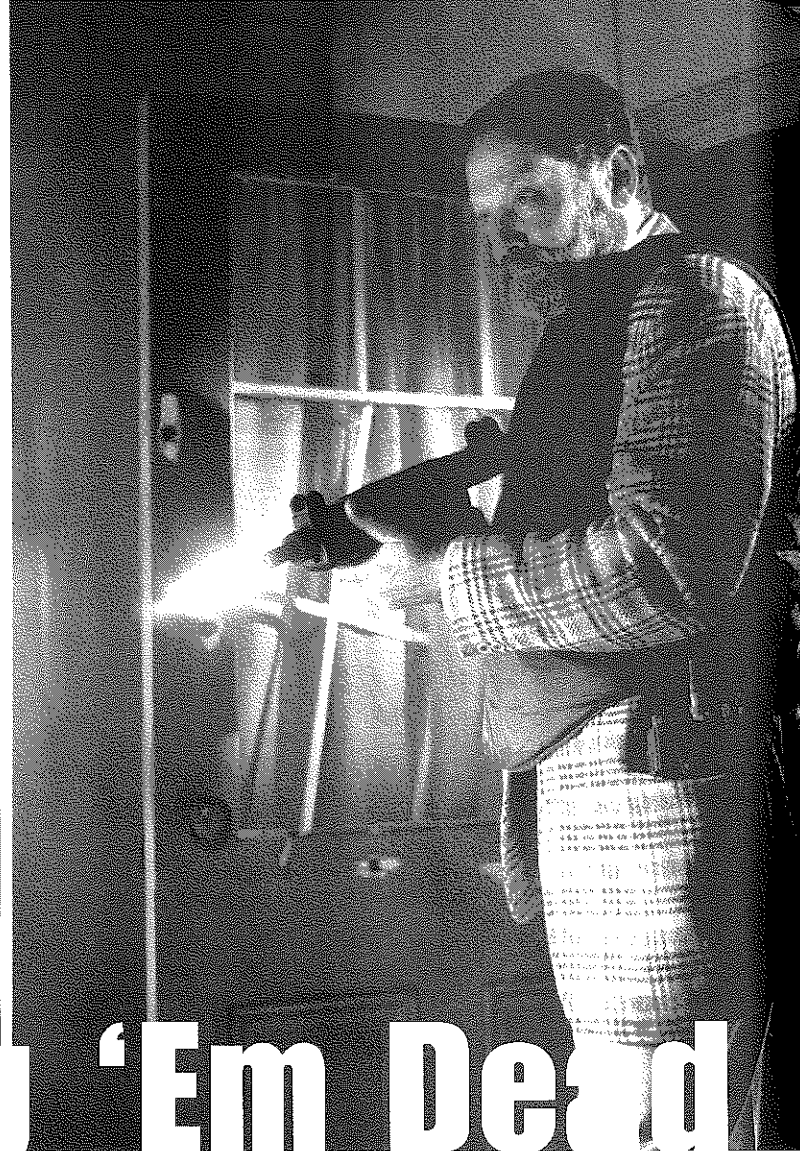
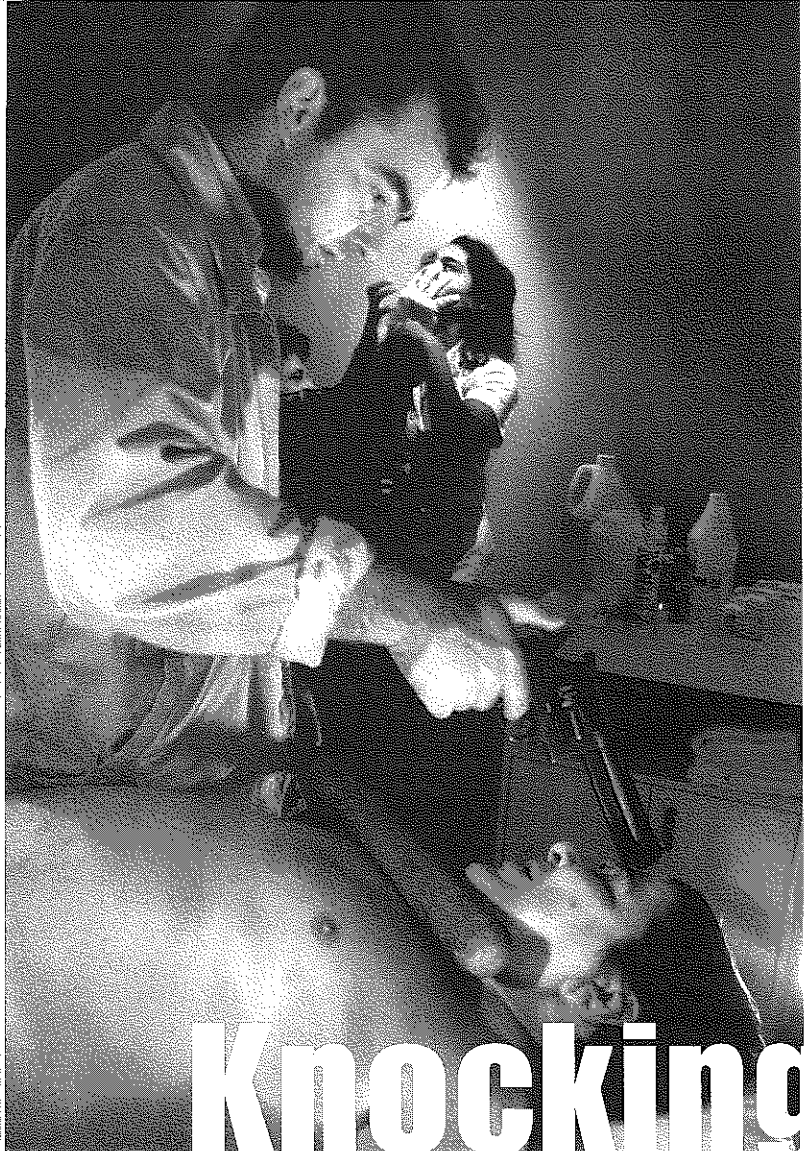
**#33:** "The arrival of Hong Kong money in Toronto has recomposed power relations within the Chinese community and has also somehow changed central Chinatown. Conflicts developed along class lines during the late 1970s when the new elite entrepreneurial class tried to take over Chinatown's development. Before the 1970s, Chinatown and its political, economic and cultural life were influenced by social workers and community activists, and a relatively small group of wealthy merchants whose authority relied mainly upon kinship. Both groups were inward-looking. With the new entrepreneurial class, business is business – capitalist production and profits are central concerns. It is in part this mentality that generated the modern residential-commercial buildings such as the Dragon City and Wenhua Centre standing today at the southwest corner of Spadina/Dundas, the outcome of a compromise development project in the late 1970s. The entrepreneurial class's original vision of a "commercial Chinatown" was to turn the heart of Chinatown into a multimillion dollar commercial/residential complex consisting of expensive boutiques and high-priced condominiums. Its realization would have deprived hundreds of garment factory workers' of jobs."

Xiaoping Li, "One Face, Many Stories: Redefining Chinese Identity"

Nadedge, Licia Bronzin



10



# Knocking 'Em Dead Natural Born Killers At The Box Office

**BEING KILLED IS COMMON IN THE CINEMA. BEING A WITNESS TO MURDER HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN A FAVOURITE AUDIENCE ACTIVITY. WE'VE BEEN THRILLED BY IT IN ACTION MOVIES, BEEN SCARED BY IT IN HORROR MOVIES, TRIED TO SOLVE IT IN DETECTIVE FILMS AND SAT THROUGH ART MOVIES TRYING TO UNDERSTAND IT. WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THE REPRESENTATION OF MURDER IN NATURAL BORN KILLERS IS A COMBINATION OF THE SHEER NUMBER OF KILLINGS, THE MODE IN WHICH THEY ARE SHOWN, THE MORAL VALUE ATTACHED TO THE ACTS AND A PARTICULAR TYPE OF AUDIENCE RESPONSE.**

The representation of the serial killer and the use of this figure as signifier of the social and personal decay that will bring forth the apocalypse are not restricted to American culture. In the past few years, and in movies alone, the mass murderer has been the focus of Belgium's *Man Bites Dog*, Spain's *Kika* and Québec's *Requiem pour un beau sans-coeur*. These films are each rooted in their own national cinematic cultures and the films draw on different narrative traditions to tell their stories. Both *Man* and *Requiem*, for example, borrow and playfully fictionalize cinéma vérité techniques to represent the killer, while *Kika* utilizes director Almodóvar's usual repertoire of excesses. The point is that this trope is present in films from different highly industrialized cultures and that, despite their cultural specificity, these films present the serial killer as a symbol of the end of community, order, progress and reason.

In American cinema the mass murderers/serial killers have been a stock motif in suspense or action films. The Dirty Harry

series, to name but one, could not exist without them. The social threat they represent is the context in which Harry is permitted to be dirty. One could even argue that the mass murderer as romantic hero also has deep roots in film history. Frank and Jesse James killed dozens. But the narratives needed to give Henry Fonda and Tyrone Power cause and right. Likewise Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway killed as many people in *Bonnie and Clyde* as Brad Pitt and Juliette Lewis do in *Kalifornia*, but the former were glamorized even as their actions were condemned, while the latter are deglamorized even as their actions are offered as sensual pleasures.

Though there are many different types of films being made at the moment, I don't think there's been as much *noir* in American cinema since the post-War years. But it's a different shade of *noir*. Films like *Romeo is Bleeding* go beyond neo-*noir* into a sublime and hip nihilism. The message may be one of exhaustion and despair, but the mode of telling is frenzied and

BY JOSE ARROYO

exciting. Though the serial killer appears across genres, there are generic considerations (if not quite determinants). The killer is used to different effect in different genres, running the gamut from the cute *Serial Mom*, which drew on camp for comedy, to the scarily mundane *Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer*, which drew on documentary for a realism effect.

The figure of the serial killer is the signifier of the malaise of the millennium. We might have several theories about why society is shit (capitalism, capitalism, capitalism) and we might have several theories why people may become killers (society, society, society), but, as the popularity of "JoJo's psychic Alliance" indicates, we can't really explain it rationally. The films point to a combination of social factors, psychology and economics as possible "causes" of serial killers. But they are so partial and yet so bewilderingly large that one would need a different culture for prevention. The serial killer represents everything that's out of control with our lives. To "fix" it would be like fixing a microchip on a computer. We know something is wrong, we know it's because of our culture (and many of the films point a finger to the media), but it's all represented as so complex that we can't begin to understand and we know we can't fix it. I'm still waiting for a film to say you can't fix the chip because you need a whole new board. For now, however, films like *Natural Born Killers* seem to be saying society sucks, everything is corrupt, and it's going to get worse. But don't kill yourself yet because there's still desire. All you need is love. Yet, as we are told in *Romeo*, "what makes love so frightening is that you don't own it. It owns you."

These films are deliriously romantic ones in a nineteenth-century sense. Love is all-encompassing and out of control. The sublime is no longer found in nature. What these films will have us look upon with awe and horror now is no less than the fall of civilization. A visceral reaction from the audience is their intention. A body gushing blood in death throes merely underlines how social decay is not merely imminent but already in process. These films reject reason in favour of mysticism for explanation. (The shaman scene is one of the most embarrassing ones in *Natural Born Killers*). And their characters find meaning only in their passions.

## Spectacle and Sensation

To see *Natural Born Killers* is to notice, shockingly clearly, how much the Hollywood cinema has changed in the past twenty years. While the Academy may still give its awards to old-fashioned "realistic" dramas that critique society in some way by focusing on how some issue or moral dilemma affects an individual, most Hollywood products—and certainly the largest box-office films—focus on spectacle. Hollywood may distinguish between its "serious" films that "move the human spirit" and its action/adventure/sci-fi spectacles that'll kill 'em at the b.o. But serious filmgoers tend to find these categories much more fluid than most daily film reviewers. How safe, tritely uplifting and crushingly middle-brow can Hollywood's version of "serious" be? Check out *Quiz Show*. And for commentary on the human condition at the end of the century, one could do much worse than pay attention to *Blade Runner*, *Robocop*, or *Total Recall*. The "spec-

tacular" film has become the site at which pleasure and depth most commonly intersect. Which is not to say that all spectacle films have depth. I'd need some persuading to see *Jurassic Park* as other than a thrill machine.

One can make a broad distinction between Hollywood's "serious" films and the spectacle films. And it's not budget. "Serious" films tend to be old-fashioned. By this I mean that the narrative tends to focus on character and relationships, the editing is slower, the *mise-en-scene* attempts a faithful reproduction of places and events, and acting is an important vehicle of meaning. In other words, serious relies on the classical Hollywood paradigm of filmmaking (and in particular its notion of quality). Spectacle relies more on showing things and less on character identification to generate affect. The narratives tend to be punctuated by quickly-edited scenes of cars crashing, blood gushing, imaginary worlds exploding, finely-honed semi-nude bodies fighting. In short places, people and events one tends not to happen upon (except occasionally downtown).

Perhaps the greatest difference between films in the classic style and the new spectacle films is the emphasis on sensation. Films such as *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Robocop* may both want to critique, explain and help their audiences understand something. But the former does so primarily by soliciting an emotional response, the latter by a visceral one. Both do so through visual means, though the latter relies much more on dialogue. The mode of narration is also different. In classic cinema the manipulation of character and theme through time, for example, was heavily indebted to the nineteenth-century novel and theatrical melodrama. The representation of space was heavily indebted to painting, particularly in its adoption of Renaissance space. The above (plus editing) is the bulk of *Fried's* cinematic vocabulary. One can't say the same for the spectacle film. The classic style is merely one component of the spectacle film's repertoire: avant-garde techniques and advertising images are some of its many elements.

## Seriously Stallone

Oliver Stone makes "serious" films: *Salvador*, *Wall Street*, *Heaven and Earth*, *JFK*. The titles say it all: big themes, the major issues of our time. They scream their seriousness so loudly they scare off the censors who have prohibited the distribution of *Exit to Eden* and *Reservoir Dogs* for similar levels of sex and/or violence. Stone paints a big canvas, with large brushstrokes and very little subtlety. His are testosterone movies. The Vietnam War, *Wall Street*, the Kennedy assassination, are all explored as moments that not only transformed American culture, but that also reshaped the meaning of masculinity in America. These events are critical to American culture because they reveal how that culture is in crisis. And by having men at the centre of these dilemmas, they also reveal how masculinity itself is also in crisis. The moral issues in Stone's films are resolved when a character takes an ethical position that is conveyed by an action. For example, when Tom Cruise energetically flexes his biceps to wheel himself into the convention in *Born on the Fourth of July* he has

finally taken on the moral responsibility to speak against the war and thus become a bigger man.

Stone's movies rarely whisper when they can shout. Their analysis of society is vulgar. Characters are represented in a Manichean fashion. To think of Tom Berenger and Willem Dafoe in *Platoon* or Michael Douglas and Charlie Sheen in *Wall Street* is to contrast the bad rat with the good rat. Sheen becomes a man when he acts for the good and becomes a citizen. These patterns recur in a most dazzling visual fashion in *Natural Born Killers*. But *Killers* differs in that it falls outside the broadly humanist tradition of Stone's oeuvre. Almost everyone in *Killers* (and certainly everyone who stays alive) is a rat.

## Pomo Blues

The beginning of *Natural Born Killers* sets the tone for the rest of the film. Leonard Cohen is singing "Waiting For a Miracle." But the scene is set in a diner in the desert. We are shown images of a coyote, a snake, a large animal decomposing and Nixon on television. The film stock varies from filmed video to Super 8 to 16mm to 35, from black and white to colour. I don't think there's a specific reason for these choices. The effect is meant to be cumulative: we live in a society of images, a society of spectacle, and it's decomposing. The miracle won't come. We'll get on someone's shit list (the title of the next song on the soundtrack) and we'll get squashed by a car just like that scorpion we see in close-up getting run over.

Mickey and Mallory Knox (Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis) live in a postmodern world. They are surrounded by a kaleidoscopic mediascape. Their only sense of social history is what they see as they channelsurf through various TVs: *Leave it to Beaver*, *77 Sunset Strip*, *The Wild Bunch* and *Scarface*. To them, these shows have become more real than reality. This incursion into hyperreality extends to the representation of Mallory's personal life which we see as a TV sitcom à la "Married with Children." Here there is no extended family. The nuclear family is one in which the mother is powerless, the younger brother is a brat and the father is a Rodney Dangerfield who owns the rest. Incest and rape elicit the same moronic canned laughter as a burp would. Stone wants to show us how the media influences our interpretation of our own experience. In one scene, Stone superimposes the slogan "too much TV" over Mickey and Mallory. What is the result of "too much TV"? *Natural Born Killers*. Mickey and Mallory feel only when they love or kill. Their love is expressed as a heartfelt perversion of romantic ideals. Mickey is the knight in shining armour, except that he delivers meat and his hands and clothes are bloodied. He rescues Mallory from incest only to enable her to kill her parents and go on a murder rampage. Their feelings for each other are intense and heartfelt. "You belong to me," he tells her. "When I look up at the stars, I know you'll be looking at the same ones." They are fated for each other, they are each other's missing piece. Their rings (serpents coiled over skulls) are each one's reminder that they belong to the other. If life is mostly a bad sitcom, intense passion can occasionally transform it into a good video clip.

Their love is in the mould of the nineteenth-century romantic ideal. Their visually spectacular wedding scene is a good example. They take their vows on a bridge over a river. The awesomeness of their love is declared in front of the awesomeness of nature. Some yahoos jeer at them from a passing truck, but Mickey won't ruin the sacredness of his wedding day by killing any of them. They symbolize their becoming one by gashing their hands, clasp them and mixing blood. Mallory throws her veil into the river. A splash of pristine white falling in slow motion over pristine nature. Their blood, now united and belonging to them both, is meant to circulate forever in the oceans of the world. Which it does. However what we are shown is a quickly edited animated scene in which this drop of blood uncoils into a venomous snake. Their union, so fated, is a curse which will poison the world.

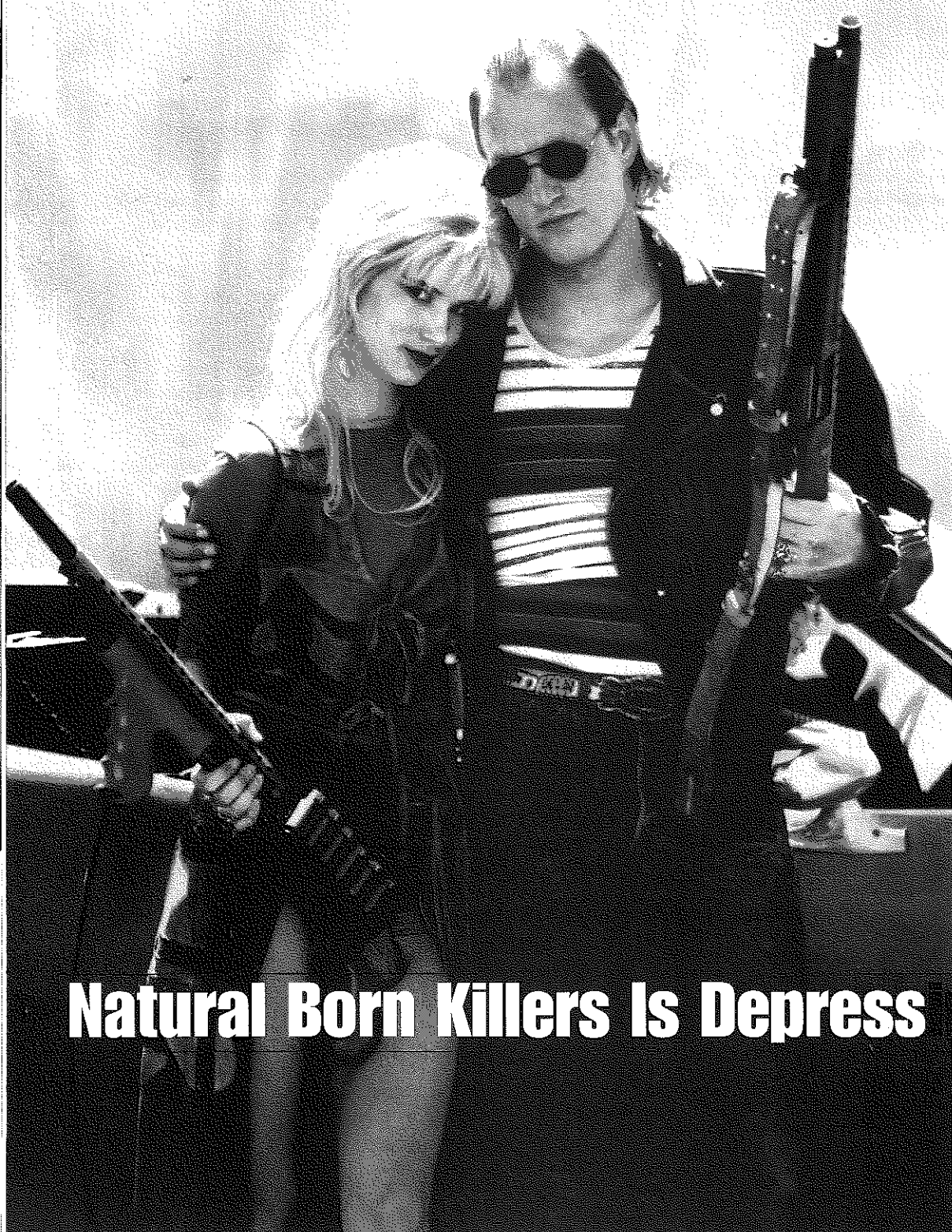
Mickey and Mallory have sex, but it is their killings that are orgasmic. The first murders we see them perform at the roadside cafe are operatic. These are initially quickly edited. Then, as bullet or knife approaches its target, the camera shows us the victim's point of view of the approaching weapon before another quick cut to their organs splattering. As the narrative unwinds and everybody is shown to be a murderer (including the police and the media), the killings become more visually perfunctory.

The film assumes its audience has a vast intertextual cultural vocabulary at its disposal. It disproves Fredric Jameson's argument that pastiche is empty quotation. *Natural Born Killers* endlessly quotes from culture. Those citations are seemingly socially de-historicized and culturally de-contextualised except their place in the narrative gives them a new history and a new context, and the *bricolage* of such quotations creates new meaning. It would be hard to create a totally amoral romantic couple in a different mode. Mickey and Mallory are the heroes of *Natural Born Killers*. Yet all they have going for them is that they are beautiful and they love each other. The film tries to make us like them (after all, aside from the mystical shaman, they are no worse than anyone else in the film). But we don't need to identify with them to keep engaged and to go along with the narrative. The speed and variety of the visuals are enough.

As with many pomo films, we don't know how to react to

**The Future is murder.  
It's a bit shallow.  
If that were the  
message only in  
Natural Born Killers,  
we could dismiss it.  
But it's cropping up  
across genres,  
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various media in  
many "First World"  
cultures.**





## Natural Born Killers Is Depressing

Mickey and Mallory. The film shows them doing the most horrible things, but it does so excitingly if not beautifully. Murder is horrible but we sometimes gasp with pleasure when we see it. Some of the situations in the film (Mallory killing her pump jockey because he was too eager and gave her the worst head she's ever had in her life; Robert Downey Jr. eagerly becoming a killer) elicit the same kind of nervous laughter as do films such as *Reservoir Dogs* and *Blue Velvet*. Yet, in order to engage with

Mickey and Mallory at all, we can't see them as too horrible. Thus, most of the time we are asked to share their point-of-view. The major characters they kill are scum (the father's a rapist, the detective kills his partners during sex, the warden is arranging their murder) and most of the minor ones are mostly fat white trash and thus disposable (the contempt in which poor white people are held in contemporary cinema is at least another article if not a Ph.D. dissertation). Mickey and Mallory are victims and scourge. There is cure neither for them nor for us.

*Natural Born Killers* is depressing. Yet I found it riveting to watch. The film is a sensational, serious spectacle. It's the work of artists with a substantial command of the medium at their disposal and only the most crushing banalities to communicate.

The future is murder. It's a bit shallow. If that were the message only in *Natural*

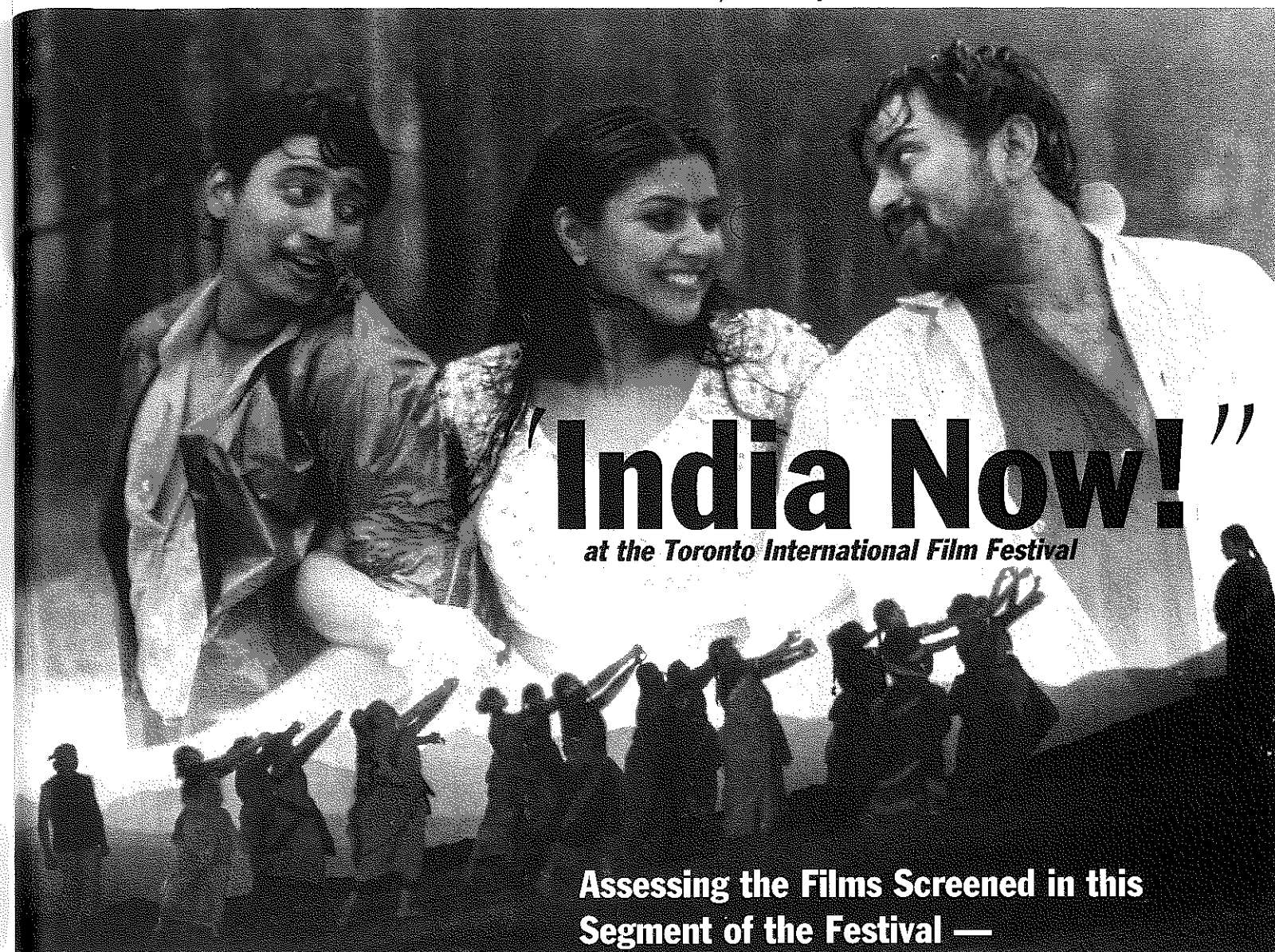
*Born Killers*, we could dismiss it. But it's cropping up across genres, throughout various media in many "First World" cultures. In one of the last songs in the film, Leonard Cohen warns that "the blizzard of the world has overcrossed the threshold and overturned the order of the soul."

Unfortunately, artists are

more interested in representing the crumbling of the old order than in imagining the construction of new and better ones.

*José Arroyo is a lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Warwick.*

Stills courtesy of Cinematheque Ontario. p.10: *Requiem pour un beau sans-cœur*. p.11: *Natural Born Killers*, *Serial Mom*. p.14: *Natural Born Killers*



## India Now!

at the Toronto International Film Festival

### Assessing the Films Screened in this Segment of the Festival — Hits, Misses... and Programming Oversights

by STEVE PEREIRA

There was an unfortunate tendency towards the exotic impulse: advertising copy that offered cinema from "far away lands"; press conferences that were heavy on atmosphere (sitar music wafting through air pungent with the smell of samosas) but very short on substance; program notes that evoked "caravans and elephants and sumptuous cloth"; introductions to films that invoked a colonial legacy (Noah Cowan introducing the film *Bollywood* to the audience as "the jewel in the crown" of the program!). Then there was an inexplicable lack of work from women filmmakers—of the twenty-three directors represented, just two were women—an embarrassing ratio given the number of women now producing exciting new work in India. And ultimately there was nothing particularly exciting about the work presented. This was surely not

the best that India has to offer. I do believe the programmers, though, when they say they chose "the very best films we could find." The question is a matter of who was doing the looking.

What the India Now! program at the Festival did offer, as promised, was a representative sampling of the types or genres of work that are now being produced in India. Separated into three rather broad categories, there was the commercial, mainstream cinema as seen in the work of Mani Rathnam; the independent art cinema, as in Goutam Ghose (*The Kite*) or Adoor Gopalakrishnan (*Servile*); and finally the independent documentary scene, the best-known exponent of which is probably Anand Patwardhan (*Father, Son, and the Holy War*).

On the commercial front, for the past couple of decades India has been leading the world in film production, with the commercial film mills spinning out an average of eight hundred films a year. Consider that, on any one day, a film star in the

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commercial film industry will go from a morning shoot for one film, to an afternoon shoot for another, and a night shoot for the third. The next day will see a similar schedule for a completely different set of films. Commercial films have become the mainstay of Indian popular culture, both in India and in diasporic Indian communities from Nairobi to Frankfurt. Bombay, centre of Hindi production, is still the centre of the commercial film industry in spite of the fact that films are now being made in all the major languages used in the country, and the southern states, including Tamil Nadu, now produce the largest number of films.

It is a credit to the programmers of the festival that, in a field dominated by Hindi production, they should choose to focus on the work of the prolific and accomplished Tamil filmmaker,

audience they wish to reach is rural and/or urban working class."

While there was a strong showing of independent work in terms of numbers at the festival, the selection was a mixed bag which worked with varying degrees of success. Goutam Ghose, for instance, whose exquisite *Boatman on the River Padma* screened at last year's Festival, disappointed with this year's entry *Patang (The Kite)* despite the stellar performances from a renowned trio of actors: the talented, ubiquitous duo of Shabana Azmi and Om Puri, here with Indian heartthrob, Shatrughan Sinha. Azmi plays a cleaning woman, a widow who is having an affair with the leader of a local gang (Om Puri). Her teenage son, Somra—country naïveté personified—spends his days flying his kite above the grimy smog of the small mining town. Things get complicated

when, as Somra gets drawn into the gang's activities, a new police inspector (Shatrughan Sinha) comes into town determined to clean it up and a swarm of politicians get caught up in the resultant machinations. As with *Boatman*, Ghose's film works best in its character study, in the early part of the film as it focuses on the lives of the widow and her son and the small defeats and victories of their lives.

Unfortunately, a third of the way through, the film changes its scope, attempts a satirization of small-town bureaucracy and gets mired in a

melodramatic tangle that never quite sorts itself out.

On the other hand, *Charachar (Shelter of the Wings)*, Buddhadeb Dasgupta's film, is eminently more satisfying. Again working within the premise of a rural/urban dichotomy, *Charachar* is a sensitive, affecting story of a birdcatcher in rural Bengal. Lakinder, in the best rural tradition, (see *Somra*, above) is a simple, honest, naive man. He is the descendant of generations of birdcatchers who catch exotic birds in the forests of Bengal to sell in Calcutta markets. Deeply affected by the death of his only child who buried a dead bird to grow a "bird blossom tree" the day before he died, Lakinder begins setting free more birds than he sells and he finds himself becoming more and more attached to the birds he is supposed to capture. Faced with impoverishment and unable to understand his preoccupation with birds, his wife begins an affair with a motorcycle-driving townsman and eventually leaves Lakinder. Alone, he begins to retreat into his world of birds until, in the final ethereal scene, he is enveloped by his family of birds. Beautifully shot, *Charachar* has the blend of lyricism and realism of the best of the poetic realist tradition. Shots are languid, the lighting moody, there's lots of evocative play with light and shadow.

Other films were a great deal less sentimental or nostalgic in their depictions of rural life, opting instead for depictions of lives of casual and often deliberate brutality, portraits of the dark undercurrents that permeate village life. K. P. Sasi's *Ilayam Mullum (Leaves and Thorns)* is a case in point, though it suffered a great deal from its overwhelming earnestness. Sasi gets points for subject matter: an examination of the oppressive patriarchal life of a small village. Like Ghose, his strength lies in capturing the small details of village life and in the details of character. Using the beautiful Kerala landscape as a backdrop, the film

focuses on four young women who work in the same weaving centre. Close friends, they have their small rebellions against the relentless sexism of the world they inhabit: sabotaging a potential arranged marriage, fighting back at the sexual harassment by local layabouts. But as Sasi shows it, the traditions of patriarchy are so ingrained and so pervasive that the women are completely consumed by it. One of the women goes through with her arranged marriage, is abused and kills herself. Ostracized by the village for acts of petty rebellion, two others are also driven to suicide. There is obviously an issue at stake here, and there is a story to tell, but the sheer relentlessness of the message makes it difficult to respond to the film. Sasi's attempt to salvage the film by imposing a coda that has the men go through an attack of remorse is ultimately unconvincing. Assuming that systemic oppression invokes guilt in the perpetrators is simplistic on one end of the scale, optimistic on the other.

Much more nuanced and far more interesting is Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Servile*, winner of the international critics' prize at the International Film Festival of India. Gopalakrishnan's earlier film *The Walls*, a poignant tale of a romance between an imprisoned writer and a woman heard but never seen on the other side of a wall, was screened at the 1990 Toronto Festival. Set in a small village in Kerala, *Servile* is a study in character, character shaped to a large part by caste, economic and power structures. Tommi is a migrant eking out his squatter's existence, until he is forced into becoming the dogsbody for a local landlord—a man given to drunken rages and extreme physical brutality, including the continual rape of Tommi's wife. When things look like they cannot get any worse, the landlord gets Tommi involved in a plot to kill the landlord's own wife and uses him to help in what is ultimately a botched escape. *Servile* is a fascinating film on a number of levels. It is an absorbing look at the hierarchal dynamics of village life and at the development of power relationships. Particularly interesting is its focus on a protagonist who is alternately repulsive and pathetic. Even as the abuse escalates, and his own life becomes more and more fraught with danger, Tommi seems to get increasingly attached to the tyrant he serves, sycophantically grateful for the small kindnesses offered him. Among other things, this dynamic makes for an interesting metaphor for colonial relationships.

Speaking of colonial relationships and another take on the rural/urban dichotomy: As a preface to Dev Benegal's *English, August*, I would like to offer two quotations. The first one is from Mahmud Jamal, who, in a commentary on Hanif Kureishi and *My Beautiful Launderette (Artrage, 1987, Autumn 1987)*, says, "Neo-orientalism best describes the way the Asian community is incorporated within contemporary culture by Asian intellectuals who have been laundered by the British university system." The second is a quotation from the novel by Upamanyu Chatterjee on which the film was based. The speaker is a character in the novel named Sathe, a political cartoonist. In the novel he is a sardonic voice of reason; in the film, however, he comes across as being something of a cynical buffoon. Sathe describes a cartoon he is drawing, which shows a man sitting at a typewriter with the Statue of Liberty in the distance: "I wanted to suggest an Indian

writer writing about India, after having spent many years abroad, or living there. There are hundreds of them—well, if not hundreds, at least twenty-five. I find these people absurd, full with one mixed-up culture and writing about another, what kind of audience are they aiming at. That's why their India is just not real, a place of fantasy, or of confused metaphysics, a sub-continent of goons. All their Indians are caricatures. Why is that. Because



*Leaves and Thorns, directed by K. P. Sasi*

there really are no universal stories, because each language is an entire culture." I don't believe this second quotation was actually used in the film, but I do believe that Mr. Benegal, who adapted, produced and directed the film (and who spent a great deal of time in the States), should have been paying attention.

*English, August* is a sort of contemporary picaresque Indian

**This was surely not the best that India has to offer. I do believe the programmers, though, when they say they chose "the very best films we could find." The question is a matter of who was doing the looking.**

Mani Rathnam. We are talking about commercial films here—often engaging, but as formulaic and as star-driven as any Stallone, Schwarzenegger or Cruise vehicle. Except that, never to do anything by halves, any one Indian commercial film will be a combination of a number of Hollywood formulae: drama/action/thriller/romance/comedy—that it is a musical is a given. While there is an overt attempt to engage in contemporary socio-political issues (as Rathnam does with the politically volatile Kashmiri issue in *Roja*, or with the issue of arranged marriage in *Mouna Ragam*), as with most commercial films, the issues tend to become grist for a cinematic mill that reduces everything to personal, individual, dramatic action. For those not weaned on such films, they are definitely an acquired taste. For those who grew up with them, you might hate yourself, but they are an absolute delight.

The independent cinema—the art house cinema circuit—is, as in the independent arena anywhere, an attempt to provide an alternative, in this case, to the dominant "song-and-dance" film. Ranging in its inspirations from the auteur school of filmmaking to a social-realist imperative, the films are seen as a site both for formal experimentation and for social critique: a cinema of social significance and artistic sincerity. In her recent book, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947-1987*, Sumita S. Charkravarty says of the "new cinema" that it has an interest in linear narrative, "realistic: *mise-en-scène*," psychological portrayal of character, the "motivated" use of songs and dances (as and when required by the context of the film), explicit scenes of sexuality, and a disenchantment with the workings of the Indian political (social) system. She also notes that "one of the ironies of India's new cinema is that while the filmmakers belong, for the most part, to a middle-class English educated elite, the

film . Agastya (anglicized to August) Sen is the son of the Governor of the State of Bengal. Born into a world of urban, post-colonial privilege, he has been educated in the finest schools and brought up in the cosmopolitan whirl of Delhi and Calcutta. As is typical of his class, who speak and think in English, his range of reference is almost completely western—he invokes *Twin Peaks* on occasion, lipsynchs to Queen (done while driving, à la *Wayne's World*), uses Marcus Aurelius for his daily dose of wisdom from the classics. Just out of university, August has joined the Indian Administrative Service—the most influential and powerful cadre of civil servants in the country, the governing elite. As the film begins, August is sent off for a year's training to Madna, a small town in the backwaters of central India, where for the first time he comes into contact with rural India. An innocent abroad, brought into contact with the "real" India for the first time, August is in for all sorts of surprises, and, unable to deal with his reality, retreats into a world of daydreams and masturbatory fantasies.

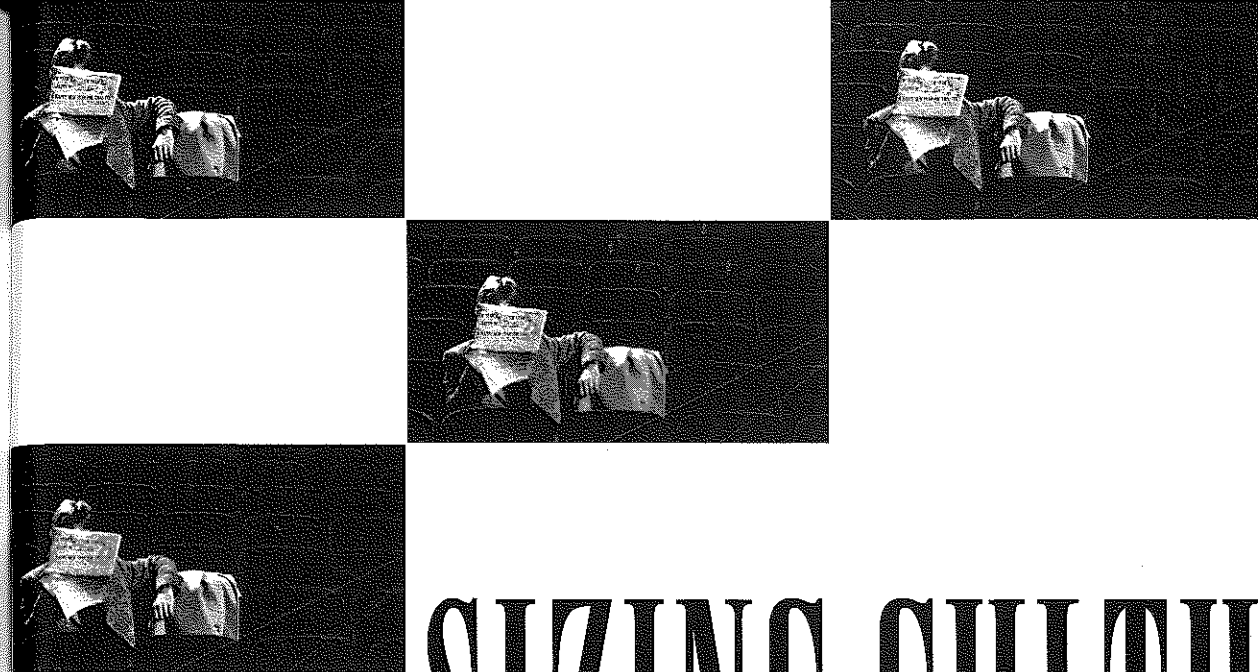
My quarrel with the film, in the first instance, is that the story is told from the perspective of a hip, urban westernized Indian and is designed to identify with equally hip, urban westernized Indians and Westerners. Everybody else comes off as being hopelessly provincial. It is a town populated by pompous bureaucrats and sycophantic minions, bored housewives, comic-book policemen and sinister servants, a nation of caricatures and "goons," to quote Sathe. What is particularly insidious about this is that the film has deliberately taken out the nuances and subtleties of the novel to achieve this effect. In the novel, August's central concern is the state of ennui that afflicts him—he has no real ambitions, no desires, and, recognizing this, chafes at his own paralyzing inertia. That is the reason for his retreat into himself. He is also fully conscious of and uncomfortable with his alienation from his own culture, but his level of perception that never translates to the screen. He says of Bhatia, a school chum also serving his time with the service in Madna, who is besotted with Western culture, that he is "just one more urban Indian bewitched by America's hard sell in the Third World." That line never makes it into the film; instead Bhatia is presented as a further validation of August's perceptions of the town and its people, and rural India by implication. *English, August* was made for Western audiences. It was shot in English (with the help of French financing) and there is no way that the Indian censor board is going to pass the film—with its nudity and salacious sex—to the Indian commercial market. It will probably be a great success in the West—unfortunately.

**A**nother film designed for the West and the elite art-house circuit is *Bandit Queen* by Shekhar Kapur. It was perhaps one of the most controversial films at the Festival. In what is probably a Festival first, there were reports of the real life heroine of the film threatening to sue the film's producers and the Festival if the film were screened. Word was, depending on who was talking, that she had either refused to see the film or that the producers had refused to allow her to see the film. *Bandit Queen* tells the story of Phoolan Devi—a sort of contemporary Robin Hood. Escaping from a history of poverty and abuse, Phoolan Devi

became the leader of a gang of men who led daring raids on towns and villages, and thwarted government forces for years. By the time she was finally negotiated into a surrender in 1983, she had achieved cult status and the title Phoolan Devi (Goddess of Flowers). She is now married to an MP and is running for office herself. The film is based on her bestselling autobiography and is a tremendous film in many ways, carrying an emotional punch from the opening frame that never lets up until the credits roll. Seema Biswas as Phoolan Devi does a tremendous job in what from all accounts was a harrowing role. Apparently she was so traumatized by a crucial scene in the film, where she is paraded naked in front of an entire village, that shooting had to be suspended for four months. The film is, it should be acknowledged, a sensationalized thriller. The energy of the film is fuelled by the sheer emotional rage of the sexually ravaged Phoolan Devi. The profound social and political circumstances—the tensions between castes, the fight over land that had as much to do with the gang warfare—are given short shrift. But then the film is really no more than what it was meant to be: an action thriller.

**O**f the documentaries, Anand Patwardhan's was the most compelling. *Father, Son, and the Holy War* is Patwardhan's ambitious follow-up to his 1992 documentary, *In the Name of God*—the vibrant film that documented the religious wars that erupted in 1990. *Father, Son, and the Holy War* attempts to trace the roots of the fundamentalist violence that has become so much a part of the Indian landscape. The documentary is divided into two parts; Part One, "Trial by Fire," refers to the fires that are burning up Indian society. In one chilling section Patwardhan interviews a brother and other men related to a woman who committed sati—the ritual self-immolation of widows that is now illegal in India, but that is becoming more popular wrapped as it is in fundamentalist fervour. The men have deified the sister for, in their view, her act of religious conviction. In another section, the filmmaker interviews a social worker who was savagely attacked and her husband killed in an apparently random attack. Punctuated by charred scenes of carnage, this section is disturbing, compelling; it is Patwardhan at his best. Part Two, "Hero Pharmacy," is more ambitious and works less well. Here Patwardhan looks at the cult of the machismo that has always been present in Indian society, but that is now taking on sinister ramifications. He looks at the roots of violence that have historic antecedents in the warrior society of the past and are now being newly affirmed by the Schwarzenegger/Stallone/Hulk Hogan school of machismo that has made its inroads into Indian culture. Patwardhan's over-all conceit is an interesting one, if a little facile. Five thousand years of patriarchy does not fully explain the sudden explosion of fundamentalist fervour that is now erupting all over the world. His skill as always lies in his capturing of the kinetic intensity and fervour of life on the street. If you are looking for real images of India, look to Patwardhan.

*Steve Pereira is the co-ordinator of Desh Pardesh, a South Asian cultural festival and a writer and artist living in Toronto.*



## DOWN SIZING CULTURE

In my current copy of the *Toronto Star*, I find the following item:

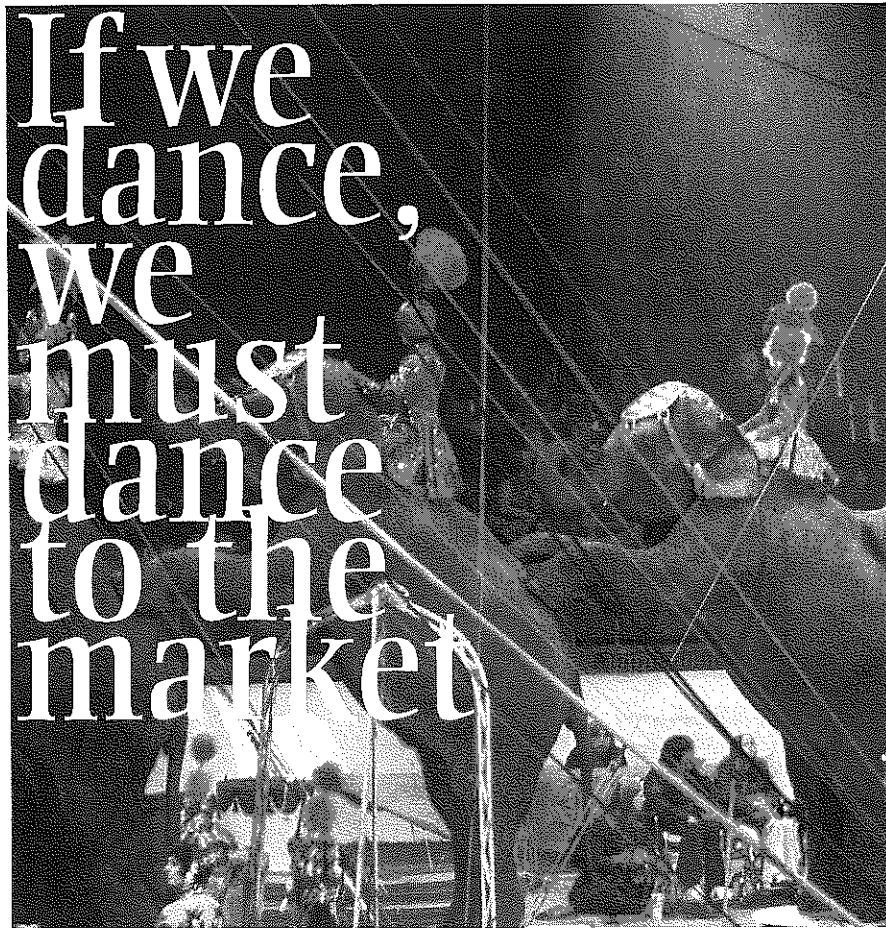
The most prominent casualty at the Jewish Community Centre is the Leah Posluns Theatre, whose entire 1994-5 season has been axed. The theatre, formerly designated as North York's official theatre, has been shut down indefinitely for the first time in at least 17 years.

The main reason is that JCC directors have spent a \$2.4 million endowment fund set up for the theatre to pay the operating costs of the centre. Bernie Ghert, president of the Jewish Federation, which is trying to sort out the centre's financial situation, says that without this support, the theatre has now become a serious financial burden. . . . Sources say staff at the Leah Posluns Theatre are outraged at what has happened. They claim the theatre has always been solvent, and the endowment fund—capital raised or donated by businessman Wilfred Posluns—should never have been touched.

(Henry Mietkiewicz, *Toronto Star*, August 28, 1994)

by Ioan Davies

# If we dance, we must dance to the market



If I had wanted to invent a news item to start this piece, I could not have done better. We have been told repeatedly by federal and provincial agencies that if we want culture (e.g., magazines, theatres, dance, film, etc.) these should be self-sufficient, that the government should have no part in the dance-shoes of the nation. If we dance, we must dance to the market. The saga of the Jewish Y shows how the market dances and ignores a large segment of its community.

In their urge to abandon the responsibility to govern, most governments in Canada, imitating the United States and Britain, have chosen to ridicule the idea that the state should have any part in funding any aspect of culture. Robert Fulford, using a state-subsidized network, organized a programme through the fall of 1993 on CBC's "Ideas" on culture and the market in which most of the major speakers argued against the state having any-

thing to do with culture. The programme did not, of course, include schools or universities which are integral to culture, and which are, in most cases, funded by public money. When we talk of culture now, we talk of the state backing off on its support. Yet the state spends increasing moneys on culture. In Toronto, the SkyDome was built almost entirely with state (federal and provincial) money, though it was made to look like a triumph of private enterprise. The Winter Garden Theatre was heavily subsidized and so was the North York consortium of theatres and concert halls. The O'Keefe Centre is currently being rebuilt with some state money. The figures here are astronomical by the standards of this magazine. Yet it is this magazine (and many others like it) which are being squeezed until the pips squeak. Why?

Two instant answers. Governments are not afraid of giving money in order to turn culture into a com-

modity to be sold to the highest bidder so that the spectacle is seen to be culture. It doesn't matter who brings the spectacle: we will provide the venue. Toronto must become the specular capital of the world, and hence we will get tourist dollars from those benighted souls in Buffalo, Rochester, etc. who hunger for culture. (So, too, with Caribana, Caravan, etc., which allow the multicultural segments of the city to focus their energies on an event rather than create a culture of engagement). The second instant answer is that governments have given up on the idea of providing subsidies by which those organic intellectuals or creative artists who are opposed to its everyday concerns might do their thing. The issue is not whether culture is downsized, but under whose auspices, and for what reasons.

In the Victoria Commonwealth Games the Australians came out on top because state and private funds worked together to make sure that they would be on top. In a recent visit to Kenya I discovered that one of the very few lively cultural centres was sponsored by the French Government. (France? but this is a former British colony). Every country is apparently under the gun because of the IMF, the World Bank and the Junk Bond crises of the late 1980s, but each works on different cultural priorities. It seems not to matter much whether accountants (such as Paul Audley in his report for the Ontario government or the more recent report, *The Business of Culture*, by the provincial cultural advisory group) produce figures which show how much the cultural industries, collectively or separately, make, the various Canadian governments decide that culture must be downsized. Whatever this means in terms of banks, factories, the service industries, in culture it means that the cultural products must come from elsewhere and that there will be no investment in human capital.

But to promote downsizing, there must be an ideology, a smokescreen, to make the entire venture respectable. The position of the loony right is clear enough and hardly deserves intellectual discus-

sion, although their power for mischief-making should not be underestimated. Their position, represented by the likes of John Crispo and the Reform Party, is a purely ideological one in which the market controls all and 'minority' views will ultimately be snuffed out because they will never control a sufficiently large segment of the "market." (This is coupled with a paranoid corollary that organizations like the CBC and the Canada Council are necessarily controlled by the "left" because they are subsidized by taxes).

Much more interesting, because they see themselves as the voices of the cultural establishment, are the columnists who have been totally sucked in by market rhetoric and anti-intellectualism. Fulford, Michael Coren, Andrew Coyne, John Bentley Mays and sometimes Bronwyn Drainie have made a job, over the past year or so, of bashing state subsidies for the arts, while Bruce Blackadair in the *Sunday Star* pathetically goes out of his way to denigrate anything Canadian in his search for quotable gobets from American magazines. The argument that they all advance, of course, is that internationalism is pluralism, that having imported culture raises our standards rather than making us a cosseted backwater. The curious feature of all this is that the examples used are invariably American. It is as if, in the funding of culture, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Britain, Spain, not to speak of the Low Countries, Scandinavia or Australia, did not exist. Pluralism, it seems, works between Canada and the USA, but not within Canada, and hence countries which have various ways of handling their internal differences are not important because they are not American. In Fulford's "Ideas" series there was not one voice from outside North America, and most were from the USA. Will Straw has argued that "the range of publications, sense of sustained dialogue and presence of shared concerns which seem to many Canadians to characterize cultural studies in Australia has offered a more appealing and viable model than those of either Great Britain or of the United States." In the United States, large foundations

(Ford, Guggenheim, Carnegie-Mellen, Fulbright, Rockefeller, etc.) act as surrogates for state sponsorship of the arts. In Canada we have none of these. The slickness of Fulford's or Coren's prose and their pretensions to scholarship barely conceal the ideological agenda that accompanies their work.

The other aspect of this campaign is the sheer anti-intellectualism of the exercise. In different ways over the past year, Mays, Fulford and Coren have weighed in with pieces which attempt to show that academic scholarship consists of unreadable prose organized by totalitarian thought police whose object is to denigrate great art and literature. Emily Carr gave occasion to both Fulford and Mays to take wild swipes against post-structuralist critiques of her work. In neither case did they refer to a body of work, but rather to single examples of writing which they disliked. That the issues have been thoroughly

debated in *Parallelogramme* and various gallery catalogues is never recognized. The critical sideswipes by these writers hardly invite dialogue, but rather present us with a set of executive flats against any politically engaged attitudes with which they disagree. The name of the game here is to denounce any politics that seems to come from the left, label it politically correct and academically obfuscating and then ask why the state should be funding such rubbish.

The ultimate problem with all this is that it is couched in the language of "common sense." But this is precisely what ideology is all about. Because, in the end, what this type of chatter does, for those who really do want to "downsize" culture, is to create the climate of opinion that makes it legitimate. The language may seem civilized, but the consequences are brutal.

Ioan Davies is a *Border/Lines* collective member.

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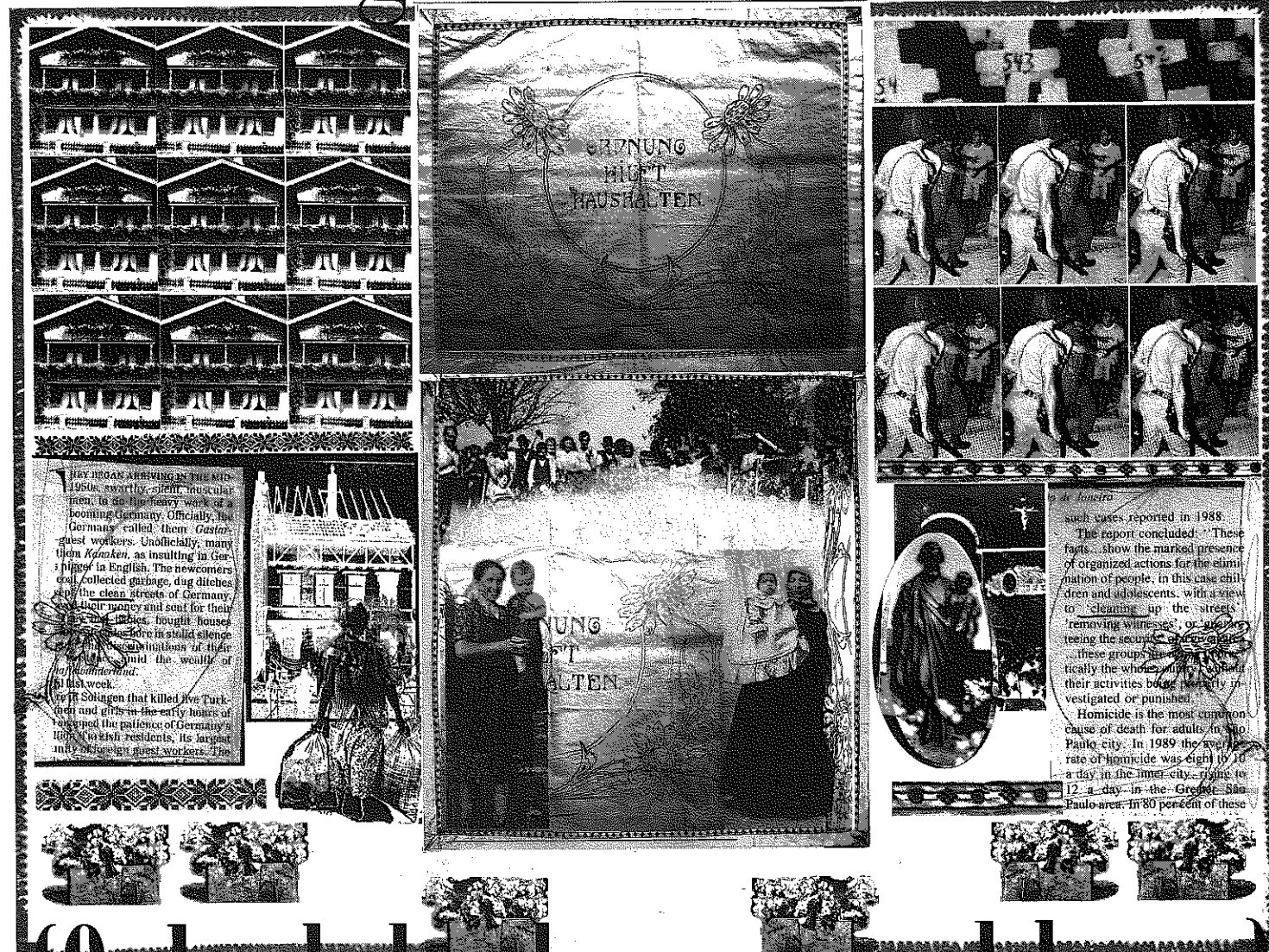
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# Ordnung Hilft Haushalten!



## (Order helps keep a good house)

BY INGRID MAYRHOFER

The idea for this large size billboard project originated in an attempt to deconstruct concepts and aesthetics of "order" in personal (home) and political (state) relations. Dealing with issues arising from my family's experience, the work eddies around my grandmother's obsession with cleanliness, her fear of God and submission to His will. Imagery of my grandmother's life, as an infant, peasant, mother, refugee, inevitably surfaced. The work also follows my family from Croatia to Austria, Germany and Brazil.

During my last visit to Austria in 1993 I found the countryside inundated by propaganda images of an orderly, clean, pure, authentic, folkloric homeland whose inhabitants are sympathizing ever more with the exclusionist politics of the neo-fascists and their charismatic leader, Jörg Haider. His anti-asylum slogan is "Austria is not Canada." Hundreds of thousands of Austrians had signed Haider's petition against accepting refugees (asylum seekers, foreigners). Among those who signed was my father, an ex-communist party member, who at the same time is providing free lodgings to a young Bosnian family in his small farm house. The contradictions inherent in my father's actions reflect a confused nation under pressure to define its identity. Neo-fascist cultural aspirations look backwards to an unspecific Golden Age; they willfully ignore historic changes in the ethnic make-up of the nation-state and its Slovenian, Slovak and Hungarian minorities. They also seem unaware that diversity of class and geographic regionalism are reflected in architecture and folklore.

In my Upper Austrian village, the present trend to build Tyrolian style model homes, complete with balconies and flower boxes, started around twenty years ago when Tyrol was pocketing most of the foreign tourist currency. When my foreign-born mother attached flower boxes - like the ones they had in her native Croatia - to the proletarianized peasant family Häußl 45 years ago, the villagers unanimously decided that she was wasting time. Now she has planters on the original structure, balconies with flower boxes on the addition, a mowed lawn in the front, and she can't keep up with the new neighbours. Balconies and flower boxes, together with a resurgent popularity of traditional dress, present an image of a generic Austrian identity which may be as successful in attracting tourists as in ostracizing foreigners. It seems that when it comes to the market, the trend can dispense with authenticity. When I left Austria 20 years ago, Germany had started to bastardize Austrian designs, and then sold mass-produced dresses back to Austria.

My grandmother, herself an ethnic German (Volksdeutsche) refugee after WW2, lived according to a profoundly regulated hierarchy of Catholic ethics and social ranking. In the course of searching for a biblical explanation for my grandmother's belief system, I came across a hint at ethnic cleansing: "...I shall pour water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols..." says God (Ezekiel 36:25) in the context of gathering His people "...from all the foreign countries, and bring you home to your own land."

The biblical intent to reunite a people that had become dispersed over centuries was given a new and sinister meaning during WW2. Rather than returning the ethnic Germans who had settled centuries ago throughout Central Europe to a smallish Weimar Republic, Hitler intended to expand his Reich to include all territory that contained pockets of Germanic language groups. Areas such as Siebenbürgen and the Banat-German peasant settlements since the Middle Ages: were in turn occupied by the Ottoman empire, the Hungarian kingdom and the Austro-Hungarian empire; they also went through numerous religious conversions.

My grandmother's homeland had once been part of the Carolinian Empire and was resettled after Prince Eugen's victory against the Ottoman Empire. Never having quite adjusted to Serbo-Croatian society, the Donauschwaben of the kingdom of Croatia, along with those in Siebenbürgen, Banat, Poland, etc. were more than supportive of the war that guaranteed them their language and other rights, and would bring them "home." "Heim ins Reich" was Hitler's slogan. (The cost of millions of human lives, more recently defined as collateral damage, was not mentioned.) Toward the end of the war, they realized that the Reich was not going to come to them after all, and millions fled to Germany, Switzerland and Austria, where they were not welcome. Of those who did not want to give up their lands, over one hundred thousand perished in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Poland after the war.

Some of my mother's family members went directly to Germany, where they quickly joined a prospering working class (later propped up by foreign "guest" workers) and received good compensation packages from the government. Austria was less generous. The refugees spoke a different dialect and wore 18th century style clothing; the women covered their heads and foreheads. Bus drivers had the legal right to refuse their passage. Having been landed peasants in Croatia, my grandparents became unpaid servants for a large farmer in Pettenbach, a village in Upper Austria. When my grandfather died, his family was moved to a refugee camp. My mother started working in a restaurant kitchen in the village where she met my father, then a young peasant son who had just returned from a USSR prison camp.

Ordnung Hilft Haushalten decorated many of my grandmother's

embroidered kitchen towels. Another slogan, *poor but clean*, was held up to us in my mother's family in order to set us morally apart from the majority in my father's village, where 'refugee' was an insult similar to *gypsy* and, at present, *foreigner*. My grandmother's Austrian-born neighbour suggested that my Oma's habit of changing her underwear daily might give people the impression that she was dirty. She herself only hung out one pair of underpants on the clothesline per week. In turn, my grandmother did not approve of the neighbour's habit of changing fathers for each of her children. They were both dirt poor, but my grandmother obviously had the upper hand; she was always clean, honest, hard-working, god-fearing and knew her place. Unfortunately for me, my city college typing teacher did not know the family motto and stereotyped me in with the other "stinking peasant girls."

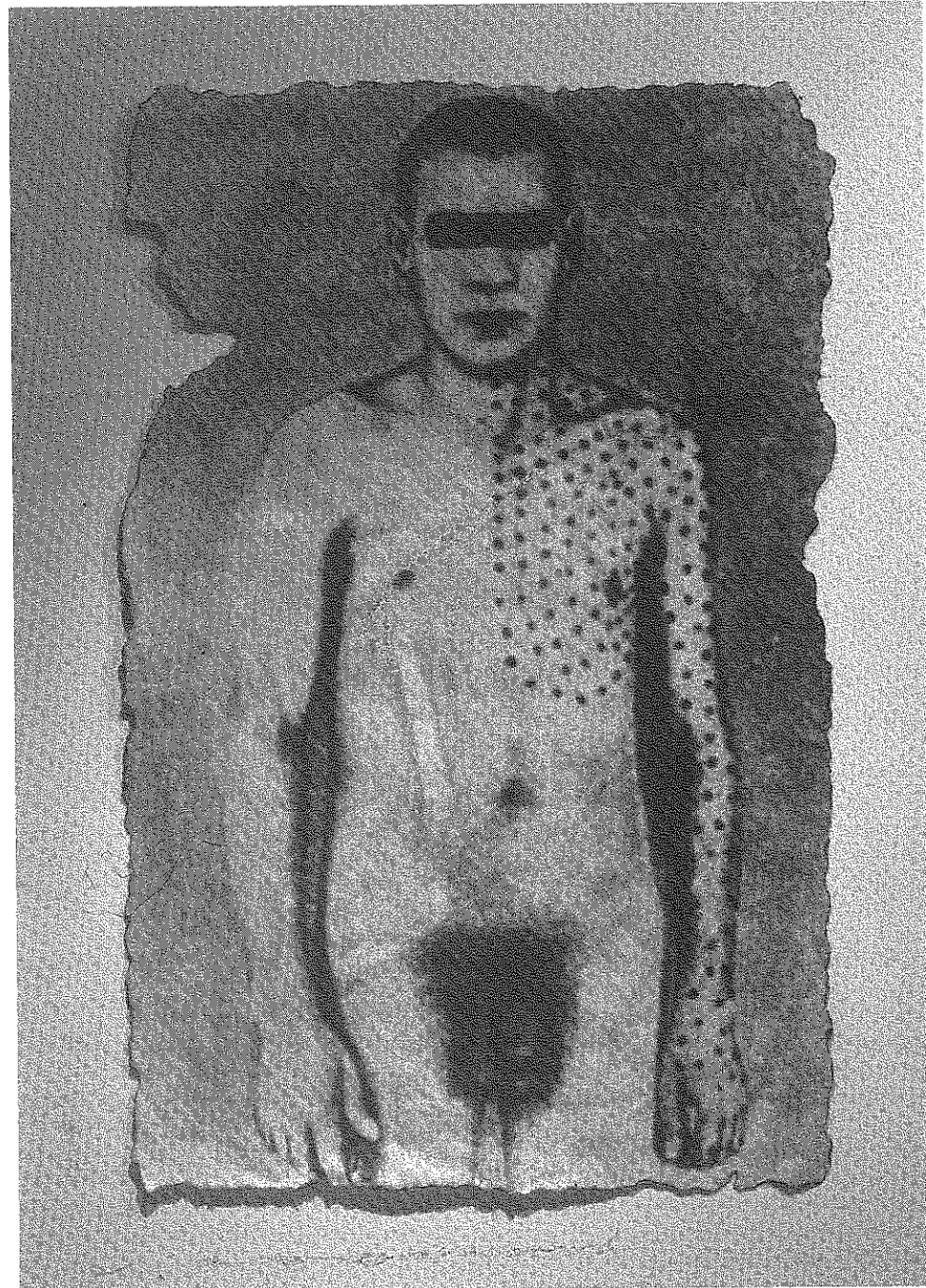
My uncle's young family was resettled in Brazil as part of an international effort in the late forties to alleviate Austria's *refugee problem*. My uncle was murdered by his brother-in-law over the down payment of a farm, his wife became a servant in Sao Paulo and the children were mistreated in an orphanage run by German nuns. They were our "poor" relatives, "poor but clean," and loyal to their Catholic Church because what the nuns had done to them "...wasn't God's fault." Our cousins in Germany sent their handed down clothes to Austria; we sent care packages to Brazil.

The only one of my cousins who married a Brazilian moved away from the German settlement of Victoria in Guarapuava, where the natives now live in hovels on the outskirts of the village. Brazilian graves are kept separate from those of German settlers because the natives don't keep their graves clean. My relatives do not believe Amnesty International reports of over one thousand street children murdered because they presented an eyesore and threat to business as part of the 1992 "street cleaning" campaign. German settlers believe that they were given unoccupied land. They consider themselves Austrian and consequently superior to the native population.

Working on the billboard, aiming at readability and intimacy at the same time - remember, this is my family I am dissecting - I came to the conclusion that the issues of refugees and displacement have not changed much since the exodus, nor have human attitudes. People leave their homelands because of famine, drought, deluge, war, repression. "The land which I gave your ancestors" is often claimed by more than one group. In the process of resettling 1.3 Mill Jews in 1948, 1.2 Mill Palestinians became displaced. Religious and historical accounts of migrations trace just about every tribe to another place. Mythologies also refer to the previous occupants as somehow less human, less clean, less chosen.

In its final state, the billboard returns to its original purpose: it presents order. Orderly houses in Austria are good for tourism; they show foreigners what is decent. My grandmother cleaned with soap and water; Germany's neo-nazis use arson to "cleanse" their territory of the unwanted. "Order and progress" is the motto of the Brazilian flag and the police are paid bonuses for assassinating homeless children who present a threat to profit. The separation of the settlers' graves from those of the natives allows for the established social order to continue uncontaminated into eternity.

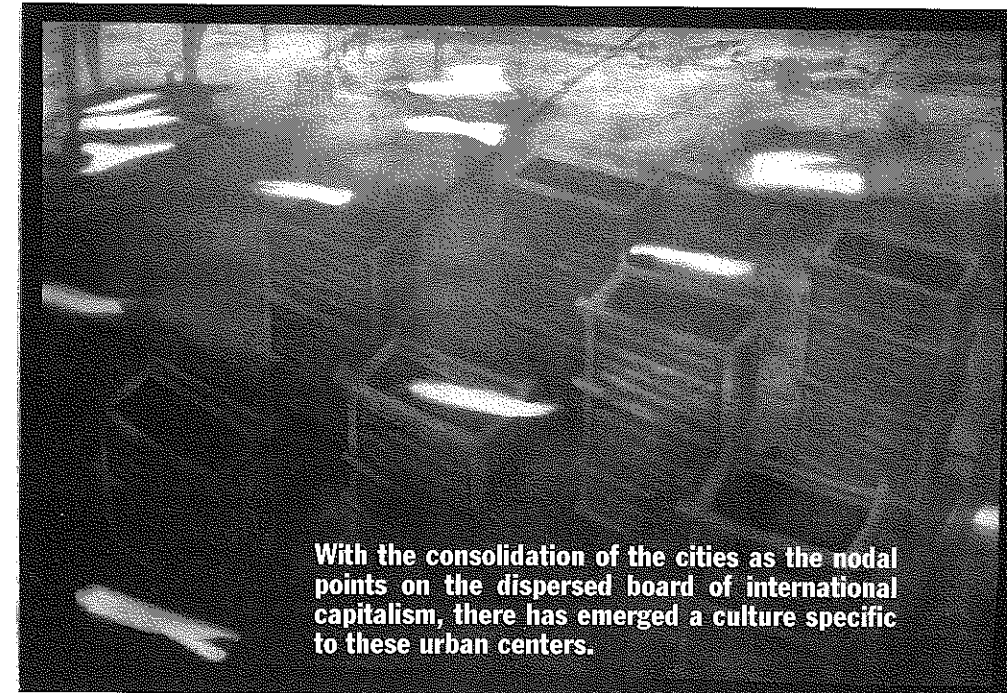
Ingrid Mayrhofer is a visual artist and member of Red Tree, a collective whose artistic and curatorial practise is based in cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary collaboration. The 9' x 12' billboard will be in Vancouver in February as part of Basic Inquiry's *The Spectacular State: Fascism and the Modern Imagination*.



"Let's Start Again," Andrew Olcott. From his show entitled "On Architecture and the Body," Gallery 44, Toronto, November 1994.

# The International Urban Elite and the Culture of Instant Transmission

The Nation-State is passé, the mega-city is omnipotent. Alex Ferentzy studies the implications of this shift.



With the consolidation of the cities as the nodal points on the dispersed board of international capitalism, there has emerged a culture specific to these urban centers.

What Stepford and Strange in *Rival Firms: Competition for World Market Shares* call a "privileged transnational business civilization," is not merely a passive recipient of social pressures, but is actively engaged in a process of creating culture; simultaneously delineating its identity and establishing barriers to deny entry to outsiders. While many such barriers are spatial and economic, others present themselves as the site of an invasive enterprise at cultural definition. In order to understand these endeavours, we have to clarify the changes and continuities between current practices and those that were apparent in earlier periods. In this way we will be able to specify what is new, what is an exaggeration of previous trends and what assumes a different form in relation to what some have called the informational mode of production.

**I am leading up to that most annoying yuppie phrase of "doing lunch" which goes further than merely having lunch and exaggerates the level of activity yet again.**

**In** his classic essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," George Simmel argued that the sheer number of formal, rational and abstract intellectual permutations that the urban dweller living in a money economy must perform as part of his/her everyday activity, combined with the frequency of encounters with strangers, fosters a mental attitude that is abstract, rationalistic and aloof.

Simmel emphasized the role of money in this process of fostering a rationalistic attitude. Insofar as money represents an abstraction that is rationally manipulatable and removed from where and how its value was produced, it lends credence to a notion of the existence of an abstract reality that is graspable in a rational and detached manner.

Language is the scene of an on-going power struggle that demarcates the above shifts; its refractions of meaning signal intimate political battles. Every GRRRRR knows this. As does that self-named Revolting Hag Mary Daly. To look at current words and expressions it is necessary, yet again, to get a sense of where they come from. Without this historical perspective everything seems simply to fall from the sky for no particular reason.

"To have lunch" is a linguistic device that involves the introduction of a verb between the participants in an event and the event itself. Perhaps it is more obvious in the way that "to dine" becomes "to have dinner." As the verb becomes a noun, it is objectified; it becomes the object of the action and the people become the actors. The event is mediated by the verb "to have" introducing an element of possessiveness into the

utterance. While the event is now possessed, it is also at a greater distance. What is this little possessive weirdness that has come between us and our dinner? In a society that validates the act of possessing it should not be all that surprising that the emphasis should be on consumption rather than on the experience, just as earlier the expression "to take one's dinner" expressed the aristocratic situation. **I am leading up to that most annoying yuppie phrase of "doing lunch" which goes further than merely having lunch and exaggerates the level of activity yet again. The doing of "doing lunch" operates as a signifier of a certain status and a way of being in the world which must push the object of its intentions more harshly than merely having can indicate.** It is also a magical act which attempts to make all the haphazard and non-instrumental aspects of life disappear. Perhaps most importantly, the agreement to do lunch marks a deal between parties that the event will be contained within the codifications of the professional elite. Though they are lunching, there is no need to fear that they will lapse into a temporarily passive state, that the social encounter might be non-instrumental. No, they will do it.

**Nike's slogan "Just Do It" universalizes this doing into an order-word. The command to "just do it" sets things rolling and organizes the world by giving this kind of senseless activity priority. It is in relation to this order-word that we must appreciate the rantings not only of GRRRLS and Hags, but also of those schizophrenics who look at the world-order, perceive the order-word, and transform it all into a new whirled order.**

This splitting of expressions into their component parts has other related effects, particularly in those areas of human life which can only be expressed in qualitative terms and which Simmel spoke of as "irrational, instinctive and sovereign traits and impulses." I am thinking of moods, emotions, desires, beliefs and delusions. We say "I want an apple" or "I want to have my nipples pierced" or even "I want to go home," and we abstract from these different desires a unified transcendental DESIRE. They are separated from their situation and then reunited in the abstract. Of course this is still Platonic thinking. The myriad different tables participate in the

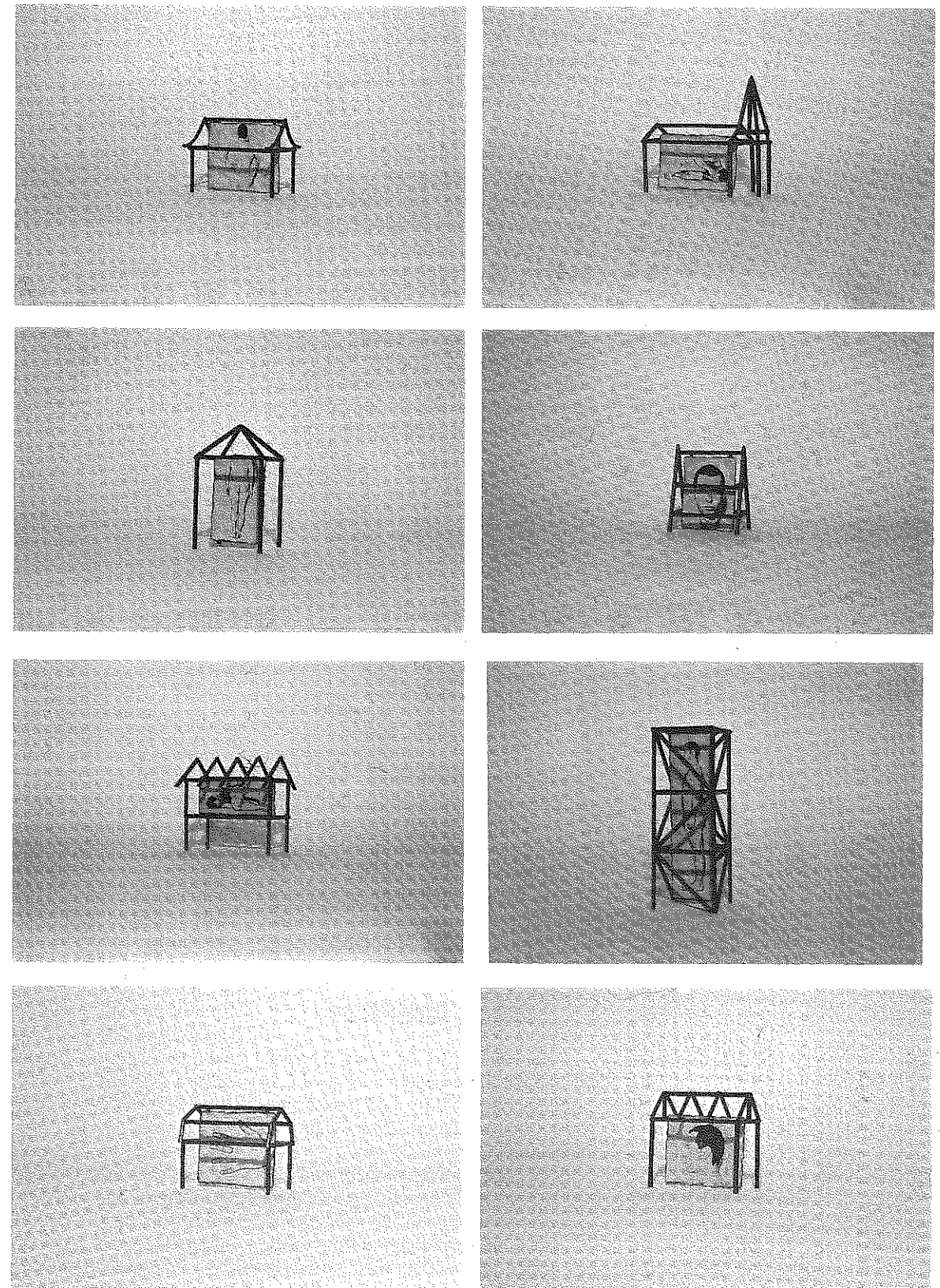
ideal form TABLE, which is their deepest truth, their essential nature. This is evident in the study of emotions where every anxiety, fear or panic is said to reflect the universal condition of which it is a mere imperfect particular. As we deprive everything of its validity outside of its adaptability to our technocratic purposes, we create a metaphysic out of our very alienation. And because it is a metaphysic it is apparent in our language and unavoidable in the world. We find that we cannot "do it" to the world or to others, without in some sense doing it to ourselves.

This process generates a plane of abstraction (the set DESIRE: Desire of apple, Desire of nipple piercing, etc.) which is available for analysis. We have seen a large expansion of the territory (moods, thoughts and emotions which are of no immediate use-value in our society) which is first problematized through posing the impossible question "what is your anxiety exactly like?"- and then reintroduced to the process of capital accumulation through the experts' privileged access to the plane of abstraction, where every anxiety, phobia and panic can be clearly delineated and approached in a rational, instrumental manner.

Though I deny their rational character, there is no denying that these planes of analysis have become what David Harvey calls "concrete abstractions." It becomes impossible to approach them from outside their cultural existence, from a purely rational denial of the validity of this presupposition. Quite the contrary, it is here in the power of their cultural existence that they must be encountered.

Such concrete abstractions are no longer understandable in the monolithic forms that typified modernism. They have moved, along with everything else, to a systems-theoretic rationality and so it should not be surprising to find a host of cybernetic terms invading the language of sociability. **I am thinking here of keeping in touch, touching base, networking and so on. They all affirm the importance of maintaining contact, of being a point on the grid. Within this grid there is a space of flows, and we delude ourselves if we think that there is no politics in this grid and that a little seduction will make everything alright.**

The vast territory that is problematized in this manner is also a cybernetic



"And We Built," Andrew Olcott. From his show entitled "On Architecture and the Body," Gallery 44, Toronto, November 1994.

grid because we have generated too many overlaps, too many nuances of detail for a simple asylum to hold. The truth of the asylum (as Jean Baudrillard and Donna Haraway have pointed out) is no longer in the seeing, but in maintaining electrochemical contact. Like the cybernetic chart of information flows, the individual is merely a point of contact, a point of possible feedback, and the new discipline is characterized by being on this grid, and having the truth of any specific point removed from localized access. This is why it is so important to be in a cluster. The point on the grid only makes sense in relation to the flows which surround it; without a decent cluster, these flows can be rerouted without the least consultation with the points in question.

that bar access to the undeserving or to discipline the body into conformity with the dominant aesthetic criteria. The points on the grid must be capable of subtle adjustments to the changing flows around them. As Paul Virilio writes in "The Third Interval: Critical Transition,"

**...with the revolution of instantaneous transmissions, we are witnessing the beginnings of a type of general arrival in which everything arrives so quickly that departure becomes unnecessary.**

**So today's training regimes—aerobics, treadmills, stationary bikes, step-climbers—display a sense of going nowhere fast, denigrating the importance of the journey and affirming the preparedness to change and to adapt to new circumstances. It is this general**

tion systems. The new professional-managerial class colonizes exclusive spatial segments that connect with one another across the city, the country, and the world; they isolate themselves from the fragments of local societies, which in consequence become destructured in the process of selective reorganization of work and residence.

In the movement from a money to an information society we see a reduction in the distance between the economic and the social. The number and complexity of abstract-rational calculations increase tremendously in an information economy since the means of information exchange involve learning technically specific processes (using automated tellers, logging onto databases, programming your VCR, playing video-games, etc.) and enacting them with considerable exactness. So it should not be surprising if each of the above elements is best understood as an exaggeration and an extension of earlier developments, rather than as an entirely new form. Taken together, however, they do present a distinct cultural complex which takes its meaning from the shift to an information economy and reflects an attempt to legitimize the views of those groups that have privileged access to the new technologies and its social-economic organization.

The emerging international urban elite expresses its alignment with the dominant orders of the day and is continually poised to re-align itself along the possibilities of its flexible specialization and, from there, to transmit its functional imperative unhesitatingly, with no internal resistance, all the while presenting itself as a clear, smooth package of this same political positioning; it is refined and capable of the most subtle transmutations of its aesthetic or ideational nature. The quest is to be fully immersed in the flows of the grid: to have the channels cleared of all extraneous material and to create a social space out of this same sensibility, to create a society of smooth transmitters.

*Alex Ferentzy writes about the cybernetic asylum.*

## I am thinking here of keeping in touch, touching base, networking and so on. They all affirm the importance of maintaining contact, of being a point on a grid.

The only way to follow through to the question of the truth of an experience is to chart a path back through the grid. But the grid can only be navigated with the kind of educational and social skills which make radical feedback unlikely, or in any case provide the individual with the kind of resources which make unwanted external control improbable, though as the history of psychiatry continues to prove, by no means impossible.

preparedness that is being inculcated with all our exercise routines. What kind of population is it that is always at the ready but never has to go anywhere? We are, it seems, being prepared for war. This is where Baudrillard has it backwards; it's not that the revolution has already happened, but rather that the war has already begun.

### Smooth Transmitters

The grid in question is not merely a technological-informational complex. It is being carved into city landscapes. According to Marvel Castells in *The Information City*,

The new industrial space and the new service economy organize their operations around the dynamics of their information-generating units, while connecting their different functions to disparate spaces assigned to each task to be performed; the overall process is then reintegrated through communica-

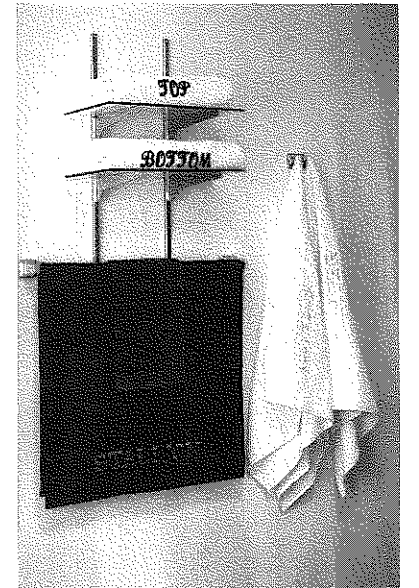
**the** demarcation of the point on the grid is not merely a negative technique, but also a positive one, involving the creation of culture as much as the denigration of uselessness. But the techniques of this delineation are different. They look different. Their purposes are different. To be sure, there are still all kinds of conspicuous consumption and the presentation of the self is increasingly packaged and codified into specific abstractions of our possible aesthetic aspiration. But it is no longer enough to erect institutions

## Excerpts and Commentary on Dreaming of You

Garnet Press Gallery,  
Toronto. July 2 - August 20, 1994

An exhibition featuring works from over 75 artists to celebrate and remember the charm, talent and generosity of David Buchan, Robert Flack and Tim Jocelyn.

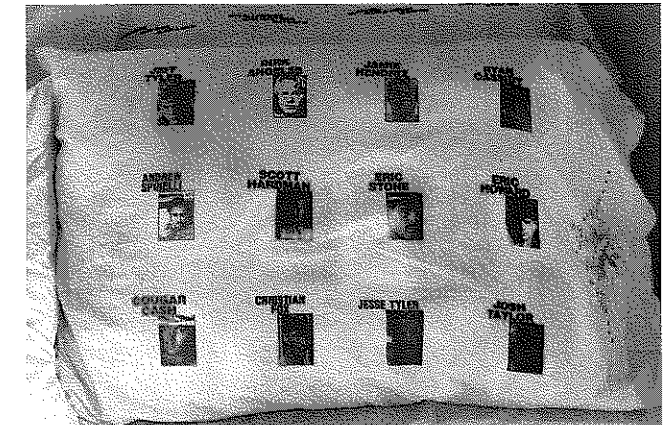
David Morrow's "Couplings," a parody of "HIS" and "HERS" merchandise, features towels embroidered with "TOP" and "BOTTOM" as well as "Stallion" and "Colt."



There are about 5 billion people in the world. 5 billion tears, assuming the average tear to be 2 ml, would be 10 million litres of warm salt water. Cry me a river.



John McLachlin's "Slumbering" parodies promotional merchandising tie-ins (usually aimed at children) of television programs and movies. Here pillow cases have the images (head shots) and names of current gay porn stars.



Hamish Buchanan in "Mourning Cap-Veil of Tears" has taken a cap (recent staple of young gay fashion) and attached a veil to it. Definitely haute couture rather than the off-the-rack prototypes of Morrow and McLachlin...

by Steve Reinke



# The Hanging Man:

A Report on Homelessness in Germany

Patricia Pollock Brodsky

**d**uring the summer of 1993 David Brodsky and I spent five weeks in Germany. It was our first visit since before the Wall came down. We travelled all over the country, talking to people in an attempt to gauge their mood in the aftermath of unification. One of the most noticeable changes was the vast number of homeless people everywhere.

**W**hat had caused this explosion in homelessness? What has the government done to alleviate it? And what have the homeless and their supporters tried to do on their own? Before I address these questions, some political facts about "post-Wall" Germany may be of use.

The well-documented euphoria that erupted when the Wall came down soon dissolved for many people into anxiety and bitterness. People in the west with whom we spoke used terms like *Anschluss* (roughly, "entry") and "occupation" to describe what had happened to them. Westerners saw that despite the promises of Kohl and the CDU, they would be paying a lot for the changes, while in the former East Germany it's clear that many have lost more than they gained, including housing guaranteed in the constitution. Unemployment, at 7.4% nationwide, reaches over 50% in some parts of the five new eastern states ("January Unemployment Figures..." Kretschmer), where many people found that their jobs and their companies had simply been abolished by the new government.

Other factors at work include the rise of openly neo-Fascist organizations, and an alarming increase in anti-foreign and racist incidents ranging from harassment to murder. There has been a huge influx of refugees, from Third World countries and from war zones such as Yugoslavia, who came to Germany because of its liberal asylum laws, which are now under attack from the conservative government. There is also a large emigration of ethnic Germans from Poland and the former Soviet Union who by German law have a right to citizenship. In this situation the powerful soon began setting the disadvantaged groups against one another. Right-wing recruiters play upon the anger and fear of those at the bottom, and some, including homeless people, have expressed resentment towards those seeking political asylum, because the latter are automatically given housing while their cases are pending.

The strong popular reaction among the Germans against racism, violence and tacit government encouragement through inaction has been badly underreported in the American press.

Everywhere we went we saw graffiti supporting foreigners, urging solidarity with refugees and with striking East German miners. Many said simply "*Nazis raus*" ("Nazis out"). Even official organizations displayed posters with messages like "Cologne without foreigners is like the Philharmonic without music." Thus racism and xenophobia are being addressed clearly and strongly by the people. Public reaction to homelessness is not always so clear, nor so gratifying.

Politicians, particularly on the right, have chosen to make it appear as if the main cause of homelessness were a flood of foreigners into the housing market. But the factors I mentioned have at most exacerbated the situation and given the media a useful symbol to play with. As the majority of left commentators on homelessness in Germany make clear, the real root of the problem is a familiar combination of government policies, ranging from ineffectual to pernicious, and a real-estate market allowed to rage out of control.

Alex Vitale, in a recent issue of *Z Magazine*, makes a statement that could be applied virtually unchanged to the German situation: "Government at all levels, the media, and private foundations continue to conceptualize poverty as a personal problem with a personal solution while ignoring the structural economic factors that have created widespread homelessness."

But many of the homeless themselves, resisting the forces that would set them against one another, insist that the causes do not lie within the individual or the victims, but within the system.

In fact, the new wave of homelessness in Germany is a direct result of the great affluence of the 1980s and early '90s. As more people can afford, and demand, larger and fancier places to live in, those on the lower end are eventually squeezed out of their homes entirely. Germans on average live in the smallest number of square metres per person since the end of World War II. A comment by a spokesman from the German Realtors' Association shows the prevailing attitude: "There is no housing shortage, only an increased demand for luxury and a group which can't be served by the market." That is, there's no shortage, just people who can't pay the rent.

The single greatest complaint is that affordable dwellings have all but disappeared from the lower end of the market, as old buildings—sometimes whole neighbourhoods—are bought, gentrified, and sold to new buyers at inflated prices. Some neighbourhoods have joined forces to try to resist the enforced modernization of their homes and their subsequent eviction, but it's hard to fight the speculators, supported as they are by German law and the prevailing values in Bonn. German tax law favours such speculation. Much of the government housing subsidies go not to renters, but to landlords. And high depreciation allowances, among other things, encourage unscrupulous developers.

The situation of those fearing eviction is particularly hard in the new eastern states. Under G.D.R. law, no one could be evicted. Now renters face not only drastic rises in rents, but the added threat of western investors buying up property cheaply, or of former owners coming back and laying claim to houses that they or their relatives owned before the founding of the G.D.R. in 1949, or even earlier. There is no clear legal opinion on the rights in such cases, and current renters and owners rightly fear that they will simply become the "victims of history"—that is, of capitalist opportunism. There are currently enough of these cases pending to keep the German courts busy for decades.

Figures on homelessness vary. In a country of 80 million people, estimates range from 1 million homeless to over 3.5 million, if in addition to people on the street you count those in temporary or substandard housing, those in women's shelters, and the over 100,000 drug and mental patients who could be released but are not, because there is nowhere to send them.

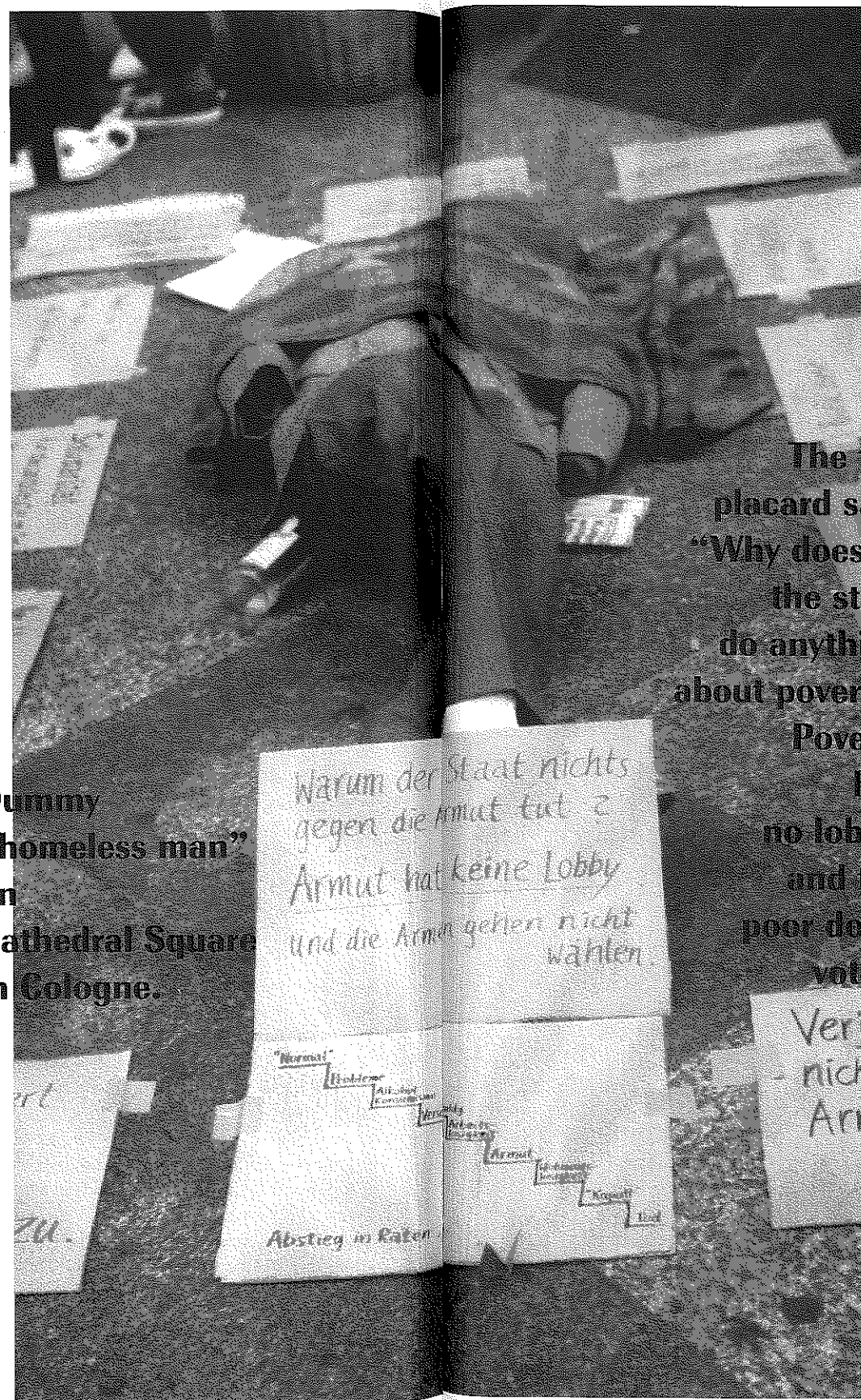
There are a variety of so-called alternatives open to the homeless. The very worst off sleep on the street, and in parks, subway stations,

underground garages and public toilets. But there has been an increasing tendency of municipalities and businesses to hire private guards such as the notorious "Black Sheriffs" of Munich, to chase people out of these areas, with dogs and clubs if necessary. In many cities people have banded together in *Wagendorfer*, squatters' villages of abandoned cars, converted vans, gypsy wagons and construction shacks. In Berlin one such village stands in what was once the no man's land along the wall. Some cities, notably Frankfurt am Main, have negotiated with squatters to provide them with alternative sites for their settlements. Hamburg provided toilets, a cook, a wagon and social workers. But these gestures are rare. In some cities the homeless continue to seize and occupy empty buildings, a practice that began in the late '60s. But there are fewer and fewer houses to be had, as gentrification proceeds.

The "temporary" dwellings, provided by federal and local governments include shipping containers, abandoned barracks, industrial sites; Cologne even put an unused Rhine ship at the disposal of a homeless agency. The most common procedure involves housing vouchers that allow a person to spend the night in selected cheap hotels and rooming houses. The landlords of these places have a reputation for brutality and exploitation; some are known to be pimps. Others simply make a profit by charging exorbitant rents, since the government picks up most of the bill. The number of nights allowed at any given place is limited. Critics complain that these government policies keep the homeless on the run, unstable, dependent and without hope of staying anywhere long enough to become part of a community.

In addition, during the last ten years the federal government has almost entirely withdrawn from the construction of subsidized housing. Very few new apartments are being built—estimates of the shortfall range from 1.7 to 3 million—and almost

Dummy  
"homeless man"  
on  
Cathedral Square  
in Cologne.



The top placard says "Why doesn't the state do anything about poverty? Poverty has no lobby, and the poor don't vote."

none at the lower rent levels, or with government control. Those dwellings that are subsidized initially can go onto the open market after ten or twelve years, at which time the landlords can sell them at a profit or renovate them, kicking out the renters in favour of a more affluent clientele. Such yuppification of neighbourhoods is a major source of homelessness. Even people with "normal" incomes often can't find a place they can afford. In addition, Bonn has recently made a number of cuts in social welfare benefits, which naturally hits people without a place to live the hardest.

A variety of self-help and advocacy groups have been formed, many of them created by the homeless themselves, out of a recognition that it is futile to hope for a solution from those who had created the problem. These alliances tend to see the situation in the same light as Alex Vitale saw it—as a structural problem that demands structural changes to solve it, addressing not only the lack of housing, but the lack of work, money, educational opportunities and health care. (People on the street in Germany have a life expectancy ten years shorter than the national average.) These groups demand that lodging be made a constitutional right, not a commodity. In a strong statement in 1993, the German Federation of Labor Unions blamed deregulation and privatization in the housing market, and demanded rent ceilings and affordable living space for all, under permanent government control!

In addition to actions directly aimed at obtaining housing, a number of initiatives have been undertaken to raise consciousness and fight passivity. Several films have been made by homeless people, dramatizing their situation. A number of German cities have restaurants run by and for the homeless. These are not soup kitchens, though they too exist. At these restaurants, the homeless eat for less or for free, while the public pays a higher, though still reasonable

price. Besides engaging the homeless in a constructive activity that uses their skills and brings in some money, the restaurants bring them together with other citizens around one table, where they can talk to one another and dispel the prejudice that grows out of ignorance.

Two of the most important forums for the homeless have been theatre groups and publications. One theatre in Cologne, which rehearses in an occupied house, considers itself the "fuse on the powder key of homelessness." In Berlin two groups, called The Rats and Under Pressure Street Theatre, present plays specifically taken from life on the street, and try to educate audiences about homelessness. Among the effects reported by participants are an increased sense of self-esteem, self-discipline and above all, a desire for political action.

The publications vary in size, circulation and quality, but all attempt to provide a forum for the homeless to air their grievances, share vital information and survival tips, and reach out to "normal citizens." Some, such as the Cologne magazine *Bank Express*, publish poetry and fiction. (In a recent issue a satirical poem called "Frankie, Go Home!" protested a performance by Frank Sinatra at 350 DM, about \$220, a ticket.) Other papers, such as *von unge*, *Adler Express* and *Casa nostra* [sic], are wholly of a practical nature. Some of these papers report on a wide array of subjects such as racism, prisoners' rights and the special problems of homeless women. One writer recalls Hitler's attraction for the thousands of homeless and jobless in the 1920s, and makes a plea for solidarity and resistance to such appeals today.

While in Cologne this past June, we witnessed several kinds of symbolic political actions. Cologne Cathedral is at the heart of Cologne. Next to it on one side is the main railroad station; on the other are clustered the city's principal museums,

and a block away is the Rhine River. Normally this high-density area is full of commuters and tourists. In recent months the large square in front of the cathedral has also been the site of a more or less permanent encampment of homeless—they call themselves "Berbers"—and of almost continuous demonstrations and confrontations between them and their advocates on one side, and the city, the business community and officials of the Catholic church on the other.

One of the most visible and provocative elements of their presence on the square is the so-called

some consistent topics: nuclear weapons, racism, the attacks on foreigners, world peace and homelessness. Some address German militarism, such as the poster showing Chancellor Kohl in Bundeswehr uniform and asking "Which of these soldiers need not go to war?" They commemorate atrocities old and new, and are written in German, French, English, Arabic, Hebrew, Gaelic, Russian and Lakota.

The city and the church hierarchy want the wall torn down. They say it frightens tourists, desecrates the Cathedral, and is bad for busi-

## APPEAL FOR SOLIDARITY

**According to the judgement of the State Court the church authorities have the right to remove the Wailing Wall from the Cathedral forecourt. We are appealing against the court decision. You may send a letter against reviction of the Wailing Wall to: Cathedral Chapter, c/o Domprobst Bernhard Henrichs, Mararethenkloster 5, D-50667 Cologne. Copy please to: Klagemauer, Domkloster 4, D-50667 Cologne.**

*Klagemauer*—the "Wailing Wall"—a structure made up of wires strung from poles, and hung with hundreds of hand-lettered cardboard placards bearing messages from people from all over the world. I spoke with the "keepers of the wall"—two homeless men, who live in sleeping bags on the square, and guard the structure, as well as sell postcards of it and talk to visitors. They began the wall during the Gulf War, as a forum for people to express their anger and frustration. Everyone was invited to write a message, which was then hung on the wires, until a wall arose. The two men, Jupp Riedel, who uses a wheelchair but is in no sense confined to it, and Walter Hermann, an artist, have maintained the wall ever since. Walter told me that the subject matter of the placards changes as people's concerns shift. But there are

ness. It has been attacked several times by neo-nazi skinheads and was rebuilt each time by Walter, Jupp and their friends.

The wall and the encampment are well situated for challenging and informing people who emerge from the train station onto the square. For this reason the Dom-Platte, the Cathedral Square, was selected for a major demonstration in solidarity with Germany's homeless population, held on June 25-26, 1993. This was the "Nacht der Wohnungslosen"—the Night of the Homeless—which included the mass action "Euro-Sleep-Out." People were invited to bring sleeping bags and stay on the square overnight to demonstrate their support of the homeless, and to publicize their demands for action. The Sleep-Out was scheduled simultaneously in over ninety German cities as well as in

**"Which of these soldiers need not go to war?"**

# Welcher von diesen Soldaten muß nicht in den Krieg ?



England and Ireland. Invitations were sent to all members of Parliament, as well as local politicians, public figures and the press. There were TV cameramen there, but by the next day the Sleep-Out had been upstaged in the media by a series of Kurdish attacks on Turkish establishments all over Europe. On the Dom-Platte that morning I found several hundred Kurds demonstrating peacefully against Turkish genocidal policies—a demo supported by a number of the same people who had gathered to support the homeless the night before.

In addition to the Sleep-Out itself, various events were planned to attract attention. There was a podium discussion with politicians from the Greens and the Socialist Party. A number of rock bands and the Grey Panthers Chorus donated their talents. Among the most striking activities were several examples of street theatre. First the organizers laid out a dummy, dressed as a homeless man, complete with wine bottle. Then they placed around him placards like those on the Wailing Wall, with messages specifically relating to homelessness. People coming around the corner of the Cathedral and stumbling on the "man" lying on the ground were challenged to join in the discussion.

A conversation I had with a homeless man who was looking on added another perspective. He was neatly dressed, gregarious and articulate; however, he wore no shoes, and carried his own open wine bottle. I asked him what he thought of such actions. His reply was that they were good as educational tools, but that they didn't go far enough. When asked what should be done, he said, "We should go to Bonn and blow the whole thing up."

The final act of street theatre involved a volunteer from the crowd. A young worker named Dieter was brought up a short flight

of stairs onto a platform and made to stand facing a construction fence in front of the Cathedral. One of the organizers began wrapping Dieter's body with black electrical tape, taping him to the fence. At first everyone joked, passing him beer and cigarettes. As the taping proceeded, people gradually realized that something uncanny was happening. Finally, when Dieter was securely taped to the fence, the platform was removed, and he was left hanging.

The crowd was very quiet. One of the organizers made a brief statement, fleshing out the metaphor which we had before us. This, she said, represented the state of the homeless in German society: abandoned, suspended without support, left hanging by the network of bureaucracies that should be helping them. The organizers had wanted to "hang" the man on the doors of the Cathedral itself, but had decided to use the fence instead. Even so, the symbolism of the "crucifixion" of the homeless in front of a church that just wanted them to go away did not need verbalizing.

It was almost dark by this time. A thin stream of tourists and homebound workers flowed into the square. Some mingled with the crowd to find out what was going on. Heated discussions continued. Some people began drifting away to find places to spend the night. Dieter was left hanging for another half-hour before he was cut down. The question on everybody's mind was, how long before the homeless would be "cut down" and become part of society again? Based on everything I've read and seen in post-Wall Germany, this will happen only when the pressure from the homeless and their advocates becomes intense enough that the system itself is changed.

*Patricia Brodsky is Professor of German and Russian, University of Missouri-Kansas City.*

by Gary Genosko

# red LONDON

## A TOUR OF WHAT'S LEFT OF THE LEFT IN THE U.K. ... A MAGAZINE AND MARX'S GRAVE

Lenin drove a 1921 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost. Among Lenin's precious things, it is less well known than his brain. Floating in formaldehyde, the latter has been poked, stained and sliced at the Moscow Brain Institute since his death in 1924. According to the pseudo-science promoted by German neurologist Oskar Vogt, brain morphology was said to reveal something of cognitive ability. But there was, in the end, nothing extraordinary about Lenin's brain. Soviet doctors would have learned just as much about Lenin's intelligence by examining his car.

Lenin's body will soon, by all accounts, leave its glass sarcophagus in Red Square and enter the soil of St. Petersburg. If Lenin is buried, then one of the best advertisements for the science of pickling bodies will be lost. It is rumoured that the Scientific Research Institute in Moscow will offer the service for a mere quarter of a million US dollars. Happy customers abound: Ho Chi Minh, Georgi Dimitrov (Bulgarian Communist Party), Augustinho Neto (Angolan CP). Of course, Mao was embalmed and is still on display. The Chinese, like the Russians, guard their secret recipes. While the sale of Mao memorabilia abounds in his hometown of Shaoshan in Hunan Province, his eternal bath has not been offered to mere peasants.

The celebrated muralist Diego Rivera was thrown out of the Mexican CP in 1939 and began, if we are to believe recent revelations about his life, as well as that of his colleague and friend Leon Trotsky, to pass information

about Communist activities and Soviet involvement in Mexico to the FBI. He may also have been involved in the first failed attempt to assassinate Trotsky.

London is a gold mine of socialist ephemera. Mining of all sorts is, however, in decline in the U.K. Still, the dailies dally over the museum pieces of international leftism and report the latest scandals with glee. What were Lenin's last words? "Good dog." What is the name of the Ossetian nationalist head of the Committee for Stalin's Body who has recently demanded its return to its "native" soil in the Caucasus Mountains? Avram Dzhotseiev. The left would be wise to invest in a special post-Marxist edition of Trivial Pursuit. Instead, with the demise of print projects such as *Marxism Today*, we have attempts such as *Red Pepper* to "spice up the left". The deadline for making a pledge was December 10, 1993, and the first issue of the magazine is now on the stands (May 1994). Many investors in this project of the Socialist Movement came from the legal community and could claim up to a 45% tax rebate. Whatever happened to the tax-happy principles of the *Manifesto*? Is leftist culture now only a tax-avoidance scheme? In the tragicomic alphabetic guide, "A-Z of the Left," in *New Statesman and Society* (25 March, 1994), it is reported that Hilary Wainwright has raised almost \$300,000 for *Red Pepper*. *Red Pepper* is "not to be confused with *Socialist* [the] fortnightly newspaper launched by the Socialist Movement in 1991. Closed after 14 issues, having lost

\$125,000, most of which had been raised by Hilary Wainwright." It was only four years ago that *New Statesman and Society* lost the libel suit launched against it by John Major and Downing Street cook, Clare Latimer. Since that time it has staggered forward, and again finds itself in a crisis brought about by infighting among the editor, Steve Platt; chairman of the board, Duncan Campbell; and the investor, Philip Jeffrey, who saved the magazine. On another magazine front and in the name of the *New Internationalist*, Lenin announces that "With the NI we have the best Read Army in the world." The no-risk trial subscription "Plus World Map" has moved *Red Pepper* into the domain of Book-of-the-Month Club offers in the battle for hearts and minds.

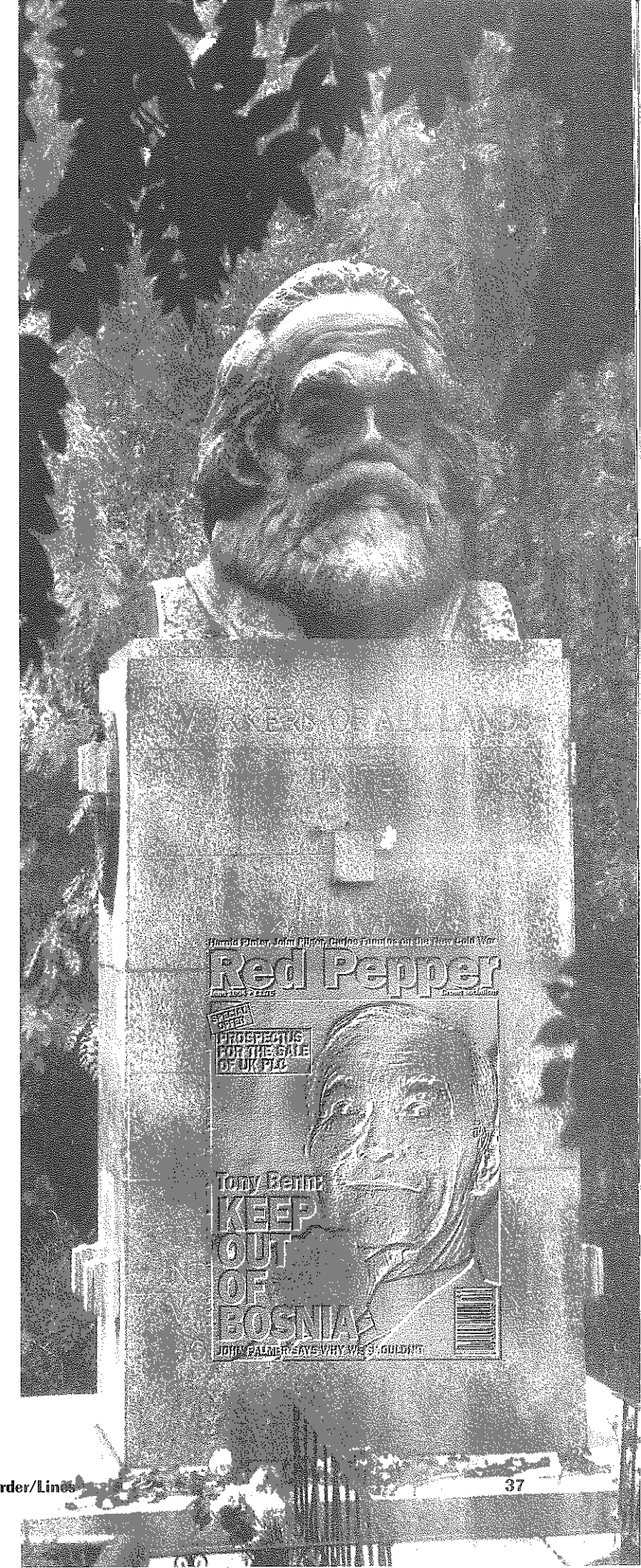
As it happens, *Red Pepper* is really a call for Green Socialism. Still inspired by such goals as that of a "classless society"—but so is John Major!—and "sustainable development"—a buzzword adopted by the most conservative international organizations to mean the continued exploitation of Third World resources under new contractual arrangements (sometimes called "free trade") and new informational regimes (genetic engineering and patent laws)—*Red Pepper* spices up the left with poorly digested borrowings from ecology. Its motif, the pepper, inspires recipes in the "Pepper Pot" (this month, *Red Pepper* and Lentil Soup) and "Pepper Pals" or personal ads (red hot, I suppose, if zoophilia is on the sexual agenda: "Choosy Pedigree Chum. My type seeks Lassie as very best PAL to share kennel"). Tony Benn makes yet another self-promotional

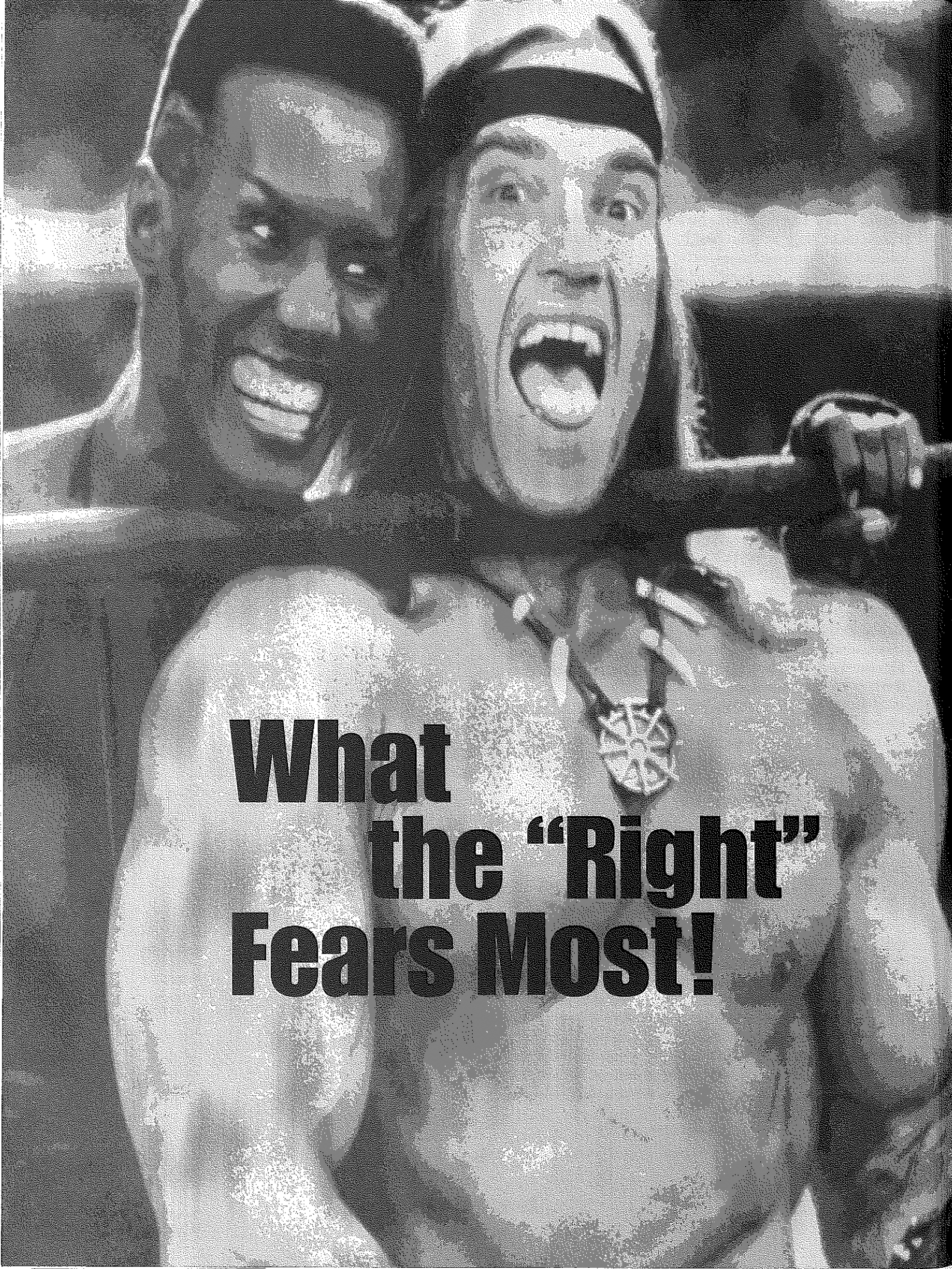
appearance, and Stuart Hall is reduced to compiling a single-page bulletin board of events and labour disputes (ironically called "Praxis"). The glossy centrepiece of the magazine is a remarkable parody of business culture and Torydom called "Prospectus For The Sale Of An Offshore Island, U.K. plc." Drafted by Kate Thompson, Tariq Ali and Christopher Hird, the Prospectus lays bare the cynicism of Tory politics as a corporate entity hell bent on deregulation—in the workplace, in planning, in financial services, etc. As brilliant as it is sad, the Prospectus is disturbing because it captures the everyday political and legal life of the U.K. Red peppers can bring tears to your eyes.

Everyone knows that London is rich in historic Marxiana. Marx's chair in the reading room at the British Library, and his grave in Highgate Cemetery—not to mention his flat on Dean Street just off Oxford Street (1951-1956)—attract numerous visitors. Gone, however, are the tour buses delivering party members from the Eastern bloc to Highgate for a glimpse of the massive bust of Marx that sits atop the impressive resting place shared by *Der Mohr*, "the Moor" his wife, their grandson, and daughter Eleanor. The sheer size of the bust makes Marx's moustache appear tusk-like. Few miss the irony that Herbert Spencer is buried close to Marx, reminding one of another famous British couple, Marks and Spencer. The English National Heritage Blue Plaques identify Marx's Dean Street flat (a site marked by the fluttering Italian flags of the restaurant downstairs) and Lenin's flat in Percy Circus, although he also stayed at 21 Tavistock Place in 1908 while he wrote *Materialism and Empiro-Criticism*. No Blue Plaque could possibly communicate Marx's or Lenin's experience of the arcades (Burlington or the Royal Opera) and the urge they must have felt to hum a tune or make merry—both of which were prohibited—while window shopping. One person's trivia is another's dissertation. Classics in the socialist-ephemera business include L. Muravyova's and Sivolap-Kaftanova's *Lenin in London* (1983), a record of all of Lenin's haunts, addresses, activities and attitudes towards London. More recent scholarly research includes Bob Henderson's detailed investigation (in *Solanus* 4 [1990]) into the books consulted and donated by Lenin during his visits to the British Museum Library between 1902 and 1911.

Stalin's local pub in Ewen Street, Whitechapel, The Queen's Head, is still a rough place. Another Ewen Street haunt of Russian revolutionaries in London, The Crown and Woolpack Pub (unfortunately lost to fire) at the corner of St. John Street, was the site of Bolshevik congresses in 1905 and 1907. The Red Lion in Soho on Great Windmill Street was the site of the Second Congress of the Communist League from which the *Manifesto* emerged in 1848. Lenin may be in ruins, as the Krovers say, and London Walks may no longer offer socialist-inspired outings in these post-Marxist days, but red London continues to struggle against the forces which reduce history to a series of saleable ephemera. Even in these difficult times the flowers on Marx's grave are usually fresh.

Gary Genosko is a member of the Border/Lines collective.





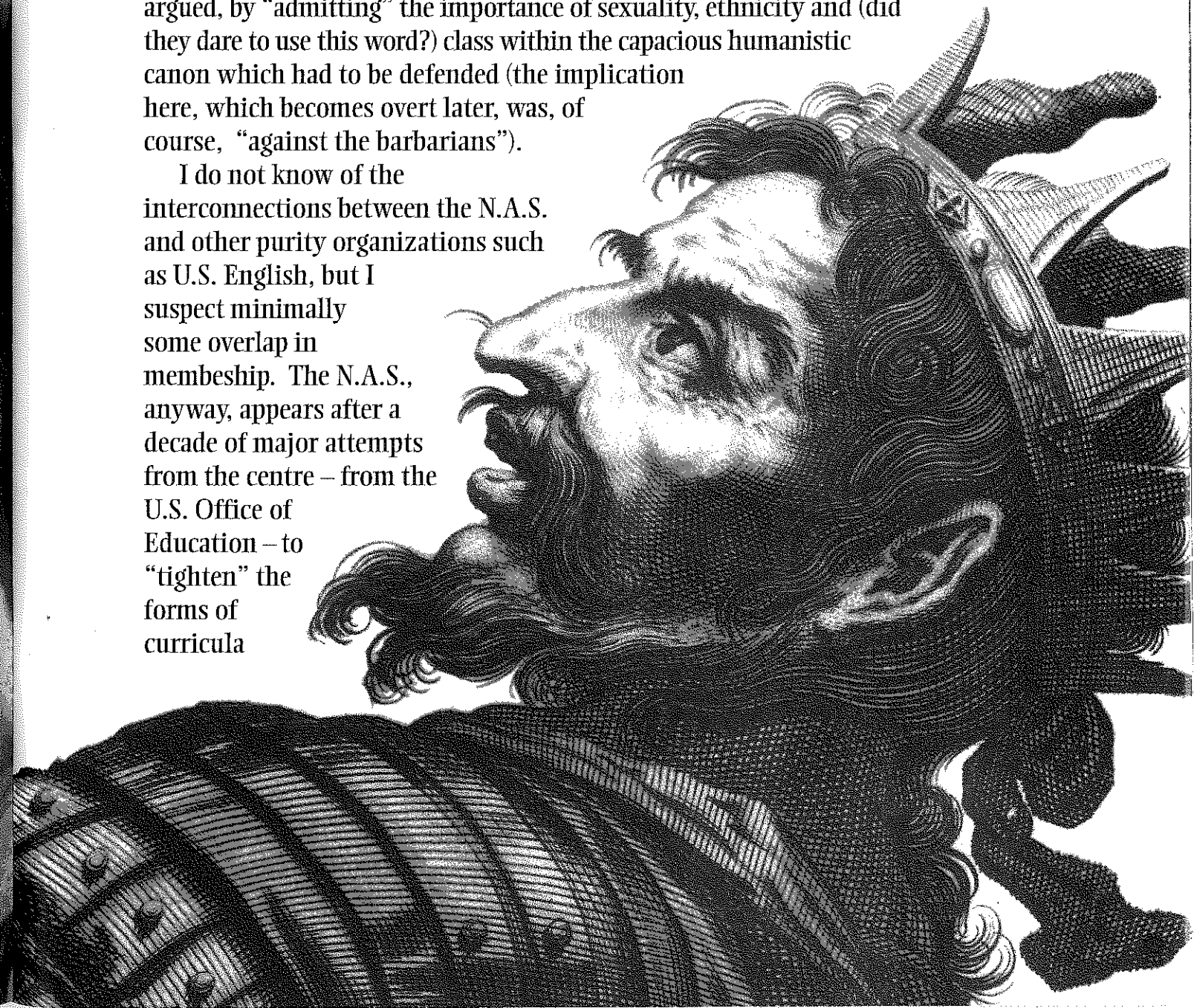
# What the “Right” Fears Most!

**Philip Corrigan examines the way the “Right” tries to turn loss of privilege and loss of institutional control into a universal social malaise.**

## **I** Fear(s) of Loss

In the Fall of 1990, I came across the first (as far as I know) advertisement for the National Association of Scholars (from a recent *New York Review of Books*). The language of that advertisement – although somewhat contradicted by the subsequent activities of the N.A.S. (including their newsletter *Accuracy in Education*) – could not have been gentler: All these debates about inclusive/exclusive canons, curricula and courses could be dealt with, they argued, by “admitting” the importance of sexuality, ethnicity and (did they dare to use this word?) class within the capacious humanistic canon which had to be defended (the implication here, which becomes overt later, was, of course, “against the barbarians”).

I do not know of the interconnections between the N.A.S. and other purity organizations such as U.S. English, but I suspect minimally some overlap in membership. The N.A.S., anyway, appears after a decade of major attempts from the centre – from the U.S. Office of Education – to “tighten” the forms of curricula



and pedagogy operative within U.S. schools. Not dissimilar movements have also appeared, of course, in Canada. All such movements are criss-crossed by different (often violently contradictory) value-objectives. Many, for example, took for their contrasting Other what they regarded as the "most successful" social formation – often this was Japan – and compared themselves negatively. Other organizations, with a directly economic character, surrounded and contradicted the moral-authority values of organizations like the N.A.S. by valorising skills and training (rather than values and education).

All that being alluded to, I do not propose to signal the seething (and thus violent) psychodynamic contradictions within ruling classes and their middle class allies, except to argue that this is, along with so much else, a source of their *social fear*. These

white male heterosexual middle-classes within the Occident are not, of course, alone in their historical experience of social fear. What is new is that They had not expected to feel afraid. They had thought their version of what the historical experience of the post eighteenth-century world meant (for Them), that is to say their *History*, their *Culture*, their *Literature*, their *Art*, and – to be sure –

their *Education*, represented all that was The Best of the West, and it was theirs, and it was good to Behold. "We" (a term which I find increasingly unusable!) have all been *taught* to embody quite different forms of social fear. For some (a distinct minority) it is a mannered fear: easily recognizable as a mania, white, clean, mannered and utterly distinct from the labours of the millions that make that life possible! We have to stop thinking of manners and morality as features which are supplied or applied from without, added to/worked upon already somehow distinct (social) bodies and their articulation within powered relations and structures of authority and command.

**A**re our social fears quite different from Their social fears? Indeed not! They are dialectically interlaced: the more we (differently) question, interrogate, demand, the more fearful They become; the more They police and survey and regulate and structure, the more we are (differently) made to be afraid. We all (differently) bear multiple marks of being denied, and every such mark (learned often long after we have been so branded) is a scar, a wound. We carry within and around us multiple bodies. The frail skin,



## II On the Historical Experience of the Occidental Upper and Middle Classes

As various statistical data show (across all OECD countries), the upper 10-15% of the earning/wealthy population have done very well indeed in the last twenty years. Nonetheless, Edward Luttwak realized, in his sharp analysis "Why Fascism is the Wave of the Future," (*London Review of Books*) that the upper/middle classes are uneasy, feeling their citadels have been invaded and transformed.

All sorts of expectations have been interrupted, all sorts of "givens" are no longer given, a range of institutions no longer appear to be "their" institutions. The English *Sunday Times*, for instance, very stupidly described the National Union of Teachers Annual Conference, in an editorial, "The Barbarians Are No Longer At the Gate; They Are Inside Our Classrooms." The writers re/present in their social fears the wild thrashing around to find a cause—which cannot, of course, be the very specific de-socialization created by the allegedly new forms of capitalism ("making money") they so favoured. Not being able to name the economic (or the more complex range of political-economic institutions without which their God "The Free Market" could not last for an hour, let alone a day), They have to turn to a personalized enemy, a nameable enemy, an enemy with a face (*and a body*): The Enemy Within, the Other who has (somehow) Infiltrated us. "Us," note that these displaced (or feeling displaced) middle classes always claim to operate through the personhood of Nation/People. "Us-ness" for their historical experience is that it was all Theirs, it was Their country, it was Their culture.

Terrified of a future that is no longer Theirs (forget that the present and past was not really Theirs either, we are not talking rationality here!) and re/presenting the truth of a past (claimed as theirs) that never actually existed, they are caught in that trap so well analyzed by Wilhelm Reich with regard to

bones and physiology that enable us to keep drawing breath; the markers within and on that skin that enable differences "socially cultured" to work; and the markers of dress, realization, behaviour, manners (again) and varieties connected to the notion of appearance and (re)presentation – these are all governed by rules that we often learn (differently) by the historical experiences of those occasions when we (differently) demonstrate infractions of this (Their) social grammar.

I have never believed that what is at issue is the capture (read: regulation) of hearts and minds; what matters is how persons behave. Organizations of the Cultural Right (which is now so impenetrably involved in forms of governance that (1) we should not locate it *beyond* state forms; (2) we should thus recognize that what is taking place is a "Revolution in Governance") do not necessarily desire restriction (of access, of numbers, etc.) to their citadels. They want, however, to ensure that the "social grammar" of their commanding/ruling institutions works to continue to make Their rule(s) regular, reliable, respectable, rational – that is, normalised.

Fascism. They promulgate a restorationist myth: old values, old ways, Victorian values, Back to Basics, more "English" period dramas/old films from the U.S.A. with hardly a non-white face in them. They prefer Australian soaps on TV to two major English-produced soaps, *Eastenders* and *Brookside*, which, they complain, are too realistic; the latter engage black people/families, gay and lesbian issues, debt, violence, suicide, and so on!!!).

# Get A Head! Forget the Pain



## III

### Get A Head! Forget the Pain

Place all of this in two other spirals: first, that education is continuously argued as the way to "get ahead," yet the competition from myriad others (lower depths, outsiders, Others in general) is squeezing out "us"; second, no government can "deliver the goods" (or The Goodies). Governments complain that they are caught in the boom/slump cycle of capitalism. They are also caught in what historians of the early Soviet period called the scissors crisis: the more you make productivity, uh, efficient (lowering the necessary reproduction costs of labour as we old-fashioneds call it), the higher you raise the socially necessary support costs for such a working class. Thus, there is the required direct and indirect taxation to pay for such supports for life. Above all there is the reproduction of class society, whose work falls most heavily upon the non-males in any given society. So, the female-headed household becomes nameable, across the OECD countries, as the *cassus belli*, the cause of the social war that the middle classes feel themselves to be losing.

Unable, as I said earlier, to name any of this, They have to turn to culture (and more generally, morality) to name their fears, sotto voce, and *their* target populations: these barbarian others in "our" midst. This transfer of a possible social, economical, political or cosmological analysis to "the cultural" is hardly a new phenomenon, is it? Not only since Raymond Williams' mid-1950s analysis of *Culture and Society* but in any halfway-adequate analysis of any *struggle* the linked nature of cultural/political/

# Fearful Dangers/ Dangerous Fears

## IV Fearful Dangers/Dangerous Fears

economic/social relations and structures is obvious. When, for example, English women and men wished not only to read, but also to discuss, the Bible *in their own language* – in that premature Reformation we call Lollardy – their “criminality” was at first seen as that of heresy—a religious matter—but quite rapidly, and in an entirely paradigmatic manner, was seen as a threat to “the social order.” It took many, many years, until, as one Welsh Methodist explained to me, any person could stand before his or her God without intermediary.

So the social fear has always been there, long before a properly historically sociological middle class existed, the fear of radical desubordination, the fear of infiltration; hence dilution.

What is at work, in many forms, is a project of restoration. This entails both a claiming (clawing) back of what has been lost (for Them) *and* – inseparably so – the re-establishment of modes of social discipline and deferential obedience which they imagine to have been true in the “Golden Age(s)” They wish to restore. More bluntly, there is a sustained attempt to frighten the majority of people alive today. What they see as fearful dangers eventuate for the majority as their attempt to work out their dangerous fears upon the bodies of working women and men.

One pattern of this which has gone unremarked for far too long involves their utilisation of seemingly “Good Things” – against which nobody could argue: everyone should be “literate” and “numerate”; “more people” should have “better” education and training. As always (and again there are extensive historical struggles from which much must be learned) these seemingly technical/quantitative indicators are in fact “filled with a certain content,” they embody certain values. Most importantly is the use of “the numbers game” regarding “access” where the simple employment of general statistical indicators (as indeed with fiscal indicators of spending on X, Y or Z) can disguise radically changed social, structural and relational patterns. As the OECD found for the 1960s/early ‘70s “boom” in post-secondary education, it benefitted wider ranges within the middle classes. Analysis has also shown a stalling and regression in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s of the proportions of the excluded *majorities* in gaining access to a socially and occupationally significant post-secondary education. Where there have been changes within the social forum (and social grammar) of cultural production and educational provision they have occurred against massive resistance on the margins. This is crucial. For it is such changes at the margins (within what they claim to be their culture and their educational institutions), which are taken to be so devastating, so threatening, so indicative of the “new barbarians” and the “coming anarchy” that a new Crusade or twenty must be launched to “save Civilization”!! We are, thus, dealing with an Imaginary, a fantasy, *and that is why their fears are so very very dangerous.*

There is a second set of dangers for the majority of the world’s people. Late capitalism’s frenetic, modernizing,

monetarist impulses cannot, in their own terms of morality, preserve or protect *any social relation, institution or structure from an economic (cost-benefit) judgement.* Thus the very institutions that symbolize and embody the heart of the civilization They are so fearful of losing are also subject to a social critique. Hence, there occurs the contempt for politicians and bureaucrats and what I want to call the “making brittle” of official politics. Since they have been the first to seek increased productivity (by extending the working day and increasing the intensity of labour) *and* to deny that anyone has the right to “a job for life” *and* to argue that citizenship is really a form of consumerism, it is no surprise that questions of value for money, productivity and so on are raised about *their* institutions and *those* who occupy positions within them. This, too, is dangerous.

## V Finale: What (Once Again) Is to Be Done

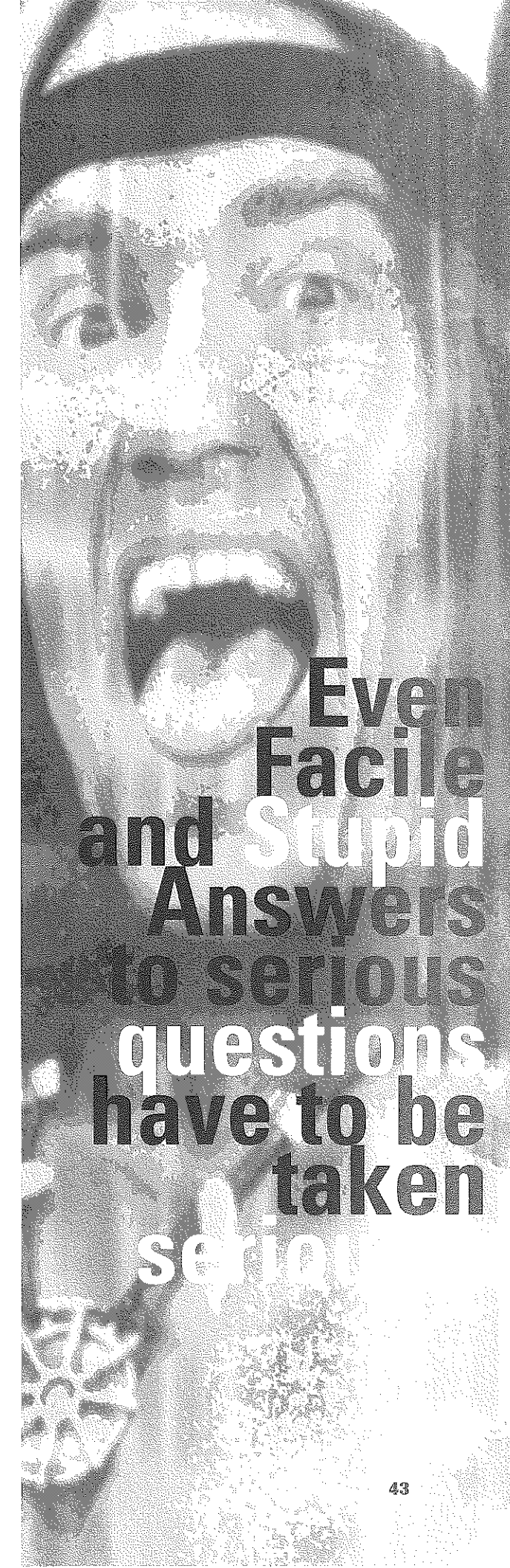
While They talk of the fact that Their radicalised monetarist capitalism would produce, through a trickle-down effect, a rise in well-being for all, there has been a bloody deluge of laws, rules, regulations, administrative inspections and constant re-constructions of our lives, both in varieties of work-situations and in the range of social assets/providing institutions. In England, to take the example I know best, there have been 144 Acts of Parliament since 1979 reforming/changing Local Government and, over the same period, there have been 800 new pages of Statute Law on Education. A third area of massive legislative activity has been the “reform” of trades-unions and work-place relations. The consequences of these changes in terms of the constant re-working of social relations and structures is what we have all been living through.

What began as a Cultural Revolution, then required (after 1983) massive Institutionalization, has now (after 1990 or so) entered a phase of Permanent Revolutionising. Within this roaring hurricane the plaintive calls for Victorian values, Back to Basics, Civic Values, and other *standards* of moral regulation appear somewhat ineffective. Also different devils are conjured up. Worried about “crime”? Why, it’s the fault of the parents, or the teachers, or the schools, or the religious bodies, or the television, computer games, films, videos, pop music, youth – ah yes, that’s it, it’s the fault of youth that they are, um, youthful, well, sort of . . . Well, dammit, it is somebody’s fault! Nothing to do with poverty, insecurity, fear, loss, unemployment, flexibility of labour regimes, withdrawal of social provision – no, *not at all:* on that They are very clear!

As Lenin once put it, even facile and stupid answers to serious questions have to be taken seriously. When both capitalism and their way of life, their civilisation, appear not to be working, they will only cope by naming causes external to the contradictions within capitalism (as a way of life and death) and civilization. Unable to face the evil at the heart of capitalist civilization, their thrashing around becomes wilder. Whole peoples can be condemned, can be erased from the new world dis/order, a world in which, fearfully for them, there seems to be no order and those who wish to give the orders are not infrequently disobeyed.

The only strategy against the cultural right must remain that of “in-and-against”: a defensive strategy that is also quite militantly *offensive* (in all senses). To make the contradictions sing, to make their mythologies dance, to allow the celebration of differences rendered as strength and not as disadvantage.

Philip Corrigan is a writer living in Exeter, England.



Even  
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# Foucault, The Conference Subject: regulated, defined and quartered

by Mike Gane and  
Nicholas Gane

The London "Foucault Conference" was widely advertised as an opportunity to "engage with, review, debate and develop the Foucault Legacy." It attracted an unexpectedly large audience: instead of the anticipated 250, over twice that number attended, some 25 from overseas. Anticipatory leaflets everywhere talked of the importance of "the Foucault spirit." It was soon evident that a central question was going to be the possession of the spirit of Foucault. The many Foucault clones already had the body.

What can one say about the first speaker, Francois Ewald? Immaculately dressed and groomed and "Director of the Foucault Centre in Paris," he presented Foucault as admirer of Gandhi. We listened in astonishment as the new image of Foucault unfolded: Foucault interrupted the vast spaces of time through the disruptive word, the word which fused past and present.

James Miller, author of a widely read intellectual biography of Foucault, next read a long paper on the "problems of the philosophical life." The audience, expecting fireworks, was astonished to learn that "to be a philosopher entailed living one's life in a certain way." Foucault was important because he wanted to restore the ancient project, "know thyself." Instead of talking about Foucault, Miller argued at length against Rorty's intelligent rejection of this idea. Why, asked Miller, did Diogenes Laertius think it important to know that Zeno liked green figs and sun bathing? Clearly it shows that Zeno lived the contemplative life! When we look at Foucault we can draw on Jean Starobinski, said Miller, for here we have a life which is a "continuous melody"! At the end of his life Foucault had arrived at the hope that all of us could live the philosophical life; it will be the day we all become "continuous melodies." He cited Foucault: "Why should the lamp in the house be an art object, but not our life?" While Rorty would regard this as absurd, said Miller, it is certainly in line with Ralph Waldo Emerson's "never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat: up again, old heart." Were the audible groans from the audience expressions of disappointment or collective gasping for oxygen in the claustrophobic lecture hall?

Colin Gordon, looking uncomfortable in smart suit and tie, spoke haltingly from brief notes - seemingly taken from his own recent publications. At last some discussion of Foucault; yet the effect was amazingly bland, even bloodless. How wise Foucault was! And how balanced Gordon's assessment! The microphone was next passed to Kate Soper. Had it been turned down before? Her voice was of one possessed. It was raspingly loud. Foucault's work is simply devoid of reference to women's feelings. His conception of the subject is an unquestioningly masculine one. His later work is abstract and offers no solution to the question of power and resistance. Perhaps to have expected some attempt to relate Foucault's work to these questions in feminism was expecting too much. The main speakers, Ewald, Miller, Gordon and Soper, presented such long papers, they effectively used up the time planned for questions from the floor. Resistance? None here. Only ressentiment.

Air! Water! Refreshment! The crush to get out and to get some liquid was accompanied by disgruntled murmurings of disbelief. Stuart Hall was there as non-speaker, and was heard to mutter "strange! strange! bizarre!" But the worst was perhaps yet to come: the meeting rooms for the seminar sessions after lunch were full to overflowing, well beyond any fire or health regulations. Opening the windows was not possible since the London traffic simply drowned all communication inside; but keeping the windows closed meant the temperature soared well beyond 40 celsius. The sessions we attended (a modest selection from those on offer) were extremely mixed in interest and quality. John Rajchman asked whether Foucault had been buried by liberalism. Michele Barrett outlined the difference between Foucault and Marx: Foucault critiqued materialism, class interest, progress, ideology. She then discussed the problems faced by feminism in dealing with Foucault's notion of bio-power, especially his refusal to describe the emotional content of experience.

Thus what of the conference? Mark Perryman, the main organizer, boasted, "The bald old man would have been proud of us. An indication of the interest provoked by the conference was that one bookstall sold more than eight thousand dollars worth of books." On the evidence of the conference, one could ask just how many people ever really understood Foucault, or what he was doing. The "Foucault Conference" staged what might be called the Resurrection of the Subject known as "Foucault." Had Foucault been there of course he would certainly have wanted to talk about something else, but who raised this, the dangerous legacy? Perhaps Mark Perryman is right to think of organizing a new conference for 1995 on "Postmodernisms," for this conference effectively reinterred Foucault's old bones: RIP.

*Mike Gane teaches in the Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leicestershire (UK). Nicholas Gane is taking his MA in sociology at Warwick University.*

"exsited/cited/sighted" from "Bound by Contradiction,"  
Shelagh Keeley and Andy Fabo. Design by Andy Fabo  
and Victoria Scott. Text by Annette Hurtig.

sited

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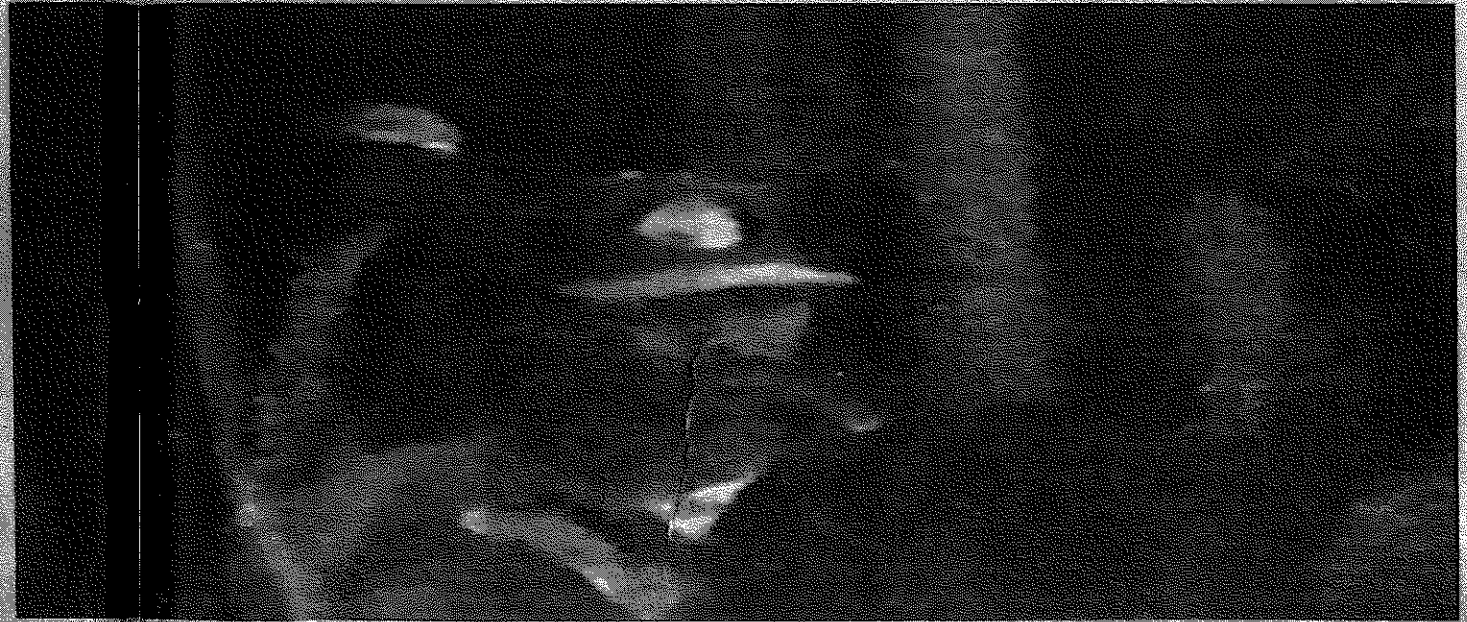
Two tapes  
from the  
conference  
are  
available  
from

Mark  
Perryman,  
28 Wargrave  
Avenue,  
London  
N 15 6UD



# 'Urban terrorism' blamed in cafe killing

Wanted: These men caught on video



## Urban Confections

by M. Nourbese Philip

**Between a rock and a hard place. It's a position all too familiar to Blacks, and the aftermath of the recent robbery and shooting at the Just Desserts restaurant poignantly, at times starkly, positions them there yet again.**

Shock and consternation are my cliched responses when I first hear of the robbery. Black or white I wonder anxiously, but at 7.30 in the morning the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) is being coy and giving but the barest of details. A few hours later, upon reading the newspapers, my worst fears are confirmed. The police are looking for four people—all young, all male and all Black. The repercussions to this particular crime are going to be severe—I feel it instinctively.

During the days that follow I listen avidly, obsessively even, to the radio. The air literally crackles with venom and vituperation as callers vent their rage over the airwaves. Lax immigration rules, being soft on criminals, Black crime, and the easy availability of guns: these are but some of the reasons given for the crime. Deportation, the keeping of crime statistics, the lifting of citizenship, gun control: some of the solutions. It becomes difficult at times to tell the difference between the audience of the CBC and

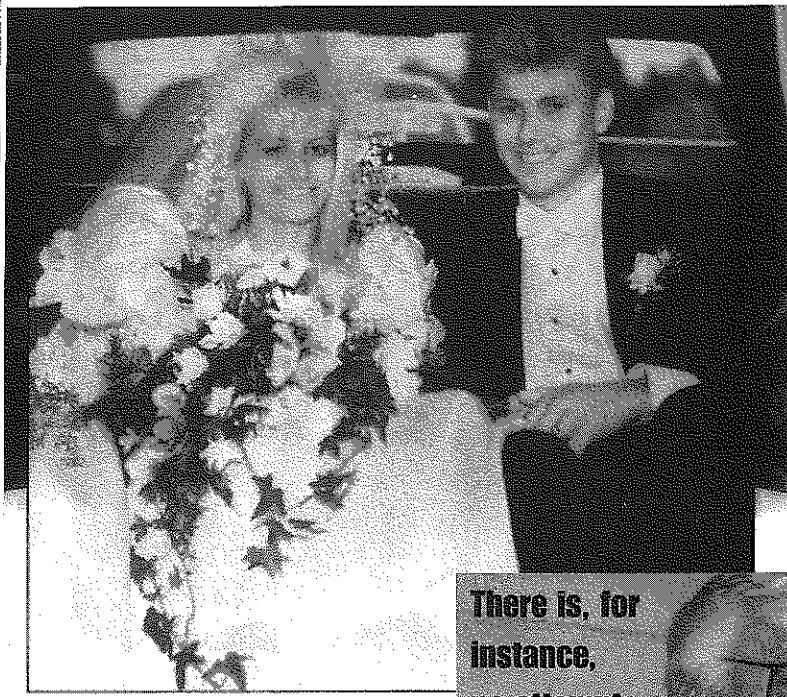
that of other radio stations. Wherever you turn the dial, the anger and hostility towards Blacks are the same. (The only variation is that some people preface their statements with disclaimers such as "I'm not racist but..." before going on to expound their racism.) Interspersed among these comments can be heard the voices of Blacks passionately disavowing any responsibility for the crime.

**B**arely able to control her hysteria or conceal her hatred, one vituperative caller to the CBC's Metro Morning demands to know where the Blacks are now. She is one among many who assign a group responsibility to all Blacks for this crime. As if we carry a collective burden—a shared guilt for all actions of all Black people. *Where are the Blacks now? Where we always were—going about life the way most Canadians do—working, studying, playing, trying hard to remain employed, raising children—generally doing the myriad things people do from day to day. Where are the Blacks now? Where we often are - between a rock and a hard place. Trying to*

make sense of a killing which, like most killing, is senseless. And grieving for that young woman and her suddenly abbreviated life.

What is this collective burden we are being asked to carry; what the source of the responsibility that is being foisted on Blacks? Is it because the victim is white and the robbers Black? Not hearing the same kinds of demands made when both victim and perpetrator belong to the same race, it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid the conclusion that the groundswell of antipathy and revulsion against the crime appears to have more to do with *who* committed it - Blacks - and against whom it was committed - a white woman, and less to do with the fact that a senseless killing had taken place. It is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid the conclusion that the, at times palpable, desire on the part of white society to hold Blacks accountable and responsible arises because the killing is a cross-race killing. Because a Black man killed a white woman.

*Why doesn't white on white crime create the same consternation*



and the same calls for collective guilt? There is, for instance, no attempt to paint white society as a silent colluder in some of the most heinous of crimes committed by white Canadian criminals such as Clifford Olsen or Karla Homolka whose names reveal Northern and Eastern European ancestry respectively. There is no link made between the deviance of these and many other white criminals and their ethnic origin.

Why are African-Canadian communities held accountable for the criminal actions of African-Canadians, while European-Canadians bear no responsibility for the crimes of people who belong to the various ethnic tribes of Europe? The answer to this question leads unwaveringly to issues of race and racism.

How exactly Blacks should have demonstrated the responsibility that was being demanded of them was never made clear. Should they have marched in condemnation of the crime? Written articles and letters to the newspapers condemning the crime? Some Blacks did do that. Perhaps they should have put up a reward for the capture of the suspects, or offered their services to the police to help find these young men. Should Black leaders have made public statements? But which Black leaders and of which communities? The Caribbean community in general? Or should it only be the Jamaican community?

Canada is no stranger to the imposition of collective guilt. Being Japanese in Canada during World War II meant that you carried genes that defined you as a traitor; it meant that Japanese property could be stolen with impunity, and Japanese interned in concentration camps. Collective guilt, however, appears to apply

only to Others — Africans, Asians and Natives. Never to whites.

The challenge for Blacks in the aftermath of the robbery was how to respond to the upsurge and outpouring of racism in Toronto, challenge it as it so rightly should have been challenged, without appearing to condone a brutal act. As always, between a rock and a hard place.

How many times can a newspaper article tell its readers the suspects are Black? Too many times. Hypersensitivity on my part? Perhaps—perhaps not. I reread the article and notice that it is the combination of the description of the suspects' clothing—"dark"—and the suspects themselves—"black"—that succeeds in conveying the impression of overwhelming blackness. Why doesn't an initial eyewitness account describing the shooting as accidental ever appear again?

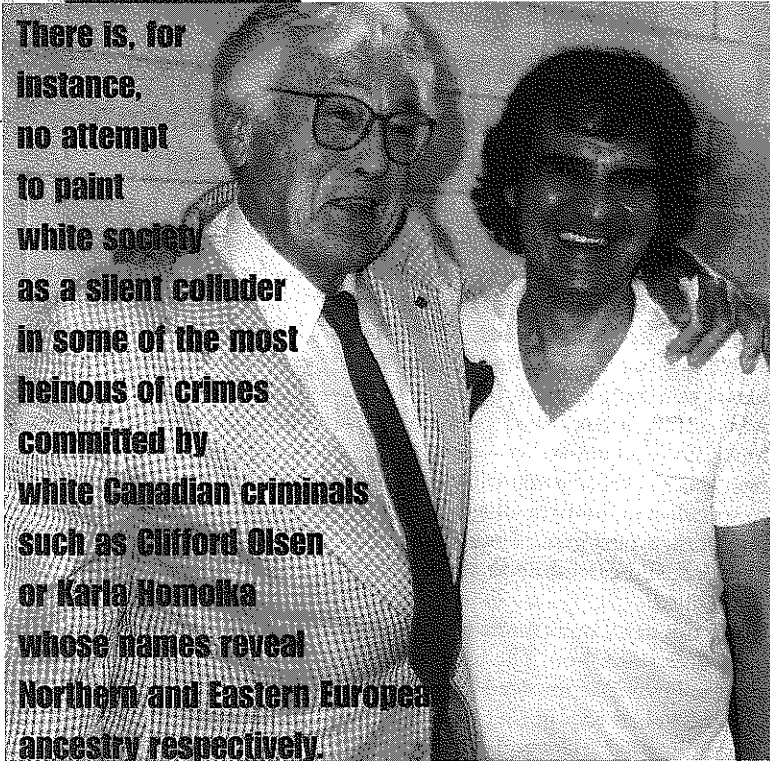
*I listen to news reports and talk shows, hear the demands for crime statistics based on race, for a more effective immigration system, for better deportation practices and, never having witnessed a lynching, I recognize the makings of a lynch mob all the same. I see the strange fruit, the dark fruit of Billie Holiday swinging in the wind—black flesh purpling at the end of a rope. Sons, brothers, fathers all with look-alike faces of the blown-up video photographs which the media have published. That these images are vague, blurred and indeterminate does not prevent the police from urging us to use them for identification purposes. Too bad there has to be a trial. And*

always the fear—of standing alone, being isolated—gnawing at the pit of the stomach.

Where are all the Blacks now? All over. I see them—brave young men and boys in groups of two or three—and know the media have succeeded because I *do* notice them, suddenly aware of their presence—their Blackness, their maleness. And if I notice them, how many others do and will not go beyond their Blackness or maleness? I also worry for them, aware of their heightened visibility.

I look more carefully at people's faces—assessing every nuance of behaviour and gesture towards me. Are they being more reserved, cool or distant? Is that anger I see? Conversations with Blacks quickly turn to the crime and its after-effects. A Black taxi driver, in Canada for 20 years, talks to me about his white fares making disparaging remarks about Blacks. He has been told he can't speak English, accused of bringing crime to Canada and told to go home.

**There is, for instance, no attempt to paint white society as a silent colluder in some of the most heinous of crimes committed by white Canadian criminals such as Clifford Olsen or Karla Homolka whose names reveal Northern and Eastern European ancestry respectively.**



Signs of normalcy are welcome—a trip out to Bruce's Mill to see the sap flow—so clear—almost tasteless and yet, under the pressure of intense heat, yielding the rich distinctive taste of Canadian maple syrup. So, too, under tremendous pressure we Blacks have produced great sweetness, but at what cost? But this is Canada eh, and spring is here and kids are out playing street hockey—any kid—all kids—Black kids in the Jungle (as an Ontario Housing project is called).

Did he play hockey?—the young man on the wanted poster on every street corner. Armed and dangerous with a bounty on his head—because he killed. A white woman. It could have been anyone who had been shot at the *Just Desserts* cafe. Anyone. But that is no consolation to her, her parents or her fiancé. It was her the bullet found. A 500-year-old bullet that had been speeding through the centuries to lodge and bury itself in her flesh—white flesh.

Nothing, however, that I have read about the killing of Georgina Leimonis indicates that her killing was racially motivated. It could just as easily have been an African, Asian or Native person who was killed—they all frequent *Just Desserts*. Nothing about the reporting of the crime overtly emphasizes its cross-race aspect, yet the crime quickly becomes racialized with the race and ethnicity of the suspects and the victims playing a significant role in its presentation by the media and its reception by the public. Not to mention issues of class and gender which were also at work.

**The facts as I know them are:**

1. In the early morning hours of April 6, 1994, three people hold up a trendy neighbourhood cafe, *Just Desserts*, on Davenport Road in Toronto.
2. In the course of the robbery at least one person is pistol-whipped; another is shot and eventually dies.
3. Video camera recordings reveal those committing the robbery to be young, Black and male.
4. The person who is killed is young, white and female and of Greek-Canadian background.

In these "politically correct" times even crime takes on a text book quality, neatly conflating race, class and gender—even sexuality.

**Fact is a Black man shot a white woman.**

*What if that Black man had shot a Black woman? Given the representation and portrayal of Black women as either asexual, all-nurturing Aunt Jemimas, or over-sexed vamps, the media would have had some difficulty portraying the image of sexual purity and innocence it was able to with the victim, Ms. Leimonis.*

*What if that Black man had shot another Black man? It would probably have been seen as Black on Black crime, possibly even a 'dick' thing.*

*What if that Black man had shot a white man? While race would still have been an element, the image of Black men preying on white women—on the sanctity of white womanhood—would have been absent. As a British judge once opined, for a white woman to be raped by a Black man *did* make the act more heinous.*

**Fact is a Black man shot a young white woman in a trendy, upscale establishment.**

*What if a Black man had shot a Black woman at Eglinton and Oakwood, Jane and Finch, or in the Jungle, all Black neighbourhoods, and not at Davenport and Avenue, a stone's throw away from the wealthy areas of Forest Hill and Yorkville? Seldom, if ever, have shootings in the former neighbourhoods—and they have happened all too frequently—or in ethnically defined neigh-*

bourhoods such as Chinatown attracted such intense media attention. Editorial and opinion pieces stress the class aspect of this particular crime, some arguing strongly that it is class rather than race that explains the difference in media coverage.

**Fact is a Black man killed a young white woman who was about to be married to a man.**

*What if that same Black man had killed a white woman who was lesbian? Could or would the media have portrayed images of her grieving fiancée and their aborted marriage in the way they did? Marriage is, after all, the culmination, if not the consummation, of heterosexuality in our society. An abbreviated life is always to be mourned. But not every abbreviated life can bear the same gloss, or is mourned in the same way.*

**Fact is a Black man killed a white woman and there is a bounty on his head.**

Blackarmedanddangerous—earrings in one ear—small dreads. His face stares out at all of us from the wanted posters on *Sun* newsboxes—armedanddangerous—wanted dead or alive. Strange fruit, dark fruit—blowing in the chilly winds of Toronto and as in some classic Greek tragedy the choruses take their positions, the one, shrill in condemnation, raising its voice:

- : it's always those Blacks committing crimes!
- : it's because Immigration is letting those people into our country!
- : it's because there are too many guns!
- : it's because of a lack of jobs!
- : it's because of drugs!
- : it's because the police have been hampered in their jobs!
- : it's because of Jamaican posses!
- : it's because we aren't allowed to keep racial statistics on crime
- : it's because—it's because ...

The hunt for meaning is on—trying to make sense of phenomena in a nonsensical world. What meaning can one give to Georgina Leimonis' parents who have lost a daughter; to a lover who has lost a loved one? What makes sense except a roar of anger against fate, against those who did it?

Call and response—in a threnody that mourns the death of one young woman and of hope for belonging of a people who have been here for over 200 years, the tragedy unfolds as does all tragedy—inevitably: the other chorus responds:

- : we didn't do it! we didn't do it!
- : we are not responsible!
- : we are good Blacks!
- : we are hard-working Blacks!
- : we are not Jamaicans!
- : we are Jamaicans but different!
- : it's the fault of those Jamaicans!
- : it's the education system!
- : it's racism!
- : we Blacks must take responsibility for this crime—for all crime!

The hunt for meaning: The strains of "Ol Man River" grow stronger and I recall how for 18 months prior to the opening of *Show Boat*, the media reported on how ill-advised and wrong-headed African Canadians were in their opposition to the show's production. Politically correct, censorship, Nazism, witch burners, too American, not American enough, a waste of time, a power grab: these were some of the media's responses. With few exceptions, opposition to the production was not understood and self-

dom sympathetically presented. How much did this unsympathetic coverage lay the groundwork of resentment against Blacks?—needing only the right set of circumstances to leap into flame like some tinder-dry forest touched by a match.

**I**t is because we understood how fragile and precious our public image is—how little control we have over it; how little the positive acts of our best affect us as a group, and how much the negative acts of the few shape public opinion about us—that we opposed the mounting of *Show Boat*. It is unfortunate that the validity of the opposition to the show had to be proved in this way.

Further, the successful conviction of Black activist, Dudley Laws, in a classic sting operation the week prior to the robbery, offered more proof, to those who were looking for it, of the intrinsic criminality of Blacks.

The revelation that Oneil Grant, one of the suspects in this robbery, was a landed immigrant who, as a result of criminal convictions, had been ordered deported but on appeal allowed to remain in Canada, introduced the third element—immigration—into what passed for a debate on race and crime. Crime, it appears, is a foreign invention: it all happens out there, over there somewhere, carried out by others. Immigrant others. Not by Canadians. Crime, like employment, now has to have the requisite Canadian content; failing that, its perpetrators should be returned to their country of origin, regardless of how long they have been here. This Canadian content is defined by the Canadian nationality of the criminal, which begs the question who is Canadian. If after being in this country for three years as a landed immigrant and taking out citizenship, your Canadian status cannot be overtly questioned. However, this is not the case for someone like Oneil Grant who came here as a child—he was twelve—or someone who may have spent most of his/her life here, but through an oversight failed to take out citizenship. That Oneil Grant and many like him—young Black men and women—may have been shaped indelibly by their experiences in Canada and within Canadian institutions is conveniently erased in this debate.

That the public perceives crime to be on the increase is indisputable, although Statistics Canada reveals that there has been no appreciable increase in recent years. That more guns than anyone is comfortable with now circulate in our societies is equally indisputable. That the immigration bureaucracy, like most bureaucracies, is clumsy and needs to be overhauled also appears to be undeniable. But focussing the debate on the mistakes of the immigration department has provided a mechanism whereby a discourse that is essentially racist can take place. Within this tri-partite discourse of race, crime and immigration very little progress is possible since race = Blacks, crime = Blacks, and immigration = Blacks. And Blacks = race, crime and immigration (unwanted).

If faulty immigration procedures had not been implicated in this and other recent crimes, the debate would have undoubtedly focussed more emphatically on issues such as the keeping of crime statistics, and even the possibility of lifting the citizenship of individuals (as one talk-show host recommended). *Pseudo-debates like the one generated by the Just Desserts shooting serve to allow whites to believe that they are purging their country, their territory, their psyches even of the threat and danger that Blacks represent for them, while at the same time attempting to reinforce in Blacks the belief that being the owners of black skin, they are in Canada only on sufferance.*

How long does it take to belong? Never. If you're Black. Not in Africa where Europeans continue to own disproportionately large tracts of lands in countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe and

South Africa. Not in the Caribbean where Europeans are fast reestablishing themselves as landowners. And most certainly *not* in Canada. Where we have been for at least 200 years. And while the debate rages as to the merits of sending us back to where we don't belong—Europeans and white Westerners exercise the privilege of fleeing whenever the going gets rough, the only passport needed—a white skin. Shortly before the recent elections in South Africa news reports revealed contingency plans by Israel, Portugal and England to fly their subjects out if the election proved to be violent. So too in Rwanda where

“...a heavily armed column of Belgian troops rescued 18 foreigners (my emphasis)...As the convoy arrived, 500 Tutsi refugees...rushed out with their hands up, pleading for help. But they were left behind...the Belgians had room only for 18 foreigners...” (5)

Many of those “foreigners” had lived the better part of their lives in Rwanda and are the latter day remnants of the earlier occupying colonial forces.

But the fact is. A Black man shot a white woman and Toronto is baying for Black blood.

**Fact is** a white man killed a Sri Lankan Tamil man, Gunalan Muthalingam (How many of us remember his name, or even knew it when he was killed?) in Toronto in June 1993.

**Fact is** a white man killed Muthalingam and the media gave it the barest of coverage.

**Fact is** a white man, after attending a neo-Nazi concert, attacked another Tamil man, Sivarajah Vinasitnamby, late one night also in June 1993.

**Fact is** this white man so badly hurt Sivarajah Vinasitnamby the latter is now physically handicapped and brain damaged.

**Fact is** this white man attacked Vinasitnamby because he was South Asian, had a dark skin and, therefore, according to the white man, didn't belong in Canada.

**Fact is** these crimes, at least one of which was motivated solely by racial hatred, did not garner the attention from the media the shooting of Georgina Leimonis did.

**Fact is** 3,500 whites did not attend the funeral of Gunalan Muthalingam or express outrage at Sivarajah Vinasitnamby's injuries.

**Fact is** the Police Commission did not meet, as it did after the *Just Desserts* robbery and shooting, to discuss the increase in hate and racially-based crimes after the killing of Gunalan Muthalingam, or beating of Sivarajah Vinasitnamby.

**Fact is** no elected official at either the municipal, provincial or federal level has made a statement deploring the increase in racism and racist acts against Blacks or Asians.

**Fact is** a Black man shot a white woman.

**Fact is** the race is gonna pay.

White Western governments have always used racism, if not openly to gain votes and political success, as a means of social control to keep Africans, Asians and Natives in their place. Is this why no member of government in Canada—municipal, provincial or federal—has publicly condemned these viciously executed racial attacks such as the one against Sivarajah Vinasitnamby? (The Minister of Justice, Alan Rock, has, however, introduced legislation to increase sentences where racial hatred is a motivation). How then do we explain the fact that the beating of Vinasitnamby—a clearly racially motivated attack—was not raised in the Ontario Parliament, yet the *Just Desserts* shooting was? How do we explain that shortly after the latter robbery, the City of

Toronto attempted—unsuccessfully—to introduce a municipal by-law (sponsored by two right-wing politicians) that would have forbidden groups of more than three people to gather in public places. The proposed legislation was designed to fight crime, but if, as argued above, we understand that “crime” is the code word for Blacks, it becomes clear who the intended target of this legislation was.

**The** abdication of responsibility by elected politicians has been ably assisted by the media. It's difficult to know whether the fire-storm response to the *Just Desserts* robbery was whipped up by media, or whether the latter was merely responding to public sentiment. I suspect both aspects played a part in the coverage. What is more certain, however, is that, in a capitalist society where the media's role is to sell advertising, there is no incentive to dampen any inflammatory issues. The O.J. Simpson case is an overdetermined case in point. If, however, we accept Chomsky's argument that, along with entertainment, one of the media's roles is to inculcate certain values in the larger society, the coverage of the *Just Desserts* shooting, particularly in areas of race, crime and immigration, is entirely valid. These value-laden messages are at times writ large, at times sub-textual, but always present. Too much Black immigration to Canada; the immigration department is allowing Black criminals into the country and failing to deport them; Blacks are a source of crime; Blacks are not Canadian, but immigrants to this country; the police are hampered in their jobs—the list is endless, infinitely malleable and always derogatory of Blacks and often of other peoples of colour.

In the aftermath of the *Just Desserts* robbery, Blacks have been presented with what appears to be an impossible choice: reject the accused suspects or take responsibility for them and their crimes. That rock and hard place yet again. To say, as many did, that we are not responsible is, in many ways, to attempt to close the stable door after the damage has been done. In the eyes of white society we have already been tried, found guilty and held accountable. But in our rush to distance ourselves from this crime, we engage in something like the children's game, “Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar,” with every-

White  
Western  
governments  
have always  
used racism,  
if not openly  
to gain votes  
and political  
success, as  
a means of  
social control  
to keep  
Africans,  
Asians and  
Natives  
in their  
place.

one pointing a finger at someone else as having the responsibility.

A third way lies between these two apparently mutually exclusive positions of extreme distance from the perpetrators and the embrace of complete responsibility for the crime. Black communities in the New World have been indelibly shaped and affected by racism. Racist practices have been carefully nurtured and honed around our communities, and these communities have been hurt and continue to be hurt by these practices. The Stephen Lewis report, the most recent of many such reports, prepared after the Yonge Street riots, documents the evidence of anti-Black racism in Ontario.

At one end of the spectrum of our collective life, Blacks have defied the odds and produced exceptional individuals of brilliant minds, committed lives and astonishing creativity. At the other end are those who, in dysfunctional ways, have acted out the rage and anger present in all oppressed groups. The numbers of this latter group are disproportionately high. And in between these two groups are the large majority—the middle classes, if you will—who do what people generally do when given half a chance—form relationships, work and try to enjoy life. It is unfortunate and racist that Black people and their communities have always been judged, not by their best, but by their worst.

**As** a people Africans have successfully mounted moral challenges against brutally racist and right-wing regimes such as the now formally defunct apartheid system of South Africa. Long before that in 1804, the Haitian people, led by a former slave, Toussaint L'Ouverture, fought and gained their independence from France to become the second independent country in the New World. Canada was a mere colony at that time. The civil rights movement in the United States spearheaded by African-Americans provided a model and the impetus for subsequent movements such as the second wave of feminism, the gay movement, and the American native movement. These challenges by African peoples to essentially anti-human practices which would reduce the scope and potential of the human spirit have made an inestimable contribution to the world of progressive ideas and ideals which we now take for granted in the area of human rights. Africans are given little credit for this. We are still seen as an ideologically backward people prone to violence.

The young men who carried out the *Just Desserts* robbery belong to us—the Black communities. They belong because they represent the broken and wounded aspects of our communities described above. *Every Black young man or woman lost to crime or drugs or mere despair represents a tremendous loss for our communities engaged in the massive undertaking of wresting our history from the shadows, rebuilding ourselves and our cultures and leading lives of dignity.* Every Black person who fails to fulfill his or her potential represents an irreparable loss. For us, for our communities and society as a whole.

**I**t is in this respect that these young men are ours—fully as much as Bigger Thomas was a part of the Black community in Richard Wright's novel *Native Son*. They represent a loss—a deficit in more ways than one. To view them in this way is to find a third way out of the conundrum of rejection or embrace. In the latitude of our compassion—a compassion which we have often had to extend to our erstwhile masters, as we see happening presently in South Africa—we must claim them as ours—as symbols, if you will, of the failure of community through the relentless workings of racism. To claim them is to express compassion for those parts of our communities that are wounded. It does *not* mean that we are responsible for what they have done, or that they should not have to take responsibility for their actions.

To say that these young men are beyond the pale and have nothing to do with us is to engage in the same practice that white society engages in—pretending that crime is somehow out there, over there, having nothing to do with us. But while being a part of us, they are also a product of white society—created by the policies which continue to wreak havoc on Black communities. Would that we could take them into our communities, hold them responsible for their actions and heal them eventually.

Failure like success is seldom sudden. Young, disaffected Black youth, which the accused suspects represent, reflect the failure of many systems, the oldest of which began as long as 500 years ago, when the workings of capital and the profit motive, through the slave trade, destroyed the resources of Africans—their family structures, their spirituality, their languages, their ways of life. These failures are further nurtured by immigration practices that encourage the piecemeal settlement of families from the Caribbean. Often the mother comes first, followed eventually over the years by her children. This results in great pressures on families and early involvement of social agencies. An education system which has not shown itself responsive to the needs of Black students, often streaming them into dead-end programs, secures these failures. A shaky economic system, weakened by the processes of free trade, per-

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meated by racism, sexism and classism, which demands that where they do exist two parents must work, and where they don't that women must work long hours to support their children, imposes further stresses on families. The criminalization of Black youth by a policing and (in)justice system creates a sense of disenfranchisement which in turn creates a sense of not belonging. And this most recent knee-jerk response that questions the right of Blacks to remain here exacerbates this sense of alienation. Further, increased criminalization, as has happened in the wake of this most recent robbery, will only serve to justify those instances where abusive exercises of police power occur.

**T**o those who ask what Black communities are doing about crime, I answer—what they have always been doing—dedicating an enormous number of volunteer hours in remedial programs and organizations in an effort to stave off these very types of acts. Volunteer hours and social work, however, cannot and will not do it all. When an economy is in recession, while education fails to educate Black youth, when racism continues to affect the hiring of African Canadians, and when the policing of African Canadians becomes synonymous with harassment, dysfunctional and criminal activity will continue to flourish.

Eradicating the more deeply-held racist attitudes towards Blacks will be impossible without genuine commitment on the part of all levels of government. In the hardening of attitudes on both sides in the aftermath of the *Just Desserts* killing, that commitment will be harder to execute. Among politicians if has been noticeably absent: if anything, knowingly or unknowingly they have been fuelling anti-Black sentiments.

All of this, however, is not to lose sight of the tragic loss of a young woman. It is to mourn that loss. It is also to mourn the loss begun a long time ago—of young lives—young Black lives—young African-Canadian lives.

But then again—fact is a Black man killed a white woman. And Blacks have always been between a rock and a hard place.

*M. Nourbese Philip is a writer and a poet living in Toronto.*

# black bodies, Carnivalised bodies

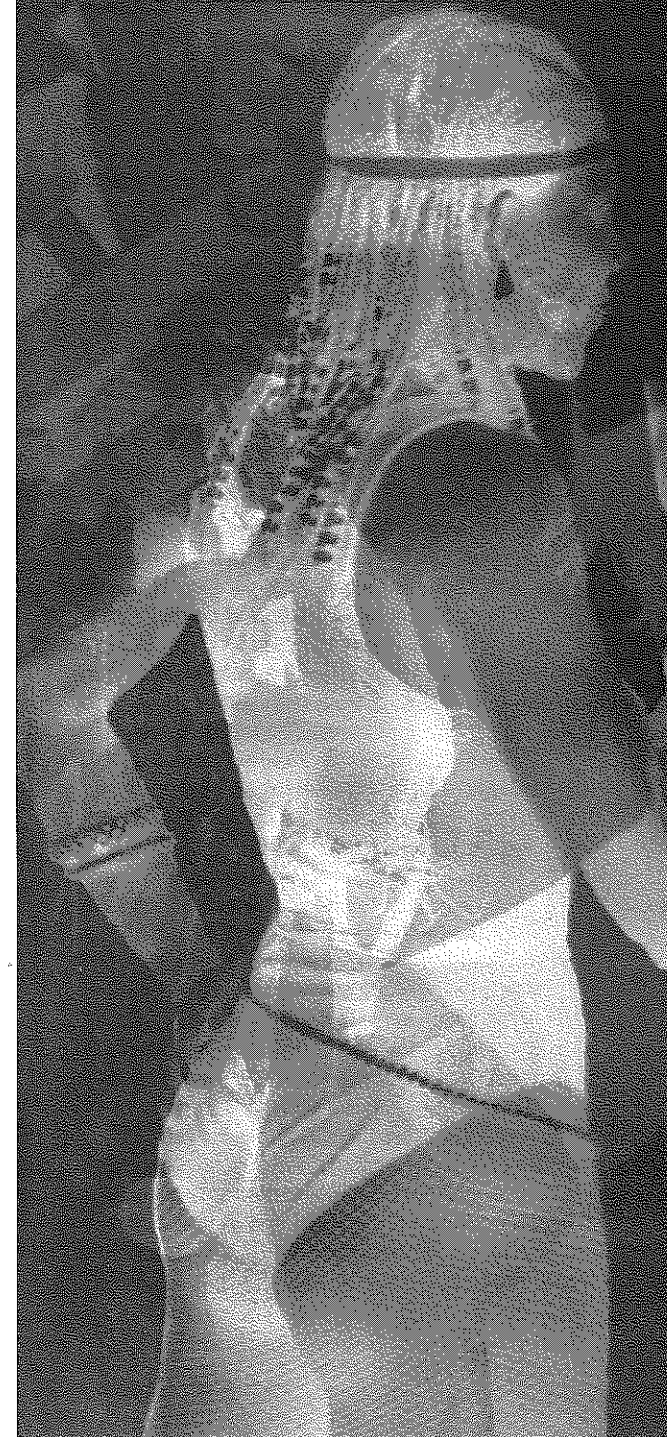
**Carol Boyce Davies writes about Black women and carnival, expressing concern that current gender dynamics do not allow women the free space simply to dance at carnival.**

**I**ntellectualizing about carnival runs contrary to its meaning. Still, since one of the most obvious representations and commodifications of the Black female body takes place within the context of carnivals, there is for me a need to raise questions about representation and to try to arrive at some tentative conclusions about the carnivalised female body. A series of Caribbean carnivals, held in a variety of cities, highlights my concerns. Some of these festivals grew out of student/migrant desires to re-create some of the joy and space commensurate with Caribbean Carnival in the otherwise alienating landscapes of North American culture.

One occurred at my university during the annual carnival sponsored by the Caribbean students there. A young woman from one of the NYC community colleges entered the performance arena and executed a "wine" that took her from seductive vertical wining to a movement on the floor which then drew a huge crowd which witnessed her gyrations which increasingly became sexual/orgasmic mimings. This motif became increasingly popular and culminated with a presentation from one school last year with the following scenario:

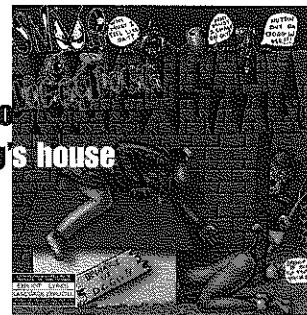
The act begins with about ten young women in "pump shorts" on the stage, dancing vertically. A young man enters with a large water gun and shoots them all down onto the stage floor. The now prone young women, with their shoulders on the floor and their legs raised towards the audience, begin a version of the butterfly that was so risqué that two other students functioning as mistresses of ceremonies signalled to the DJ, in prearranged signal, that the music had to be cut. This of course triggered boos from many of the men (and women) in the audience who in the spirit of true carnival would want to see the routine taken to the conclusion.

As we know, the logic of carnival dictates that it is equivalent to a crime against the people for anyone in authority to stop the carnival. (As an aside, there were also subsequent rumours that it was my presence in the audience that precipitated the cut, since there were other groups, similarly gyrating before I arrived, which were not cut.)



Being from Trinidad, and having done my own share of carnivalising and wining, I found myself in a very strange position because a part of me completely supported the decision to cut the dance. In this context, my position as a Black woman professor, an authority figure, is relevant. For what it seemed had happened was the obscene "winer" of years passed had been transformed into every Caribbean woman, now the object of a voyeuristic gaze. At the same time, I recognize the need for carnivalised space: the "do what you want to do; this is my body not yours." So I want to locate my discomfort in a series of generating questions and in the midst of this contradictory context: Are these primarily generational concerns and would I, if one of this generation of students, not similarly have participated. How is my own subject position as Black woman professor, working therefore in university contexts with all their hierarchies and social distances, implicated? Where is all of this located in terms of patriarchy and imperialism? What about the highly misogynistic representations of women in the lyrical articulations of female bodies in calypso, reggae, rap, dance hall and toasting?

In the context of patriarchy/imperialism, female genitalia are pornographically exposed, identified in ways so detailed and objectified that no amount reversal is compensatory. To do that, women would have to engage in discourses beyond "how do real men measure up?" Given the politics of power and dominance in terms of gender, the exposure of body parts is not equivalent or symmetrical. In Black male culture women can be reduced to bitches and body parts, as in Snoop Doggy Dog's dog-



### In Black male culture women can be reduced to bitches and body parts, as in Snoop Doggy Dog's house

house. Central to this question is the question of space and carnival and the implications of the controlled, inside and staged notion of the carnival as opposed to the outside, street-based carnival. Further, where is female agency in all of this?

Stallybrass and White, in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, would celebrate carnival as it flaunts the material body as a pleasurable grotesquerie—protuberant, fat, disproportionate, open at its orifices. The carnivalesque inversion mounts a co-ordinated double attack upon the "Ideal-ich," calling the bluff on foreclosure: it denies with a laugh the ludicrous pose of autonomy adopted by the subject within the hierarchical arrangements of the symbolic at the same moment as it re-opens the body boundary, the closed orifices of which normally guarantee the repressive mechanism itself.

A related issue has to be the freedom that African women exercise in terms of their bodies and their physical/sensual possibilities and pleasures in movement, which exist outside of Western, restricted, Puritanical modes of perceiving the body. Still for me, what precisely makes these representations not symmetrical are gender dynamics between men and women and the ways that power relations enhance the continued commodification of Black female bodies. Further, located within white supremacist, imperialistic dynamics, the female body has been trained to function for the benefit and in the service of men.

## 1. The Carnivalised Body

In an article entitled, "Nudity in Brazilian Carnival," Monica Rectora writes about the visual and verbal codes which displace the carnival event to nakedness and also shift erotic nakedness to pornography. It is the women who are reduced to nakedness, making them objects for male consumption and reinforcing the central messages of female subordination encoded in carnival.

In Carnival, then, nudity is transformed into a series of metonymic images of the woman as an object of desire. Her physical charms are presented (ranging from the parts of her body—face, legs, arms, bust, buttocks—to her representation as an erotic object as a whole). *American Journal of Semiotics* (1989)

Still, even as we pursue questions of carnival, we may want to follow Bakhtin a bit in his analysis of carnival as the interruption of dominant discourses. For Bakhtin carnival and the carnivalesque occupy that space outside of the centralizations of modernity, resisting and subverting hierarchies and other societal norms.

Inserting gender into the dynamic of carnival, Mary Russo, in an essay in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, reads Bakhtin with ambivalence given that one of his prime representations is the hag. Thus Bakhtin, in Russo's words, "fails to acknowledge or incorporate the social relations of gender in his semiotic model of the body politic, and thus his notion of the Female Grotesques remains repressed and undeveloped."

If we are to theorize the representation of the carnivalised female body, we must also examine carnival in terms of historical period, class, and so on. In my own reading of Caribbean carnival, distinctions have to be made between the "carnival of resistance," which began in resistance to oppression, and which occupies that same pole as slave rebellions, uprisings, *cannes brulees* (*camboulay*), maroon communities, and the "carnival of cooptation and tourism," which has more to do with selling the Caribbean as site of pleasure to outsiders. It is an important distinction which allows us to uncover and decode the functions of

carnival which have been appropriated by dominant discourses.

It is precisely here where the female body can become part of a series of pornographic representations. Thus, those supine Black female bodies butterfly with their backs on the ground mime a struggle and therefore mark the distinctions I want to make between the horizontal and the vertical in terms of the use of space, gaze and position and the ways these relate to conquest and domination. The Caribbean female body on its back replays, in distinct ways, the imperialist entry into the land, "the lay of the land" as feminist critics would say. The Caribbean, in all its tourist manifestations, gets re-presented as exotic space, with its primary mode of existence as the providing of sexual/erotic pleasure for a series of visitors in the "we are here just to serve you" mode of tourist representations. The island as female body becomes, then, another tempestuous site of male/colonial ownership.

Tourism and prostitution are linked. Women are the visual, the captured, in this exercise in voyeurism and erotic pleasure; they are represented as the "guests of men," the sexualized objects of male gaze. In other words, the sexuality as it is presented is made equivalent to enforced heterosexuality, i.e., women performing the dance of intercourse at the level of desire. For Black female

bodies, the link between the violence of slavery and rape is mapped onto the historical meanings of the voyeuristic gaze.

## 2. The Commodified Body

The commodified body of women, then, in horizontal butterfly-ing position lines up well with the commodification of the Caribbean in tourism. Still, I am thinking of ways to represent the Caribbean other than through fragmentation and commodification and also to allow some female agency. One has, therefore, to make some distinctions between questions of spectatorship, location and the male gaze on the one hand and the ability of women to transform their own spaces on the other. The question of "wining" can be located at this juncture. For example in the popular dance-calypso, "Dollar Wine," some clever calypsonian gives a price to each of the gestures of wining, with the lowest equivalents going to the side to side, the rear being ascribed a bit more value and the full frontal assigned the most value, with each thrust of the body emphasized by the word "dollar." As someone who gleefully participated and mastered the movements, I had to ignore the assignment of cash value to wining to enjoy it fully. Therein lies the primary contradiction for women, for Caribbean feminists and for Caribbean subjects being able to speak on any of this. For in the end, all get subsumed under the carnivalised demands of entertainment: carnival is not to be analyzed or discussed and thus paradoxically it contains the freedom to enforce dominant discourses, continuously and without challenge. For who wants to stop the carnival? This is the one time that women are able to take space, to assert the sexuality which includes women wining on and with each other and which also includes women at home in their bodies expressing with these bodies the very same sexualities which men simultaneously desire and fear they cannot control. Thus, taking space becomes their own version of a carnival of resistance.

Pursuing the ritual of dance and sexuality, at one very important level,



the butterfly is that miming of the female body opening and closing, allowing possibilities for entry and simultaneously barring entry, giving life and also taking it in all its gestures. Significantly, as with any language which one does not know, there always exists the possibility of being mis-interpreted or mis-read by the viewer/listener. For one of the mistakes often made by viewer/spectators from other cultural locations, in apprehending carnival behaviour, is the reading of physical female Caribbean movement as equivalent to heterosexual access or the "cash equivalent." Therefore, the body, read as sexual object, does not exist necessarily in the same way for the viewer as for the viewed, which always has been the racist/rapist/colonizer's mistake.

The unanswered/unanswerable question which arises from all of this is: Can one avoid all those intrusive readings by dominant culture? A recent *National Geographic* (March, 1994) has a piece on Trinidad which is captioned "The Wild Mix of Trinidad and Tobago" and shows painted, gyrating Black bodies in what comes across as orgiastic ritual; these are juxtaposed in succeeding pages with more orderly images such as, significantly, a neatly clad baby boy, born accidentally in New York City and therefore an "American," dressed in red, white and blue jumpers. The historical specificity of the Black body as commodity and its contemporary representation as a site for Euro/U.S. social and political constructions have to be factored in, particularly given the fact that the Black female body became the doubled sign of commodification and reproduction.

## 3. Taking Space: Freedom and Self-Articulation

If dance is a language, then it is not so much the physicality and sexuality of the dance itself, but what it communicates that is most critical. The problem, then, may reside in the voyeur and the colonizer of the Caribbean/female body. The concept of "taking space" in Afro-Caribbean dance allows us some further understanding and allows some agency for Caribbean women, particularly when dance is aligned with personal freedom. Taking space is best understood as taking not simply physical space, but also mental space. Taking space means moving out into areas previously restricted, particularly those racialized/gendered confined spaces. A

few important parallels can be made at this point. One would be with a Trinidadian version in which the dancer negotiates the road, creating space. In this particular context, the dancer is able to negotiate, among a variety of other dancers, his/her own particular dance space. Another example is limbo in which the space metaphor is graphically expressed in terms of a before and after with either side of the limbo bar or pole offering a space of physical freedom. The pole which has to be negotiated represents slavery, the slave ship and the physical gesture of middle passage piled on with fire, lowered to the ultimate; it requires physical dexterity and finally transcendence.

The calculations of the use of space by gender, size, age, for slave ship passage and the use of the Black female body as space to maximize profit through reproduction are significant. The maximizing of space by oppression for material gain meant the constricting of space for Black women. The semiotics of "taking space/making space" references, therefore, become clear in each of these dance formats.

Central to "taking space" is the ability to understand this space. It is not necessarily making big movements that make the statement, but how showing bodies can enlarge space. For dancers, how they position themselves becomes important. This leads to such questions as: what is the space used for? How does one navigate between manipulation and agency? What is significant about island locations is the ability to use circumscribed space.

In that context, the butterfly, itself already a sexual symbol, is simultaneously a movement of limiting space/making space. The space being referred to is the space between women's legs and the space between islands. This is not an empty space for discoverers, navigators, colonizers...men.

One final aspect of this representation that has to be presented is the idea of staging. The staged format for dance and, thus, for spectatorship can be seen in the raised float of, for example, Rio carnival. Staging makes space; it is not the grounded, carnival of resistance with people "taking space." The stage carnival becomes more a site of containment with distinctions between vertical and horizontal intact. The prostrate butterfly, immobilized and staged for colonizing gazes, in the end is not a figure of resistance.



#### 4. Triangular Representations

The problems of representing Black female bodies, we have said, are amplified at the level of the use of Black women's bodies in history. The Black female body in Western culture has existed either in the context of exoticization or abjection. Our bodies have been chained, sold, transported, paraded, flayed, pried open, discarded, possessed.

So, how does one reclaim that female body now in the context of recent history? On the one hand, it is possible to laud the physical control that women take in attempting to do with their bodies as they please. But is it what they please? Or is the female body still doing what it is trained to do?

Some developing new representations of the female body, taking place both in dance and in other cultural forms, present a reclamation of the body for its own purposes. Also, representations of the Black female body in African contexts reveal some interesting "taking space" contexts and oppositional gazes, outside of Western formulations of the contained body. Grace Nichols, in *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman*, examines the notion of laziness. This challenges colonialist/racist critiques of Blacks as lazy and redirects the political implications of laziness for both women and Black people, on whose backs and with whose labour capitalism took place. Thus, when Black women's labour is consumable, laziness becomes a resistance to our exploitation, unless it is labour in our own benefit and of our choice.

In Nichols' poems, "Dust" and "Grease," which begin the collection, the assertion is that these elements, i.e., dust and grease, which have been related to Black women's jobs, are allowed to be, to exist unimpeded.

Dust has a right to settle  
Milk the right to curdle  
Cheese the right to turn green  
Scum and fungi are rich words (p.3).

Grease steals in like a lover  
over the body of my oven.  
Grease kisses the knobs  
of my stove.  
Grease plays with the small  
hands of my spoons.  
Grease caresses the skin  
of my table-cloth,  
Getting into my every crease.  
Grease reassures me that life  
is naturally sticky.  
Grease is obviously having an affair with me.

Dust and grease exist outside of this woman's identity, unlike for many Black women, for whom waking up often means thinking of the pot and the broom. Nichols, then, deconstructs the stock association of grease. She also attempts to "sing the body reclining," i.e., take space in a way which is directly counter to expectations for Black women.

I sing the body reclining  
I sing the throwing back of self  
I sing the cushioned head  
The fallen arm  
The lolling breast  
I sing the body reclining

This reclining female body becomes "an indolent continent," "sluggish as a river...as a wayward tree": all representations of resistance. Still there is a different intent in this reclining body in the sense of its own definition; not the body reclining as it waits for something/someone else, the phallus and so on, but the body existing in its own right, not to serve. Thus she concludes:

Those who scrub and scrub  
incessantly  
corrupt the body  
Those who dust and dust  
incessantly  
also corrupt the body

Nichols is similarly clear about the representations of Black female sexuality in its own right and in all its triangulated implications. The Black female body for her is expressed in the language of a certain geography and oppressive history.

My Black triangle  
sandwiched between the  
geography of my thighs  
is a bermuda  
of tiny atoms  
forever seizing  
and releasing  
the world

For Nichols, the "Bermuda triangle" gets re-presented in terms of female sexual space, pubic, vulvic, localized, but also historicized in resistance to patriarchal, misogynistic, imperialistic and colonizing imperatives. The social construction of space between women's legs, always making space for something/someone else, has to be overturned. Island space, women's space are all imagined spaces of absence/presence. Caribbean ocean spaces cover the unfathomable existences, unknown except by the daring, but nevertheless still with their own palpable existences and histories. The ocean is a place of escape when island spaces become too confining.

The shock to men is that none of this may be about them at all. Black female space becomes a space of life and rich moisture, a delta of fertility, creativity, life.

Carol Boyce Davies teaches at State University of New York, Binghamton.



dancers, insurance company reps, etc., and she transcribed numerous songs as a part of the research for her book. All I can attest to after reading her book is that the authenticating move was not needed—it is pretty clear that Rose is a member of that fluid community some call the Hip Hop Nation.

Sampling a number of rap artists work to produce a text that moves through a number of the major issues that have confronted the academic study of rap to date. Rose often produces some very interesting breaks. Some of the most interesting of those riffs for me are her discussions of rap and technology, insurance companies, and women rappers and feminism. What those three discussions offer is the history of rap music and hip hop culture as it has never been told before. Rose tells how black inner-city youth shifted and reinvented the use of the sampler, the drum machine and even outdated mixing boards and other types of equipment to produce songs that caused millions to shake nightly. She further demonstrates how black oral practices have been brought to technology and that a useful and articulate interplay has occurred. She makes clear that rap is a much more complex medium accompanied and enhanced by “new” technology. Rose writes, drawing on Walter Ong, that

**[t]he concept of postliterate orality merges orally influenced traditions that are created and embedded in a postliterate, technologically sophisticated cultural context. Postliterate orality describes the way oral traditions are revised and represented in technologically sophisticated cultural context. It also has the capacity to explain the way literate-based technology is made to articulate sounds, images and practices associated with orally based forms, so that rap simultaneously makes technology oral and technologizes orality. (p.86)**

Rose’s entire argument debunks the myth that rap is not really music. She posits an explicit argument, in a very rap fashion, that challenges musicologists to find a more creative musical expression today.

As well, *Black Noise* disrupts the

notion that rap is a form that merely capitalizes on recognizable music, as M. Elizabeth Blair suggested in an article in the *Journal of Popular Culture* (1993). Rap’s use of technology and the insight that one can glean from tales of technological innovation suggest that technology is not the beast that current naysayers of the “information highway” would have us believe. Instead Rose and the Hip Hop Nation’s encounter with technology has made class, gender and racial differences important variants to be discussed and sorted out in any understanding of, and access to technology. But what is apparent is that when subaltern hands get hold of technology we are left shouting, “Hip hop hooray!”

Rose demonstrates the processes of racism in the music industry in a very interesting way. By locating and analyzing the importance of the insurance industry to rap music, Rose begins to demonstrate how shifting notions of blackness have impacted on one of the most important aspects of rap music. By restricting policies to either arena owners or booking companies, insurance companies have been able to circumvent the more immediate political practices of some rap artists. If Parliament and Congress are the places where mainstream politicians strut their stuff, then the arena is the place where rap artists articulate their visions of a “new world order.”

*Black Noise* makes clear that insurance companies play an instrumental role in popular cultural dissemination, and on that note Rose has unearthed an important consideration for future studies of popular culture. Her descriptions of “security” at rap concerts demonstrates the ways in which the large arenas mirror the practices of some trendy night-clubs, which attempt to keep black folks out. While at the concerts the “security search for knives and guns, at the clubs notices that announce no jeans, baseball caps or running shoes seem to scream no black guys!”—since that is the dress code in full effect for many of us today. Rose’s analysis and information makes those links clear and demonstrates the continuum between club practices, and arena practices implicating insurance companies all the way. The processes to continually keep out black

folk are excavated in this archeology that positions insurance companies in the “conspiracy” to destroy rap’s political possibilities by limiting rap artists access to their public in “person” to somewhere between the Walkman and Discman.

It is when Rose addresses the relationship between female rappers and feminism that her position and analysis begins to falter a bit. While I think she makes a strong case for why some women rappers might not want to be named as feminist, I think that Rose often comes off as an apologist for female rap artists who do not always want to engage a politics that demands the condemnation of sexist “brothers.” While it must be made clear that Rose’s analysis throughout her text is situated as a cultural studies feminist reading, her too easy release for “sisters” who refuse the naming is an indication that not all is on the up and up. If naming practices are an important part of new world black cultures—and we know how important they are—and we also know that naming is important to rap artists—look at the names that various groups use to identify themselves—it is then of political importance to continually pursue the question of naming.

Women rappers who articulate a song that places an emphasis on resisting sexist racism have a political obligation to sound off the word “feminist.” As bell hooks has noted in her essay “Black Women and Feminism,” (1988) black women (and men) need to take responsibility for feminist praxis and name the politics of which they are a part. Women rappers’ “resistance” to the word/name “feminist” seems to continue a notion of victimhood that suggests that white middle-class feminists will always hold sway over the theoretical, conceptual and definitional apparatus of feminism. Rose does not object to such positions strongly enough. Instead she offers us her definition of feminism, which MC Lyte finds agreeable, as an attempt to demonstrate that women rap artists do not have a fear of a feminist planet.

Rose’s text fills in a number of spaces that have been left gaping wide ever since rap has begun to receive serious attention. Often I wished that she would discuss

questions of pleasure, desire, articulated politics and the identifications that the politics suggest, but I guess that is another project.

“designed to address audiences reached by mainstream music journalism and fans of any musical taste.” Instead the essays generally read like a lament for the 1960s.

analysis of the various ways in which political organizing is currently accomplished (via letter-writing campaigns, persistent demonstrations, talk TV, talk radio, reli-

## The *funkeiros* dance for the revolution.

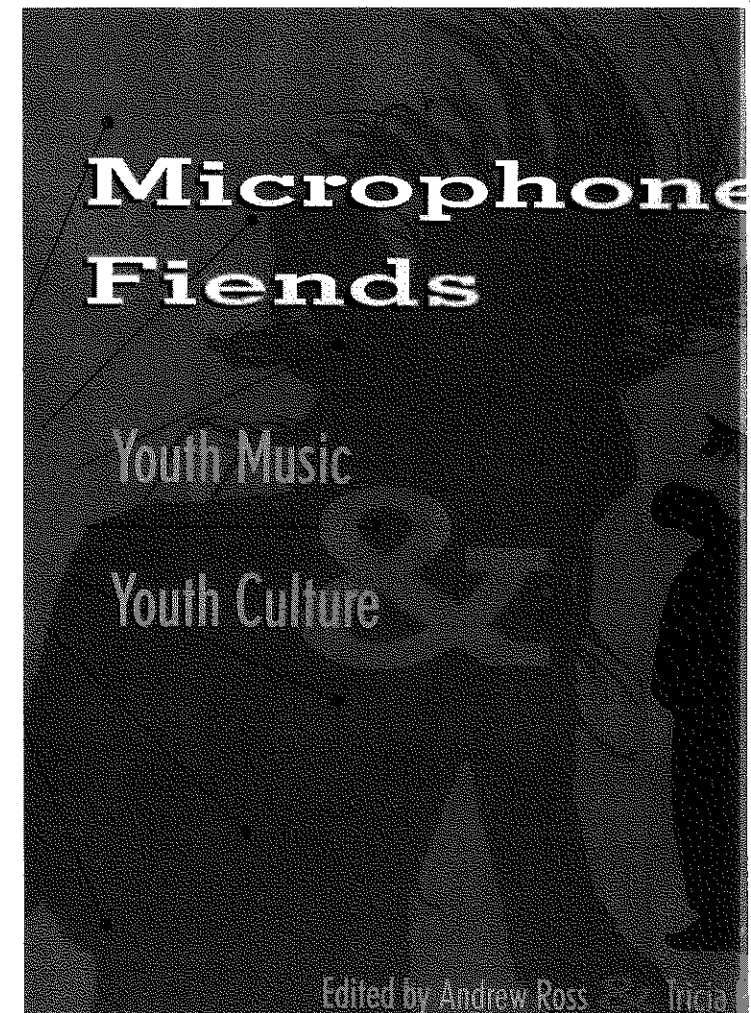
Andrew Ross, on the solicited jacket copy, is quoted as saying, “No more loose-headed talk about rap and hip hop! From now on, all discussion starts here with *Black Noise*, a crucial book about a culture that has become a social movement.” Ross seems to have his analysis backwards on this one. Rap music is a social movement that has become a “culture.” Ross’s praise for Rose’s text, while needing to read in the context of promotional campaigns, is a clear example of the ways in which some academics and cultural critics continually attempt to unwrite other historical moments and events. David Troop’s classic *Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop* (1984) and even some of Rose’s homeboy Greg Tate’s writings on rap and hip hop culture might be considered as the places where “all discussion starts” on rap and hip hop culture.

While Rose has written a fine and well-researched text, a bold and unashamed move to immediately “canonize” the text in the annals of cultural studies would be a bit overwhelming. But in the collection of essays that Ross and Rose edit, that process is clearly underway, with numerous references to her text or articles and talks that became a part of the revised text. *Microphone Fiends* is a collection of essays from a conference organized to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the American Studies Program at Princeton.

Ross’s introduction to *Microphone Fiends* is a garbled analysis of youth culture that attempts to deal with everything while really addressing nothing. To go from *Black Noise* to *Microphone Fiends* is a major comedown. *Microphone Fiends* promises to be an “accessible” text

In the essay “We Know What Time It Is: Race, Class and Youth Culture in the Nineties,” George Lipsitz argues that to understand “young people today, we have to acknowledge the new realities that confront them, and we have to reject analyses of youth that rely on outdated and obsolete concepts” (17) as an attempt to critique arguments that position understandings of youth culture in relationship to 1960s nostalgia. Yet by the end of his article, he lapses into the following: “[w]ithout some kind of collective political movement attempting to redistribute wealth and power, youth culture may well degenerate into simply another way for capitalists to sell back to people a picture of the life that has been stolen from them” (26). At first blaming youth culture for what appears to be a lack of large-scale political culture, Lipsitz realizes his mistake quickly enough to add the sentence “[y]et it would be foolish to dismiss youth culture simply because it has not yet produced an organized political movement” (26).

Lipsitz’s essay bespeaks the very moment of nostalgia that he earlier attempted to cast aside as problematic. His desire to see youth culture produce large-scale political organization lacks an



gious programs, etc.)—mainly by the Right who seem to have mastered political organization. Youth have very little access to those kinds of organizational tools and the disarray of Left politics in North America leaves little for politically progressive youth to identify with. I am also struck that Lipsitz’s partial celebration of youth culture



does not address the conservatism that exists among many young people. To address that conservatism one must be willing to live with contradiction, recognizing that aspects of popular youth culture are not necessarily counter-hegemonic.

If we were to follow Lipsitz's argument we might end up thinking that hip hop culture is youth culture today. While it is true that hip hop culture carries much sway, care should be taken not to produce narratives of youth culture that place hip hop culture as overdetermining youth culture. Discourse around Gen Xers, Slackers and grunge rockers are mainly concerned with young white male youth who seem to be lamenting that they will never wield the same kind of power to organize the lives of others as their daddies did and still do.

Many of the essays in *Microphone Fiends* use rap as the point of departure to address youth culture today. While rap as artform and hip hop as cultural practice/lifestyle have been an articulation of the urban black subaltern hipster with profound effects for popular culture generally, many youth in various corners resist what they see as the taint of blackness, exhibiting the symptoms of fear of a black planet. Rap's power as an articulate form that forces onto the agenda questions of a political nature, does not mean that rap is droppin' science for all.

In another essay that works with rap as its analytical base, "The State of Rap: Time and Place in Hip Hop Nationalism," Jeffrey Louis Decker argues that two different forms of nationalism exist in rap music. He identifies those forms as 1) a nationalism that harkens back to black nationalism of the 1960s and appropriates the images of folks like Malcolm X, Angela Davis and so on, as exemplified by Public Enemy, and 2) a nationalism that is Afrocentric and sees Africa as the base through which its politics will ultimately be expressed, as exemplified by X Clan.

Decker analyzes the lyrics of P.E. and X Clan to demonstrate how the two groups differ in articulated political influences. Yet his analysis demonstrates that eventually both groups produce a kind of sexism that places women in very proscribed, restricted and limited positions. While his exercise is

an interesting one, Decker's project does not address the overall problematic of a nationalist politics but instead focuses on "the language of nation to rearticulate a history of racial oppression and struggle which can energize the movement toward black empowerment and independence" (100). I would contend that the use of nation as a conceptual tool continues to produce a disabling politics of inconsistency and domination, and thus leaves Decker's argument in a weak position.

After dealing with the politics of the "boys" that Decker turns to the music and videos of Queen Latifah to recapture any moment of possibilities in what he terms nationalist rap. Decker wants to hold on to the discourse of nation, but by moving to Latifah he is forced to jettison nation in favour of a diasporic gathering—a fluidity of borders. I would contend, however, that Latifah's rap—especially "Ladies First"—defies nation as we know it in relation to rap's nationalism. Instead Latifah's music is diasporic, or what Paul Gilroy calls a black Atlantic "product." Monie Love from England raps on the same album and specific song and Winnie Mandela's image is in the video—all point to questions that exist beyond the strict confines of nation to address the more interesting and complex relations of transatlantic identifications and the historical relations, practices, memories and desires that the best rap evokes.

The diaspora is further explored in George Yudice's "The Funkification of Rio." Yudice writes of the ways in which subaltern youth in Brazil have begun to disrupt and challenge the mythic idea of racial harmony in Brazil through their cultural identifications. The *funkeiros*, contrary to popular belief, dance for the revolution. Their music calls for resistance to domination. The ways in which they acquire African American music circumvents the traditional capitalist mode of seller/consumer and instead operates very much in the form of a "cartel." Those with access to North America and in particular New York, bring in the music, which quickly makes the rounds in various reincarnated forms. Yudice's description of the pro-

duction and consumption of funk in Brazil echoes the development of sound-system culture in the Caribbean and its exportation to the U.S.A. that fuelled the formative days of rap.

However, the narrative that Yudice paints of rap and hip hop culture in Brazil is one of state cooperation and support. The state, in collaboration with rap artists and DJs, has supported a number of youth programs. It is not the same case with funk, thus the *funkeiros* are the targets of state harassment via the police. "The Funkification of Rio" is a solid article that demonstrates the relations of the black Atlantic and the transcultural sharing of black expressive cultures. The *funkeiros* subvert the spaces that are frequently used in Brazil to produce national myths of oneness (samba halls and soccer arenas). Thus the *funkeiros* are in the forefront of dismantling notions of national coherence as the state apparatus tries to literally force them—through harassment, murder and lack of radio-play of their music—out of the national imaginary.

*Microphone Fiends* comes on the heels of *Black Noise*, but they are vastly different books. Not simply because one is an edited collection and the other is not. Rose in *Black Noise* clearly demonstrates the emergence of rap music and hip hop culture as oppositional in the realm of a postindustrial or deindustrialized North America. Her discussion of graffiti is of particular importance to the complexity of her book. By insisting on locating graffiti as an important part of hip hop culture, Rose is able to demonstrate in a much stronger way the relationship between the politics of hip hop and the processes of deindustrialization and postindustrialization in America. For *Black Noise* the issue is not whether youth have an organized political movement, but that the practices of youth force us and them to live life differently, putting new encounters on the road/street/map.

*Microphone Fiends*, in trying to address the vastness of youth cultures, falls short of an attempt to demonstrate that youth culture is not always filled with possibilities. There is no discussion of the messiness of the hip hop nation, Gen Xers,

Slackers, those who make it in, and those who are out. The very category of "youth" needs to be theorized and interrogated—regardless of the book's intended audience—since it is clearly not transparent. What about the cultural politics of conservative and fundamentalist youth who are organizing in the anti-abortion movement; organizing against affirmative action, equity and access; campaigning for conservative political parties; or who are members of the Third Millennium?

Rinaldo Walcott is a *Border/Lines* collective member.

Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. New York: Verso, 1993

BY Bill Little

Why is it possible to manipulate signs and meanings? This is not merely a formal question for the Left, as the last thirty or so years of inquiry into the arbitrary relations of signifier and signified have proven. It is more of an anathema to the Left, on both theoretical and practical grounds. If the great emancipatory projects remain unfulfilled, it is due to the difficulty of making things mean what they should mean.

In Germany and Austria, for example, long-repressed phantoms of the Left have reappeared to make their challenges, and on the Left's very homeground of the post-War years—the hegemony of signs of the European social imaginary. The emergence of Neonazism is emblematic. In the last year, people in Vienna were shocked to discover that Neo-Nazis had been conducting paramilitary training exercises in the Vienna Woods, which surround the city. There were German-style firebomb attacks on refugee centres and skinhead rallies against "drugs." The government hastily rewrote the Verbotsgesetz, (the forbidden-activities law) on National Socialist Wiederbetätigung, or reenactment, to

make it more enforceable. A number of trials ensued against neo-Nazi firebombers and hate literature propagandists, culminating in September with VAPO (People's Extra-parliamentary Opposition) "Führer" Gottfried Küssel's ten-year sentence for publicly airing his views on National Socialism on American Television. During the same time Jörg Haider's right-wing Freiheitspartei (the Austrian Freedom Party), seemingly riding a new tide of populism and electoral victory, sponsored a referendum to severely restrict the number of refugees and foreigners entering the country. It was unsuccessful but opened up, as Haider said, "the left wing's monopoly of history." More recently a series of letter bombs targeted human rights and refugee advocates, including the mayor of Vienna who lost three fingers.

The resulting instability in the political climate seems symptomatic of Left ineffectiveness. It is a problem of significance as much as anything. The safety net of social democratic order and discourse, grounded fundamentally in reference to the Holocaust and Fascism, is on the defensive. That the far Right can control the social agenda attests to the virulence of its significations and the mysterious weakness of those of the Left. It is more than the apparent inability of the government to condemn unequivocally the extreme Right or find strong counter-positions on its issues. It runs to a deeper equivocation of the Left about itself and to a failure to realize its project.

In Canada, too, I am surprised, upon returning after being away, to discover how solidly the corporate discourse has established itself, with the deficit and free trade. In a recent article in *Saturday Night*, Rick Salutin lamented the inability of any of the three socialist provincial governments to mount an effective discursive (or any other) attack on the encroachment of a corporate-dictated agenda. They, like the coalition governments of Germany and Austria, do not seem to be able to articulate a strong position against the Right. The relevant question might not be "Why can't they articulate their position better," but, "What if they could articulate it?"

The paradox that Baudrillard poses in

*The Transparency of Evil* is familiar, but it addresses the above question. He is not breaking any new thematic ground for himself here when he argues that progressive movements, constrained to demonstrate and interpolate the meaningfulness behind social relationships, ironically end up by emptying the social of meaningfulness. Now he seeks to show that a sort of internal expiry has infected the Left (or the modernist project) without Leftists knowing it. He suggests that "after the orgy" of leftist analyses since the 1960s, everything that could have been liberated has been, but only from any fixed referentiality, value, origin, purpose or place. It has all been represented, all pushed onto the agenda, but in an attitude, says Baudrillard, of endless self-reproduction and proliferation. What has disappeared, or been transformed, is the imaginary, the trompe l'oeil, the perspectivism, that, by representing us to ourselves in an illusory double or mirror, also acted as a resistance to the realization of discourse. The great drives, thoroughly symbolic, existed in anticipatory desire for their ends. This was their imaginary function, to see themselves reflected in their magnitude as transcendence, discovery, the infinite, and to violently deny

None of these strange creatures that inhabit Baudrillard's universe has an Other; they are only points in a network of disembodied circulation.

the past, overstep the present and command the future. The imaginary image existed in an anticipatory tension with the project, a "hot," antagonistic or otherwise tenuous distance that allowed discourse to determine itself, to pose limits, and as a by-product, to create the ground for a violence of forms, transgressions of laws, passion of identity.

The implosion or collapse of the

imaginary relation results in an unacknowledged indifference of the Left to itself. For Baudrillard, the projects still exist in the "real," still generate their discourse (endlessly and without real resistance or

## The neo-Nazis are dangerous, but their capacity for violence is nothing beside the punitive power of the state.

stakes), but at the level of the imaginary, the figure of transcendence has been replaced by the transsexual, the transpolitical and the transeconomic. We see ourselves less in a mirror of boundaries and transgressions than in a mirror of political, sexual and economic indifferention—as clones, transsexuals, prosthetic attachments, computers, digitalization and codes. Or perhaps Baudrillard is saying that we see less and less of ourselves altogether, as the tension between the "real" and the symbolic implodes. None of these strange creatures that inhabit Baudrillard's universe has an Other; they are only points in a network of disembodied circulation. They all signal an operational world where everything is being reduced to its simple, digital components before being made to circulate. With no ability to transcend their aims in an imaginary, the emancipatory projects collapse upon their objects—the masses, sex, knowledge, art, nature, goods. Because these never really did exist fully, they are made to exist, and the familiar Baudrillardian world of simulation subtly replaces the old one.

The implications for the Left are twofold. Firstly, the attempt to render the world rational and transparent inadvertently results in a "whitewashed" society, one in which negativity has become obsolete. This is tantamount to erasing the ground on which the Left stands because, for Baudrillard, the Left intellectual's domain is the negative. Secondly, the further soci-

ety goes in this direction—the more "positivized"—it becomes, the more susceptible it is to anomaly, viral attack and mass abreaction. The systems suffer from unpredictable returns of exiled negativity in the form of catastrophe, random violence, terrorism, epidemic and other "extreme phenomena." The Right is perhaps better situated to take advantage of this because it erects its discourse of order on the fetishization of categories rather than their dissolution and

exchangeability. In any case, the Left is in the position of adding flame to the fire when it tries to address these issues.

This is surely not an unsympathetic challenge to the Left, but one that leads in an uncertain direction. For Baudrillard the problem is posed in terms of the relationship between the symbolic and the rational. The analysis of evil is a case in point. When the Ayatollah condemned Salman Rushdie to death, according to Baudrillard, he spoke with a power that was much greater than one of simple material or military wealth. "Power exists solely by virtue of its symbolic ability to designate the Other, the Enemy, what is at stake, what threatens us, what is Evil." The Ayatollah spoke "Evil" because he negated all Western values of progress, rationality, political ethics and democracy with a single utterance. He spoke with power because the West has ceded the power of evil and symbolism to him and others, as a result of the operationalization of its values and the "leukemization" of the body politic. The power to speak evil no longer exists in the West. Only a positive discourse exists on the rights of man which the typically irreverent Baudrillard characterizes as pious, weak, useless and hypocritical.

In Germany and Austria the reaction to the neo-Nazis lends itself to this sort of analysis. The neo-Nazis are dangerous, but their capacity for violence is nothing beside the punitive power of the state. It is because they deign to speak "Evil" — about refugees, about the Holocaust, about

Hitler — that they incite a disproportionate fear of Nazi virulence and resurgence. They evoke the "accursed share" which the assumed existence of a social democratic consensus sought to suppress. Like Mitterand naming the Ayatollah "absolute evil," anti-Fascists suddenly find themselves colluding with evil, calling neo-Nazi spokesmen "Auschwitzlugner" (liars), spreading destabilizing innuendo about drug use, homosexuality and infidelity among the movement's leaders, and, in parody of the Gestapo, keeping detailed files on neo-Nazis and extreme Right organizations.

The power to speak "Evil" has been exiled from the post-War political discourse. This must be the source of the Left's peculiar ineffectiveness. Under the sign of the Holocaust and terror of Fascism, Social Democracy in both countries has evolved along a course of rights, consensus and rational management. The official response to neo-Nazism is heavily coded with law and order while a substantial response to the extreme Right issues of refugees, foreigners, drug users and AIDS victims has not been forthcoming. (This is in part to avoid alienating the apparent right-wing vote and in part because there is no language with which to respond). By banning neo-Nazi groups from the legitimate body politic and, in Austria, rewriting the laws on Nazi Wiederbetätigung, the Left continues along the course of management by silencing one half of the discourse and letting the courts, in their limited arena, deal with a fundamental challenge to the premises of the social democratic state. It must also be said that no amount of people in the street holding candles in silent vigil will suffice to fill this emptiness. Planned marches and crowd scenes only signify more emptiness. Because the Left discourse no longer lives in any passionate relation to transcendence, utopia or Truth, people depend on this ultimately futile show of numbers to demonstrate solidarity to each other. Even the concept of solidarity itself betrays a passivity of response that holds no stakes, makes no real demands and expresses no vision. The Left attempts to reenact itself by "necro" reference to the Holocaust and combative gestures towards *Rechtsextremis*,

but does not admit to itself that this eruption of evil in its midst is nothing but a sign of its own empty projects and weakness. While the Holocaust was a horror historically, we might ask the repugnant question, as Baudrillard does, about whether—given its constant use to found a leftist discourse, the constant return to its site to render it more and more factually and analytically transparent, and the constant levelling ability of the media to replace thus rendered facts and histories with any other—the Holocaust really did occur (like that), or at least, whether it can be said to exist for us today.

A Baudrillardian critique like this is compelling but elusive. It is compelling as an explication of the paradox at the limit of the universalization of exchange value (the "viral"), and of its repercussions for Left criticism. The individual's subjective moment of understanding and decision is convincingly shown to be lost to discourse. Baudrillard is certainly speculative and hyperbolic, but in the manner of a machine of enunciation he demarcates a near future or recent (unrecognized) past, both by assuming a Western world radically entering into simulation and susceptible to "viral" attack, and by describing it as if the process were already complete. And we cannot say that he does not find a responsiveness there.

His critique is elusive because this plays uncertainly on Baudrillard's contraposition of the symbolic and the rational. The spheres of metaphysics and sociology are blurred (perhaps in the manner of the contagious superconductivity he portrays), and it is never clear whether we are in the domain of the logic of reason, causes, realization and the law, or in that of theatre, game rules, seduction and metamorphoses. By moving the analysis to the systemic structure of signification and discourse, Baudrillard can speculate, announce a total emptiness and throw down a challenge from the position of the symbolic, while at the level of his sociological analysis in the rational world, the confusion of forms, motivations and practices tumbles over itself, as indifferent to or as interested in politics, clones and the crisis of art as it is in ironic strategies. He moves

quickly to describe the form and thus, like a literary machine, would seduce it onto a course, but from such a level of abstraction (post-situationist, post-post-structuralist?) and to such an incomprehensible "Otherness" of ritual game and gesture, that we may not wish to give ourselves up to the looseness and arbitrariness this implies.

Baudrillard's "reversibility" seems to be a sociological phenomenon whereby the idea of, say, politics, reverses itself as it becomes detached from its imaginary and referentiality. Instead of dissolving the alienating government structure in an ideal of Greek city politics, political qualities like citizenship, moral responsibility, leadership and power itself dissolve in simulation, in the people's corresponding indifference to politics without stakes, and in the move of power to more genetic, uncompromising spheres. But isn't reversibility also a mysterious metaphysical principle, whereby things or ideas just flip their meanings by themselves, without intervention from the "real" world? Baudrillard suggests as much by opposing the rational sphere, where logic is based on irreversibility (of time, meaning, progress), to the symbolic, where things are reversible by "nature," and according to rules which are played up to but remain unknown. Does the essential kernel of things just flip because the essence is symbolic and "objectively" ironic, or is it made to flip through struggle in the real as a parody of the symbolic?

By means of a vulgar pragmatism we may ask, in the end, whether the value of Baudrillard's analysis is not simply contained in what it can do. With respect to the neo-Nazis we are offered a strategy of analysis that would not reason with hatred of foreigners and Jews, the use of violence, the reenactment of Fascism, etc., but would undermine the concept of difference that informs reason. Neonazism and racism are a fetishization of difference, the virulent reverse side of the same liberal system of commodity exchange. In Baudrillard's agonistically conceived universe, on the other hand, where Objects (and races) are radically Other, racism may be turned from its path only through irony: "an ironic give-and-take founded precisely on racial terms: not at all through the legit-

imation of differences by legal means, but through an ultimately violent interaction grounded in seduction and voracity." The Nazis would not be debated or exterminated but the polarity between them and their objects of hatred would be diffused, "brasilianized," by ironic doubling and by valorization of the Other as an Exotic Other, a distant mirror in which to see ourselves and to "exchange gifts." If the Nazis are not allowed to be the sole holders of the symbolic wealth, their menace declines to the status it deserves; namely, a feeble abreactionary attempt to recover life in the social scene.

Perhaps Baudrillard would suggest that the overabundance of symbolism that emanates from the swastika—that transcendence of mere racism that constitutes the "Evil" of *neonazism*—is something to be respected, at least as an enemy. Is this acceptable? Baudrillard's ironic critique is elusive, but it is also a worthy challenge to think through.

Bill Little is a writer living in Vienna, Austria

Laura E. Donaldson, *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-building*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

BY Nicole Shukin-Simpson

Laura E. Donaldson's *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-building*, engages postcolonial and feminist criticism—what many feel is the critical juncture in a radical politics—with a perspicuity equal to the task. In the company of Trinh T. Minh-ha, Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and bell hooks, among others, Donaldson tracks the guises of nationalistic identity that accompany and even constitute colonialist regimes. She does so through an analysis of the subtle intersections of race, gender and

class "among" and "within" women (33). Layering both literary and filmic study, Donaldson situates the overlap and the slippage within race and gender, making visible the latent ideologies that mark colonialist enterprises.

While Donaldson trains a critical eye upon the colonialist complicity idling beneath white feminism, urging feminists' self-reflexive examination of their own nationalistic tendencies, she also exposes the equally monological positions of some Third World feminists. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, is caught in the act of simplifying Jane Eyre as the privileged "individualist female subject" (15), overlooking the complex interaction of gendered race and racialized gender. Donaldson initiates her book with a "take" on the problematic dynamic between Miranda and Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, stating, "the Prospero and Miranda complexes should become parables about the dangers of monotheistic reading" (17). Singular readings wielded by any critic, Donaldson suggests, function to colonize the subject.

Donaldson supplements her exploration of the interaction of identities with an interaction of disciplines, complicating unified readings with a "cultural studies" approach. Only at the intersection of film and literature does she discover the ways in which dominant representations stitch themselves together into almost seamless discourses. Donaldson targets the filmic device of "suture," a term popular in the "Screen" school as well one used by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, where it is described as the ideological practice of covering over complex relations. Donaldson sees it as that which creates "the imaginary unity, the sutured coherence . . . set up by the classic film" (230). Foregrounded as a colonialist technique of meshing together incompatible differences of race and gender in cinematic imagery, Donaldson locates the stitches, so to speak, in "natural" representations of people of colour and of women. In *Peter Pan*, film and book, she traces how the racial stereotype of the "pickaninny," or the "infantilized" Native Other, is an image sutured almost invisibly to the stereotype of

woman, blending race and gender in a colonialist project that depends on the mastery of difference.

Donaldson begins by arguing that Bertha, the madwoman in the attic in *Jane Eyre*, and Jane herself, are more complex embodiments of race and gender than are allowed by either Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their groundbreaking study *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, or Spivak, in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." By reading the text from the angle of filmic "shots," Donaldson unravels Jane's unwitting participation in Bertha's othering without erasing Jane's own oppression within patriarchy. (It was both a surprise and a disappointment, however, that Donaldson never mentions Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel that counters *Jane Eyre* by giving the native, colonized Bertha a voice).

In her second chapter, the diaries and novels around Mrs. Anna Leonowen's experience in an Indian court are juxtaposed with several Broadway and film versions of the story, eliciting here, too, Anna's subtle imbrication in and exploitation by dominant culture. In the next chapter, Donaldson, again, braids her discussion of text and context, or postmodernist feminisms and essentialist feminisms, into an analysis of the 1982 Australian film *We of the Never Never*, highlighting the specific narratives of racial and gendered colonization in the Australian outback as they are constructed in "sutured" representations. It is in this third chapter that Donaldson introduces her own project, proposing a reading strategy that blends feminism's split positions, that "graf(ph)ts" one onto the other and arrives at a powerful hybrid. Borrowing and relocating Derrida's deconstructionist term, Donaldson writes, "Graf(ph)ting as the combination [of difference] . . . could become an extraordinarily powerful trope for feminist criticism because it insists not only upon the text as a playful system of signs but also upon the material rootedness of signification" (57). The rest of the book offers various configurations of femi-

nisms that splice together difference to become not a singular entity, or one that grows irreconcilably apart, but one that accommodates many strains. Graf(ph)ting, as opposed to the ideological device of suturing, splices rather than fuses difference.

Donaldson goes on to make a Marxist appeal for a materialist analysis of discourse, one that would expose both the ways in which women's experience is discursively mediated and the ways in which discourses are experientially embodied. She does this around a discussion of James M. Barrie's 1911 story *Peter Pan* and its revival in a Leonard Bernstein musical in the 1950s. The blurring of "pickaninny" and woman in the figure of Tiger Lily exemplifies what Donaldson calls "graft as political corruption." Corrupt grafting, as opposed to the empowering technique of "graf(ph)ting," resembles the suturing described by Laclau and Mouffe, one which Donaldson situates as operating in literary and media representations of race and gender. In Tiger Lily, we witness the grafting together of a racialized Other and a woman so that each term is exerted against the other and cancels the difference. The enthymeme is a vehicle for such corrupt grafting, suppressing in logical argument an assumption that gives rise to a foregone (sexist, racist) conclusion (76). Yet if graft naturalizes and extends an empire, graf(ph)ting responds agentially by transforming it into a trope of resistant reading.

Chapter 5 allows us to compare E. M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India*, with its 1984 film adaptation, both of which "write" the metonymic structure of colonizing desire and the consequent exoticization of India. Donaldson recognizes that although white women may be excluded from men's clubs on the basis of gender, they are still implicated in the colonizing of a Ralph Lauren-ish British Raj. With Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, for which there is no cinematic comparison, Donaldson reinforces her contention that plural and ambiguous, rather than singular and nationalistic, identity politics are the only hope for a truly subversive feminist movement, or "exodus." Hurston understands, as must feminisms, that exodus (liberation movements) can

symbolize freedom without demanding a unified political identity. This contention is theoretically enlarged in Donaldson's last chapter, when the book begins to articulate something beyond the thorough—but not entirely new—readings of film and literature that precede it.

In "(ex)Changing (wo)Man: Towards a Materialist-Feminist Semiotics," Donaldson examines the abstract commodification of "woman" within postmodernist discourses. Only by graf(ph)ting postmodern feminism onto the body of women's experience does Donaldson see a way in which societies might stop exchanging woman by changing man. Here, there is a sensitive and timely attempt to heal, but not seamlessly to seal, what she describes as "the ethereal ballerina of deconstruction and the flat-footed ethicist of feminism" (126).

Donaldson both complicates and honours organicist feminisms. Her horticultural tropes of graf(ph)ting (and, later, gardening) pose a feminist vision that remains grounded in the soil of women's experience without falling blindly into the dangers of pure, nationalistic identity. For graf(ph)ting is a tool that equally cultivates hybridity. The book contributes to today's theoretical discourse through its careful attention to feminism and difference, situating race and gender within the historical and ideological contexts of film and literature, and ultimately working out a theoretical stance that offers a productive non-solution to the shifting intersections within and among women.

Nicole Shukin-Simpson is studying feminist and post-colonial theory at the University of Calgary, Alberta.

Sharon Butala, *The Perfection of The Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature*. Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994.

## BY Gayle Irwin

**Funny: how you can learn more about people through their fiction than you can when they are writing about themselves. It's a trendy project, but Life Writing can be a tricky task; and when you combine an often shifting autobiographical voice with other trendy genres like social history, eco-feminism, Jungian psychology, a sometimes new age spiritualism, not to mention anthropology and postcolonialism... well, pulling the project together can be a monumental task. Perhaps too big a task. In the opening section of *The Perfection of the Morning*, Sharon Butala explains how her latest text grew and insisted its autobiographical form. In the end, however, her short stories and her novels are far more "immediate" and "insistent" than this Life Writing text.**

Funny: the impulse to hide behind quoted texts and quasi-psychoanalytical truisms, when you want to investigate not character, but self. As I read this book, I couldn't help feeling Butala would have been better off concentrating on the rich descriptions of the various not-quite-banal rural moments which sometimes peek through her narrative agenda. She could have given rein to her trademark aptitude for ironic detail. Instead, her attempt to weave together the mesh of historical, botanical, anthropological, mystical, feminist, and psychoanalytical titbits is often frustrating, and when all this merges with a "prairie call to the land," the project brushes precariously close to "just plain hokey."

Recently in the "Introduction to Gender in Literature" course I teach, my students and I reflected upon the rise of social history within the academy—another

big and, yes, trendy topic. Throughout the year we had been discussing concepts of voice and exclusion, and we studied a number of Life Writing texts. I remember one discussion in particular which may be pertinent here: One student (a bright, white woman returning to school after four years on the wheel of fortune that pretends to be a workforce) complained of never learning about "her" culture in the midst of all our new-found consciousness surrounding ethnicity and race. Discussion that day hovered on the edge of what we defined as traditional history—a history that seemed little interested in "anyone's" culture, truth be told, and preferred instead to concentrate on the acts of a relatively few "great men," and a constricted sense of "great civilizations" (always Western). Hoping the issue could shed valuable light on a year long misunderstanding, I listened as my students coaxed out each other's sense of the changes being made. They zeroed in on the fact that we were studying Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash* and Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House*, for instance, and the way the CFB Heritage Series, which has been coming out with sixty second Canadian vignettes for years, now seems to be redressing the silences of past programming by producing pieces on a Manitoba suffrage leader, Canada's first female doctor, the underground railway, the Chinese labourers on the Trans-Continental line, and Native Canadian oral history.

All of which brings me, in a roundabout way, to my take on Sharon Butala's *The Perfection of the Morning*. I'm from Saskatchewan, a fact which probably weighed in my favour when I was handed this book for review. I know the territory Butala is trying to describe. This text is about building a relationship with nature: an old Canadian theme, one that crops up everywhere in prairie fiction. Butala's story follows her "apprenticeship" in the often harsh, certainly unfamiliar, world of her second husband's ranch. His place in the far reaches of southwestern Saskatchewan is a rural world in the true prairie sense of the word "rural." It is only fitting, then, that some of the most poignant passages in the text come when Butala is describing

the awe she feels when she tries to understand her husband's life-long connection to the land:

**on the far side of the hill in that slough-bottom, twenty or so cows stood grazing or lay with their calves beside them peacefully chewing their cud. In their midst Peter's saddle horse, reins dragging, browsed lazily too. And far off at the edge of the cluster of cattle, a couple of antelope stood, noses down in the grass. All of them were oblivious to my presence and paying no attention to each other, as if they were all members of the same contented tribe on that still, hot afternoon, under that magnificent dome of a sky, and in the midst of those thousands of acres of short, pale grass. About a hundred feet out from the foot of the hill, in the midst of his animals, lying face down in the grass, head on one bent arm, hat shielding his eyes, Peter lay sound asleep.**

Other passages describing the rural world are equally infused by Butala's sophisticated understanding of the concerns that arise specific to a small community brought together and woven tightly because the people depend on nature and their environment in a way urban inhabitants rarely contemplate. Butala has established her niche in the world of fiction with complex accounts of rural life, and her new book has been produced with an eye for both the nostalgic and the contemporary. As a package, *The Perfection of the Morning* reminds me in some ways of the old texts my grandmother used to keep in her spare bedroom—mostly the books were dry accounts of Canadian history, but the pages were crisp, and they often had faded hand-drawn maps on the inner covers, full of squiggly river detail and icon signs of lost prairie bison. I love maps, so the brown ink map printed on the inner cover of Butala's book was a strong point in its favour.

Still, I can't say I wholeheartedly recommend this book—not to your average urban cynic, especially. While its prairie

**You'd be hard pressed to fit this book into any of the categories or sub-genres that fall under the non-fiction rubric.**

grid is compelling, the project as a whole feels naive. Again, I think the problem is linked to the shift in genre.

**T**he *Perfection of the Morning* is registered as non-fiction, and a large part of the confusion that clouds Butala's more typically mature narrative style can be traced to the way this book treats non-fiction like an open plain, a prairie no-where waiting to be broken and settled without thought to previous inhabitants, or its deceptively flat terrain. You'd be hard-pressed to fit this book into any of the categories or sub-genres that fall under the non-fiction rubric. It's not really social history, since the majority of the narrative is dedicated to Butala's own very personal interaction with the nature of the southwestern Saskatchewan landscape. The text's subtitle doesn't help either: *An Apprenticeship in Nature*. "Whose apprenticeship?" my academic training nudges me to doubt. If this text is simple autobiography, why add all the information on Native history, or the quotations taken from anthropology and psychology texts? ...And, yes, I suppose "appropriation" will have to be addressed. After all, non-fiction is as fraught with the political and narratological tensions of "subjectivity" and "authority" as any self-respecting contemporary novel. Butala's text captures historical details, but doesn't contextualize the facts she unearths. Speculation on the aboriginal peoples of the region, the time of the treaties they signed and their migration from the area, late in the last century after the buffalo had disappeared, never make it past the realm of speculation, and the information sits uneasily beside the narrative of a white woman's self-discovery. To give her credit, Butala admits to reservations about wan-

dering into Indian territory. But she doesn't still my doubt: "I think of Aboriginal people whose entire lives were an interaction with Nature." She writes, "It seems to me so clear as to be self-evident that living directly on the earth as Native people did, with constant, direct contact with the natural world, in teepees instead of on floors lifted from the earth by cement basements, would make different people of any of us." A fine tension plays between this passage and the analysis of a visit to the urban buildings of Calgary after Butala has spent a number of years "living rural":

**I felt a disruption of my normal ways of experiencing the external environment; I felt disconnected from my physical self. It was as if my body didn't end after all with the surface of my skin, and that some invisible, exterior part was being subtly disrupted by the machinery running the building. I felt as if I were minutely and imperceptibly vibrating with the machinery...as if I couldn't locate myself inside my body because the buildings (the furnaces, air-conditioning, florescent lights, removal from the natural world) were disrupting my normal way of functioning in the atmosphere.**

Still, we have learned little about the Native version of events, here; and we learn even less in the many strange moments of dream analysis, which, when they're not turning on the Native experience of spirit animals, make recourse to various tired theories from Jungian psychoanalysis. The narratives are patchy, perhaps gratuitous at times; the pieces don't fit together nicely the way, say, a quilted comforter might.

I guess I am most disappointed because all of this might have provided an interesting sort of pomo account of "the fundamental interconnectedness of all things." After all, the heading Nature is capitalized throughout the text and reified as the great bailer twine of the soul. But neither Butala's prose nor her tone reflects the typical postmodern irony at how so many fragmented narratives play off each other, and often lead to contradiction. She is either unable or unwilling to theorize properly the contradictions that arise as she meanders through First Nations issues, eco-feminism, and the economic demise of the traditional family farm. Finally, these issues co-habit even more uneasily than the people from Butala's isolated little community just south of the Cypress Hills.

**T**he *Perfection of the Morning* is an essay on many things: the personal, the social, the natural, the mystic, the historic. Like the rural people she describes, Butala must forge her connection to the harsh landscape she inhabits. Unlike your average urban reader, she cannot treat her environment as an "issue"; she and her adopted community must live with it. A displaced city dweller, Butala offers a perspective that is interesting if somewhat romantic. Her narrative inhabits the scene of translation. But I can't help feeling that, in the end, this book isn't sure what language it wants to be speaking. This may have been a better text if the author had more faith in her own voice, or even if she had been more familiar with the terrain of her new genre.

*Gayle Irwin lives in Toronto, teaches at York University and writes about life after the prairies.*

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Angela McRobbie. *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

In McRobbie's collected essays (a number of them published elsewhere) she consistently and cogently argues for analyses of popular culture that locate gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity in critical tension with each other. Her well-formulated and articulated arguments for postmodern

## B/L List

theoretical positions in cultural studies balance a number of theoretical approaches. McRobbie is at her best in the essays that focus on youth cultural practices—she locates a number of directions in which research on youth cultures needs to go. McRobbie's essays stand out as texts that announce the "adulthood" of cultural studies in the postmodern era. /R. W.

Carole Boyce Davies. *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Boyce Davies is one among many currently charting and mapping the sites of convergence and divergence of black diasporic identifications. Boyce Davies' reading of black women's texts across a wide range of "geographical-memory" neither homogenizes nor reduces black women's experiences to a unitary simplified reading. Her archeological re-covering of black women's multiple, conflicting and shifting subjectivities might be understood through the author's own migratory practices. Hers is a travelling intellectualism that recasts "travel writing" as a black women's genre of resistance, self-affirmation, doubt and the possibility of community. Boyce Davies' text would read well alongside Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. /R. W.

John Beverley & Jose Oviedo (Eds.). *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America: A Special Issue of Boundary 2*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993.

An excellent overview for Anglo readers of the ongoing debates in Latin America over the meaning(s) of postmodernity on the periphery. The purpose of the volume, state the editors, is "less to present a 'regional' variant of postmodernism than to resituate the concept itself, which risks being colonized by Anglo-European provincialism, in a more genuinely international framework." In the process, this collection introduces North American readers to a number of important South American theorists, including Nelly Richard (editor of *Revista de Critica Cultural*), Beatriz Sarlo (editor of *Punto de Vista*) and Néstor García-Canclini (author of *Culturas Híbridas*, translation forthcoming from U. of Minnesota Press). /M. H.

Pilar Riaño (Ed.). *Women in Grassroots Communication: Furthering Social Change*. London: Sage, 1994.

This collection brings together articles by media activists and theorists from Latin America, Africa, Asia and North America which both celebrate and problematize women's alternative media projects. The volume is celebratory in two senses: first, it brings together the experience of many committed media activists whose work is little known; second, at a time when much of the liberatory potential of cultural studies

is wrapped up in reception studies, it (implicitly) issues a challenge to complacent theorists to turn the computer off and go out and do some active political work in their field. To this end, these articles provide a critical interrogation of concrete projects of alternative communication which will be useful to media activists. /M. H.

John Nguyet Erni. *Unstable Frontiers: Technomedicine and the Cultural Politics of "Curing" AIDS*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

The purported aim of this book is "to examine the phenomenon of 'curing AIDS' from the perspective of the 'discursive field' in which it occurs." Unfortunately, if the aim is clear, the development of these ideas is not. This book reflects the kind of magical thinking so pervasive in the cultural studies of HIV/AIDS (always buttressed by stale readings of Foucault). The book remains in the realm of ideas, disconnected from lived experiences and community action, and it contributes to the immorality of talking about AIDS, wrapping the topic in thick jargon and doing nothing about it. /F. I. C.

Naomi Salaman (ed.), intro. Linda Williams. *What She Wants: Women Artists Look at Men*. London-New York: Verso, 1994.

For women artists to "capture" men it is necessary, apparently, to frame, if you will, the photographs in question. The absence of a history of erotic representation of the male nude by the female artist "demands...an historicizing and theorizing." Linda Williams, author of *Hard Core*, as well as four others provide the printed justification for the images that follow. To construct a female gaze, deconstruct a male one—as well as offer a riposte to anti-pornography feminists such as Mackinnon and Dworkin: these are their focuses. The photographs themselves present, in turns or together, a fetishized, aestheticized, sexualized male body. Puns, transgenerating poses and anti-realistic scenarios predominate over austere presented cocks. /S. F.

Reviews by Stan Fogel, Michael Hoechsmann, Francisco Ibañez Curasco and Rinaldo Walcott.

## What She Wants: Women Artists Look at Men

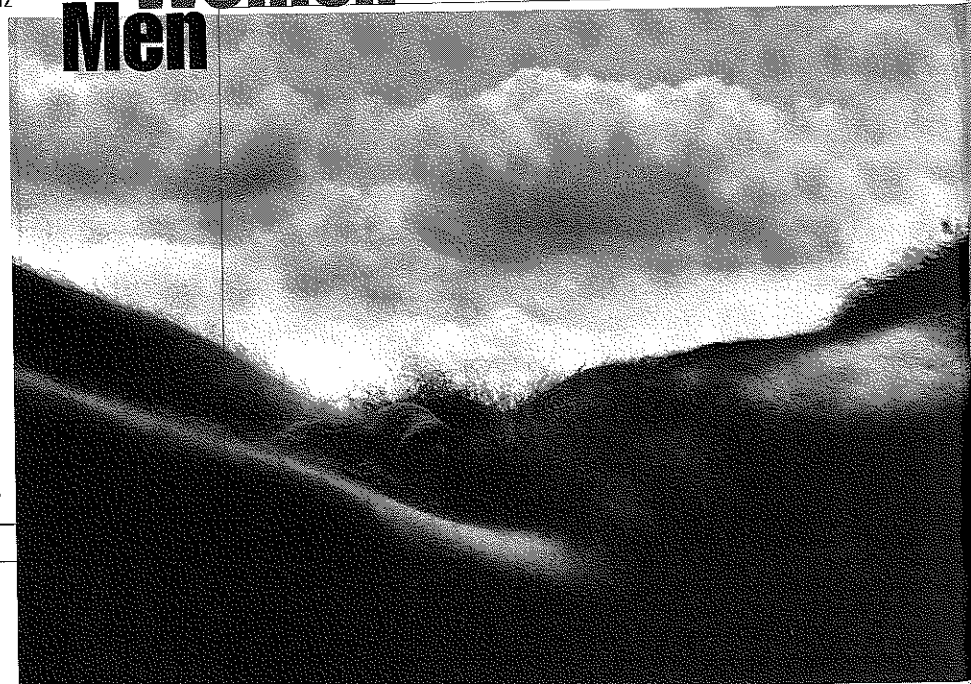


Photo by Diane Baylis, "Abroad." From "What She Wants."

## Mexarcane

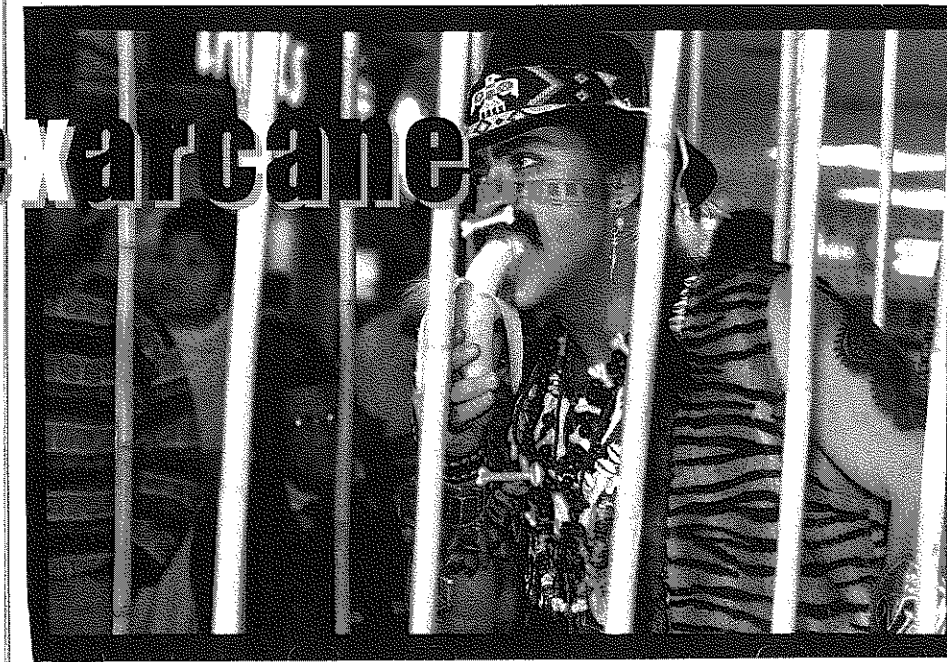


photo by ka yin fong

### The Corporate Future of the Couple from Guatınai

**Mexarcane International: Ethnic talent for export.**  
(performance/installation)  
Coco Fusco & Guillermo Gómez-Peña  
Dufferin Mall, Toronto  
Nov. 11-13, 1994

by Michael Hoechsmann

'Naftartists' Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña recently brought their new performance/installation, "Mexarcane International," to Toronto's Dufferin Mall. In the press release for Mexarcane, Fusco and Gómez-Peña explain that they "perform as representatives of a mythical multinational that specializes in supplying "exotic human resources" for restaurants, fashion shows, music video backdrops, films and commercials, parties, and singing telegrams." Fusco, the corporate secretary, conducts market research on shoppers to determine consumer desire for exotica and to suggest a "live action" which might correspond to the particular consumer's needs. Gómez-Peña, the sample of ethnic talent, then gives live action demonstrations for the benefit of the individual consumer and curious bystanders.

Mexarcane is the follow-up to Fusco and Gómez-Peña's Quincentennial counter-commemoration in which they were displayed in public spaces as two undiscovered Amerindians from the island of Guatınai ("Gringoñol" for "what now"). Among other sites, this performance was undertaken at the symbolically charged Columbus Plaza in Madrid (Columbus took several Arawaks to Spain in 1493, one of whom was on display at the Spanish Court for two years) and Covent Gardens in London, where "ethnological" display had also been practiced. Whereas Guatınai took up the history of European exploitation and exoticization of conquered peoples - see Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," *The Drama Review* 38, 1, Spring 1994 - Mexarcane takes a somewhat futuristic look at the commodification and continued exploitation of 'post-colonial' cultures.

Situated in a busy intersection between the food court and a shopping arcade, Mexarcane both fits into and stands out from this commercial private/public space. The slick corporate-style booth could easily have been located in front of the adjacent Body Shop as an ancillary to its "Trade, Not Aid" marketing program. Even Fusco's extraordinary carnivalesque outfit (read Rio, not Bakhtin) merges seamlessly into the spectacle of corporate culture as translated into the marketplace. Gómez-Peña, on the other hand, shatters the illusion. Whether clutching his boom-box, or exalting his President's

Choice Ancient Grains cereal box, Gómez-Peña mobilizes memories of another space, be it of time or of place, where spectacle coalesces with community. Despite his silence, Gómez-Peña is nonetheless the shaman, *el brujo*, the coyote, the storyteller.

Over the three day period at Dufferin Mall, hundreds of people had the opportunity to see Mexarcane. Typically, a crowd of 30-50 people were gathered around the performance. It would take some diligent investigation to begin to develop some idea of the popular response to Mexarcane, but if stopping people in their tracks and giving them cause for reflection was part of the project, as in the case of Guatınai, then it was worthwhile. The biggest apparent departure from Guatınai is the consumer interview which, by overdetermining the responses into reductionist dualisms, much more heavily-handedly enforces an ethnocentric gaze upon the viewer/participant. By rupturing the zone of safety which critical distance affords, this strategy of in-your-face culture-shock therapy challenges the smug complacency of privileged white folks who think that they already have racism figured out. At a time when the backlash to multiculturalism and anti-racism is picking up steam, this is no small feat.

Mexarcane International will be performed at the Exploratorium in San Francisco in early 1995.

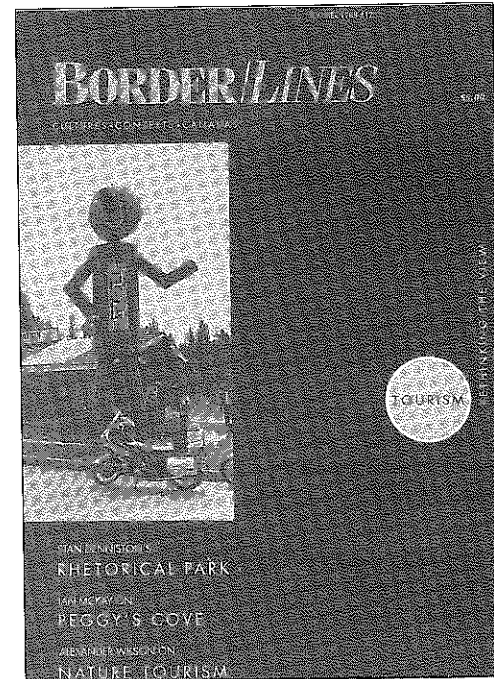
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**NO. 6**

## Avant-Garde Women's Writing

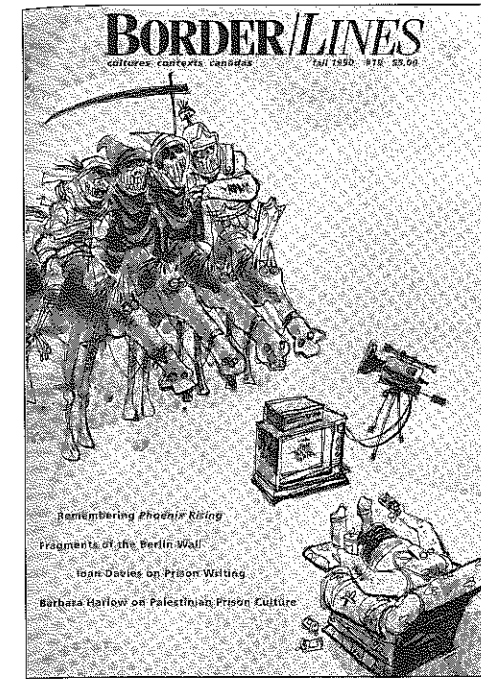
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- Janice Williamson



**NO. 12**

## Tourism

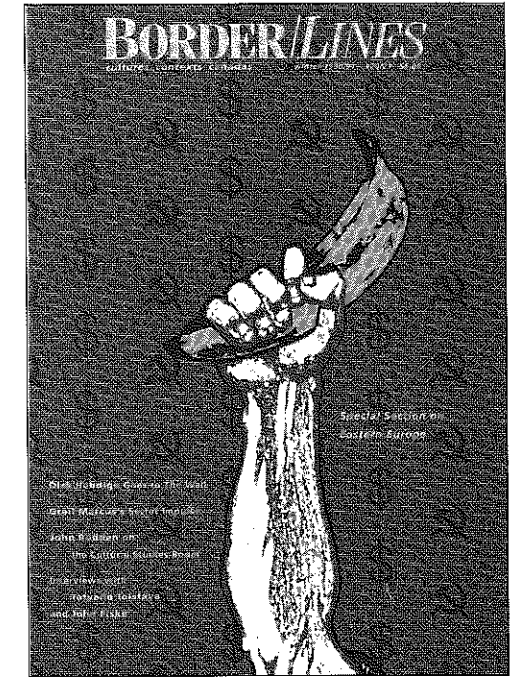
- Alex Wilson, Nature Tourism: The Postwar Years
- Ian MacKay, Twilight at Peggy's Cove
- Mark Neumann, Wandering Through the Museum
- Stan Denniston, The Rhetorical Park



**NO. 19**

## Prison Writing

- Robert Gaucher, Canadian Penal Press
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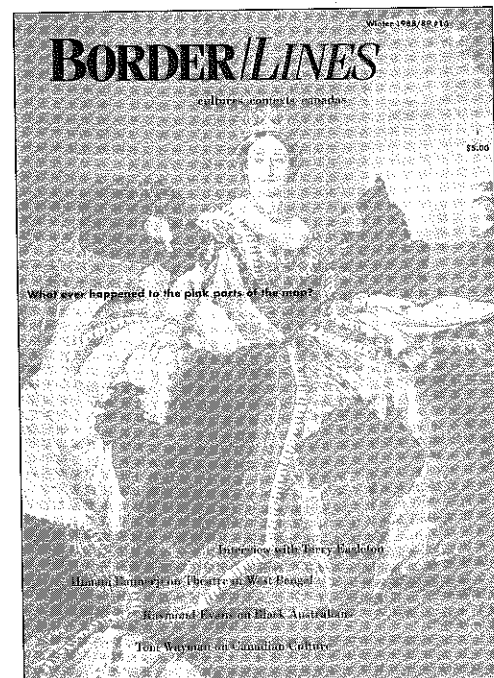
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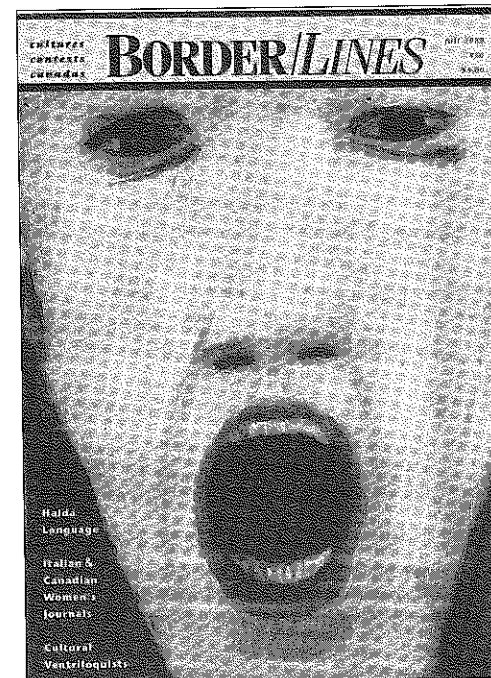
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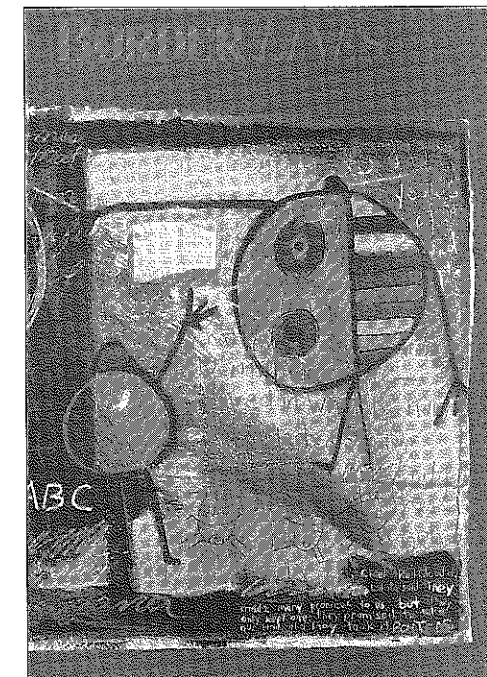
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 Karl Jirgens, Editor; *Rampike Literary Supplement*

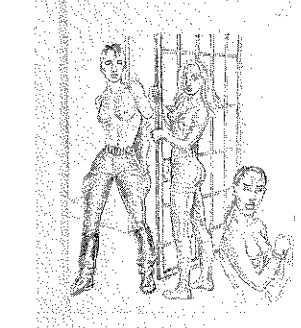
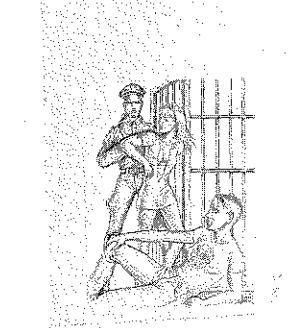
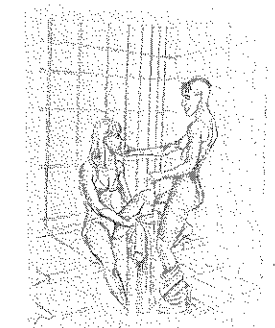
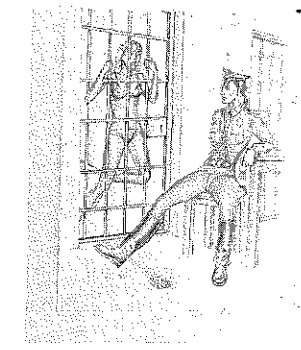
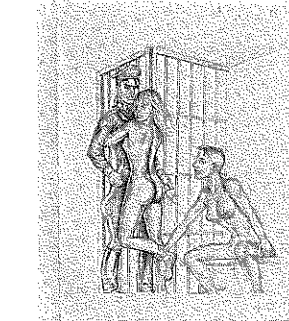
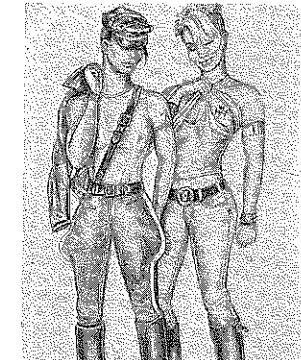
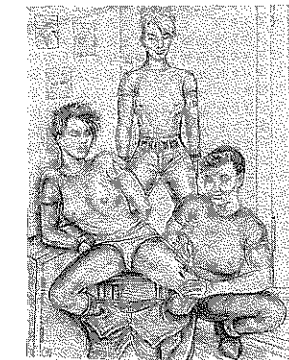
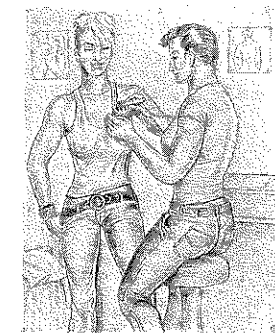
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 Noreen Stevens, Billboarding Homo-Erotica  
 R.M. Vaughan, If Silence = Death, How Can You Live Without Me?  
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 Brenda Brooks, One Angelic Kiss; Local Honey  
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**Issue No. 33**

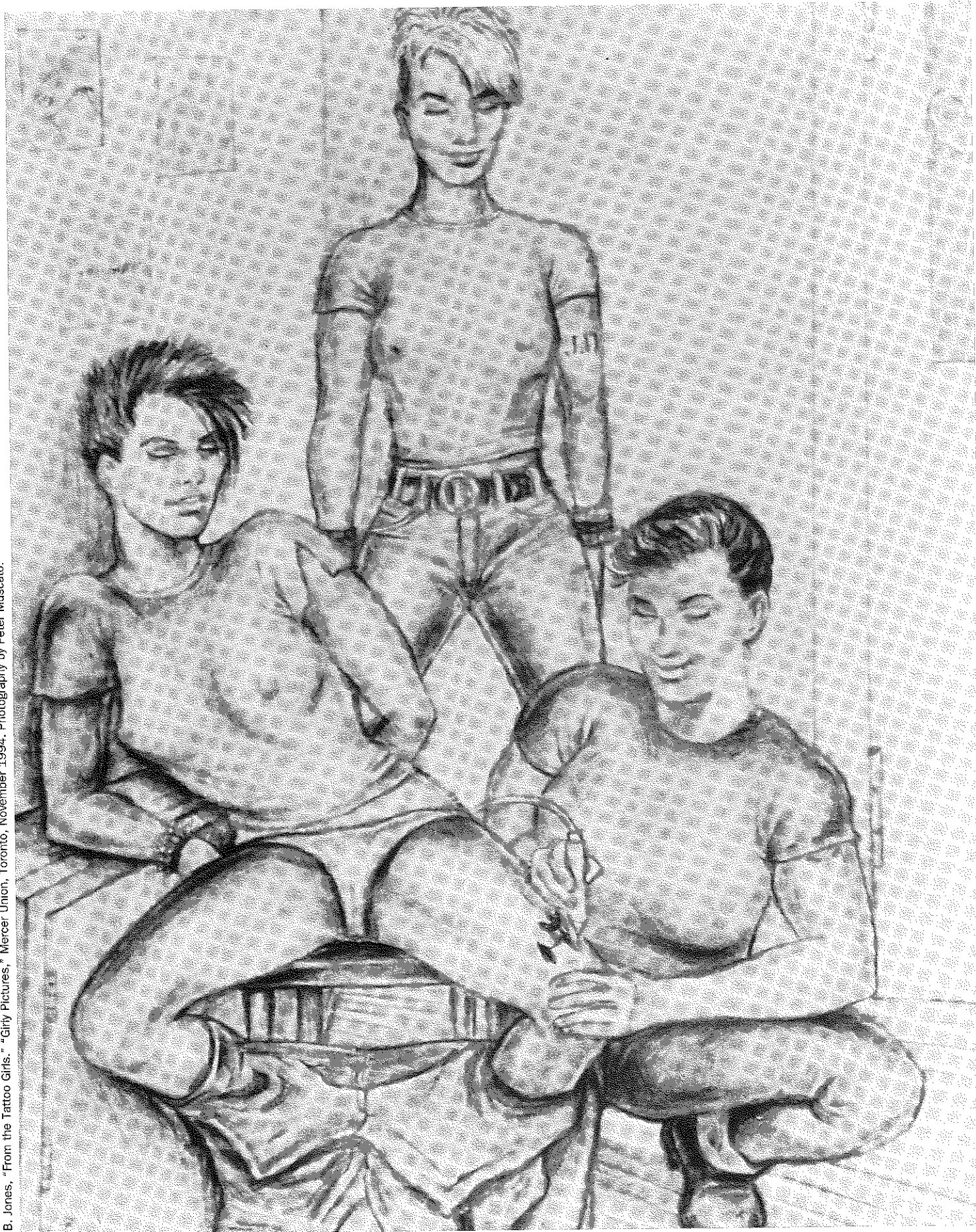
Philip Corrigan, I'd Rather Be Anywhere Else: A Letter From England  
 Gary Genosko, Blobby in the UK  
 Stan Fogel, Cuban Dispatch  
 Xiaoping Li, One Face, Many Stories: Redefining Chinese Identity  
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Illustrations by G.B. Jones  
 from the exhibition "Girly Pictures," Mercer Union, Toronto, November 1994  
 top two rows from "Prison Breakout" series  
 bottom row "From the Tattoo Girls" series  
 Photography by Peter Muscato

G.B. Jones, "From the Tattoo Girls," Mercer Union, Toronto, November 1994. Photography by Peter Muscato.



Greetings  
Loves Les  
Non Commercial Culture: 072

50%  
OFF  
70% OFFEN

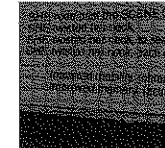
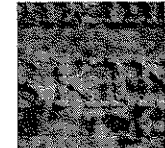
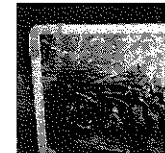
deadbeats.  
to class.  
112 917

The Vancouver Association for Noncommercial Culture

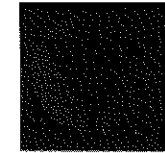
# benchmarks

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Vancouver, British Columbia



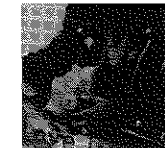
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Radclyffe Hall  
Adrienne Rich •



СДЕЛАЙТЕ СВОЮ  
КОПИЮ СЕЙЧАС!  
ПОСМОТРИТЕ  
КАКИЕ У НИХ  
ЦЕНЫ!  
ПОСМОТРИТЕ  
КАКИЕ У НИХ  
ЦЕНЫ!



white as



**B**ENCHMARKS is the name of a series of site-specific art works by 15 artists who used interventionist strategies to produce work in non-traditional sites. The project was conceived and implemented by THE VANCOUVER ASSOCIATION FOR NONCOMMERCIAL CULTURE.

*Wait a minute, the "noncommercial" what?*

The NONCOM or simply the NON, as we like to refer to ourselves, is a Vancouver-based coalition of artists who have been creating site-specific art since 1986 throughout the lower mainland in British Columbia.

Our current project has attempted to create a thought-provoking commentary for the travelling public, whether it's the local travellers who patiently wait for the transit system to whisk them away or the drive-by traffic that (sub)consciously takes in the world as they crawl through the city at rush hour. BENCHMARKS enters into the terrain of advertising and provides the viewer with a different kind of language. Although the NON has nothing to sell the consuming public, we do have messages, comments and interventions which create a visual pause in the commercial surround of the traveller.

Question: How do we historicize temporary, site-specific art works that will disappear without a trace once they are taken down? (or are vandalized or stolen as some of these works were?) How do we engage in a dialogue with other artists? How do we enter the works into the forum where art discourse is constructed?

Answer: After the complicated process of arriving at consensus, we decided to have an essay written which would create the type of permanent record usually associated with critical reviews or catalogue essays—the kind of writing that perpetuates the myth of objective criticism. We found a magazine that was open to our proposal and we paid the print costs to publish this supplement.

And now maybe you can see what we were up to, or up against, when you read the following set of questions, answers and qualifications as they are posed by Margot Leigh Butler, another NON member.

Susan Edelstein

**The Joke's on Us**  
(THE VANCOUVER ASSOCIATION  
FOR NONCOMMERCIAL CULTURE  
public artists collective)

- Q. **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COLLECTIVE OF ARTISTS PAYS A WRITER TO WRITE AN ESSAY ABOUT A PROJECT ( a site-specific temporary art project ) TO PRINT IN A MAGAZINE?**
- A. **A NON.**  
**A NON-SOLICITED** ( well, actually, the NONCOMMERCIAL did solicit the writer, but *Borderlines* didn't solicit the article; in fact, we paid to have it included )  
**NON-CONVENTIONAL** ( a non-monograph, critical review or advertisement, or is it? )  
**ESSAY ABOUT NON-CURATED ARTWORKS** ( but wait, is it non-curated if NON members collectively choose a public site or theme and collectively organize each project, but each artist selects their own location and produces their work autonomously? ) **BY NON-MEMBERS AND NON MEMBERS** ( invited artists and NON artists )

SIGNED **ANON.**

**Taking it to the streets...**  
Jacqueline Larson

**City sidewalks, busy sidewalks, dressed in holiday style**  
**In the air there's a feeling of Christmas...**

in Vancouver style. The BMWs parked alongside Robson Street sidewalks. From which people gaze through the decorated windows to the Benetton Club Monaco Gap, toward the promise of a pleasurable well-dressed lifestyle. It's Christmas. No one on Robson street knows that these same windows will be smashed, their goods looted after the Stanley Cup. What matters are the beautiful men and women who hold each other close, (hold each other's clothes?) and smile seductively for the camera. Ah, the smug joys of being a well-shod paradigm.

Leila Armstrong

**Season's Greetings**

A seasonal message for both lesbians and homophobes, designed to brighten the hearts of some and question the assumptions of others.

*white vinyl lettering on black coroplast*

Installed Dec. 93 to Feb. 94 at Robson and Thurlow, in downtown Vancouver.



On a busy corner outside a café, across from a designer boutique, the bus stop bench proclaims in ornate typeface "Seasons Greetings," complete with holly berries, followed by "Your God Loves Lesbians." Instead of wassailing, this message might assail the sensibilities of shoppers who want "Christ" returned to Christmas, and thus be read as an "in your face" sort of lesbian activism, especially at a time when "family values" are sentimentally espoused. But what about the baggy-trousered kids from the suburbs, the executive lunch crowd, the Japanese tourists with cedar-boxed smoked salmon, the ragged homeless men? If they have a religion in common, it has to be capitalism. This deity might have a dozen faces, but whether its a loonie pressed in the palm of someone excommunicated or a mastercard expense account of a holy roller, it loves lesbians as long as they are shoppers. Which is a cynical but nonetheless true reading of *its* gospel.

There is another story circulating Vancouver however, perhaps on its way to urban myth status—the one about the lesbians from out of town who were walking about, dejected in the grey December rain, made conscious of their relative poverty by all the chi-chi scene. Until they saw the bench. And knew that if not a lesbian god, certainly some lesbian women had a fine sense of humour.

Susan Edelstein

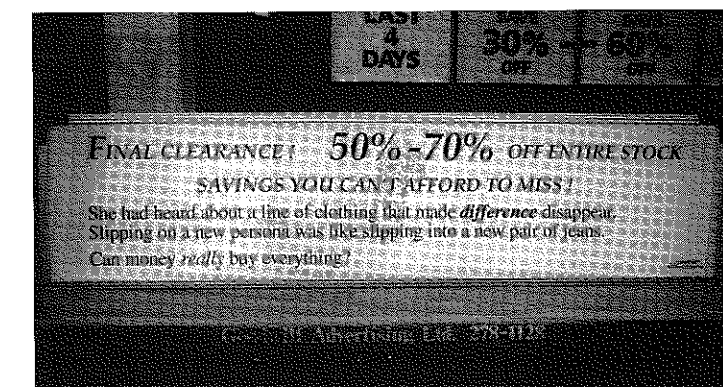
**Final Clearance!**

Questioning the masked identities which are defined/ designed by the consumer-capitalist world of fashion.

"She had heard about a line of clothing that made *difference* disappear. Slipping on a new persona was like slipping into a new pair of jeans. Can money really buy everything?"

*red and black vinyl lettering on white coroplast*

Installed Jan. 94 to Feb. 94 at Robson and Burrard, in downtown Vancouver.



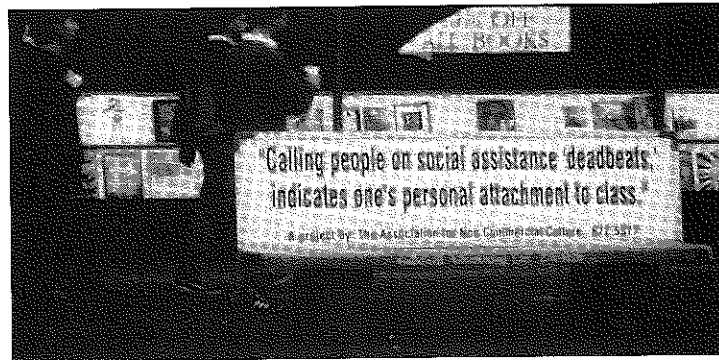
**Now that's a sale!** A couple blocks east along Robson from Armstrong's "Season's Greetings" the compelling promise of a post-holiday deal in the extreme. But what kind of clothing makes "difference disappear"? Susan Edelstein's bench might allude to the homogenizing power of multinational capitalism—how the gross inequalities of race and class and gender are (apparently) gently erased in the idealized images of fashion advertising. Difference *doesn't* figure in the sphere of what some have called "consumer democracy"—the democracy in which access to goods replaces access to power. In case anyone should get complacent about their buying power, or despair about their lack of it, the message on Edelstein's bench concludes with the (perhaps ironic) moralism "Can money really buy everything?" a question that sounds like it's coming from the super ego of a distressed shopper. What if the answer is yes?

Vicki Moulder

"Calling people on social assistance 'deadbeats,' indicates one's personal attachment to class."

black vinyl lettering on white coroplast

Installed Jan. 94 to Feb. 94 at Robson and Hornby, in downtown Vancouver.



Last autumn the B.C. government did an enquiry into welfare fraud; they also gave their PR office some overtime doing damage control on a much quoted remark by Premier Mike Harcourt who promised to crack down on "welfare cheats and deadbeats." Even if you weren't aware of this controversy, Vicki Moulder's bench message speaks loudly and clearly for itself. (However I detect a moral tone that may suggest its speaker's belief in a position above or beyond "personal attachment to class.") That this ideological slogan is presented as a quotation is either a clever play with the discourse of everyday advertising or an example of one of the most common punctuation mistakes in the language.

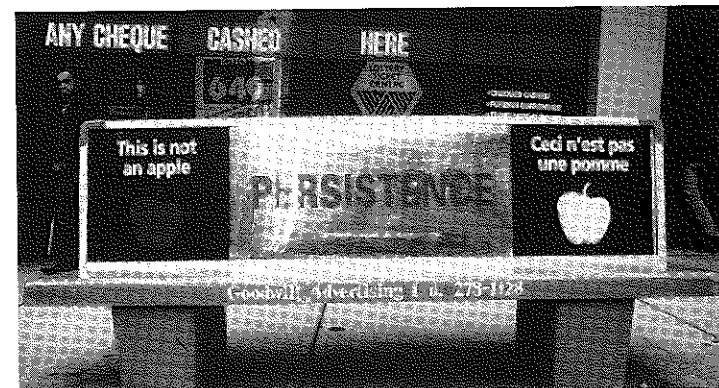
Clo Laurencelle

Backbone Descent

Placing myself between what I am not, persistence remains.

white and red vinyl lettering and cutouts on black coroplast and mirrored plexiglass

Installed Dec. 93 to Feb. 94 at Hastings and Main, in downtown Vancouver.



Backbone Descent by contrast, is a bench whose mark is more difficult to assess. Clo Laurencelle situated her bench on the corner of Main and Hastings—a local geographical cliché for poverty, substance abuse, and violence, but also the neighbourhood where 35% of the city's First Nations population find support services (e.g. a youth centre, a healing circle, etc.). The bench's centre panel is an unbreakable mirror meant to invite reflection on the viewer's own face and the word PERSISTENCE. This mirror and text panel is between cut-out shapes of apples and the two official languages that insist "This is not an apple" and "Ceci n'est pas une pomme." Perhaps the bench marks the question of official culture and language: who is really reflected in federal policies? Who is left out? Because the plexiglass of the bench was dirty, the centre mirror couldn't reflect very well; its obscurity could serve as a fine metaphor for the obscurity of the message.

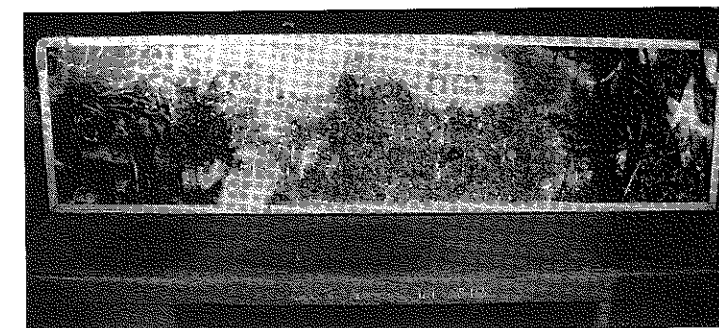
Margot Leigh Butler  
Karen Tee

December 6th

December 6th marks the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

colour photograph

Installed Dec. 93 to late Jan. 94 (when it was stolen) at Main and Terminal, in front of Thornton Park.



Last year a controversy raged about the proposed inscription for "The Women's Monument." Yet the vast majority of people who hang around the bus & train station on Main Street probably don't know that the little park there will soon host a monument to women killed by male violence; the subtlety of the bench message there certainly won't enlighten them either. There's

only an ambiguous photograph—no title, no inscription, just a bit of greenery discernible along the edges of a grey blur through which emerge a few letters (ORY). They seem to have been erased, the grey stony fragment scarcely readable, the whole image a wash-out from any distance, especially at night when you wouldn't even know there's a BENCHMARK there. Given that the planned monument will one day read:

In memory, and in grief for all the women murdered by men  
For women of all countries, all classes  
All ages, all colours  
We, their sisters and brothers,  
remember and work for a better world

the image on the bench is a suggestive metaphor for our society's memory of violence against women—erased, obscured, ignored, legible to only a few in "the know." Then the thing was stolen.

Because the image was so obscure, I doubt that the act was inspired by misogyny; as a random act of vandalism, the theft of property certainly reads into the logic of the piece too. Or perhaps Margo Leigh Butler and Karen Tee have fans—which may be about art, or may be about stalking. Their subsequent collaboration on the same site was much more readable and it was not stolen.

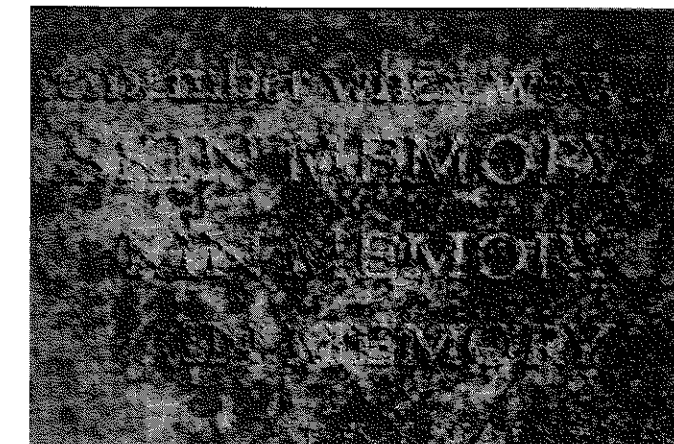
Karen Tee  
Margot Leigh Butler

In Living Memory

IN MEMORY  
KIN MEMORY  
SKIN MEMORY

computer manipulated  
colour photograph

Installed Feb. to April 94 at Main and Terminal, in front of Thornton Park.



(detail of work)

In Living Memory is a photographic image that seems to have zoomed in to the previously obscured message which in retrospect appears to have been a tombstone. This one reads:

I remember when we walked in fear of men's violence, she said.  
SKIN MEMORY We were drenched in vigilance  
KIN MEMORY We have been learning by heart  
IN MEMORY We are still shedding forgetting  
IN LIVING MEMORY

Again it is not a message to be read while driving by the bench. Someone standing there however, someone who is attentive, might recognize that it's "skin" and "kin" that were not readable in the first piece. Which suggests that this memory of violence, though forgotten by "official culture" is written on women's bodies and "by heart."

Lorna Brown

...Impaired mobility. (chronic)...  
...Improved memory. (acute)...

black vinyl lettering on hazard-tape, yellow coroplast

Installed April 94 (and stolen shortly after) at Main and Terminal, in front of Thornton Park. (Computer recreation of piece by Keith Martin.)



Feminist concerns about violence being written on the body are also addressed by the next benchmark on the same site, Lorna Brown's ...Impaired mobility. (chronic)... It too was stolen not long after it appeared. Is it the neighbourhood? How can a "bench-marker" not get paranoid after awhile?

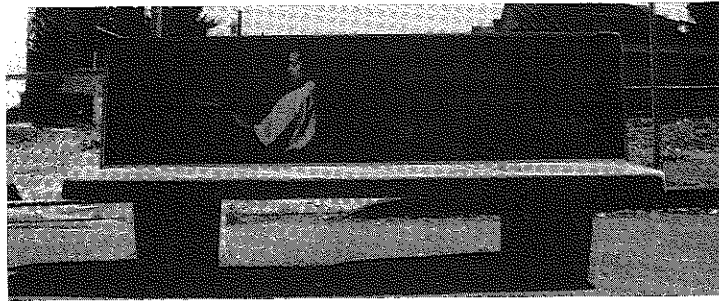
Melinda Mollineaux

### Lime

The location of colour is in the eye of the viewer.

#### hand-tinted photograph

Installed April to June 94 at Commercial Drive and Charles Street, in a Vancouver neighbourhood with a diverse community.



neighbourhood where she is known, holding a lime like a third term, about colour but not race. In a neighbourhood known for "ethnic" food and clothing, Melinda Mollineaux's bench can mark out the "neither/nor" contradictions of being "subject to publicity—limelit" by gender & race.

jil p. weaving

### ...able-bodied passengers with baby strollers...

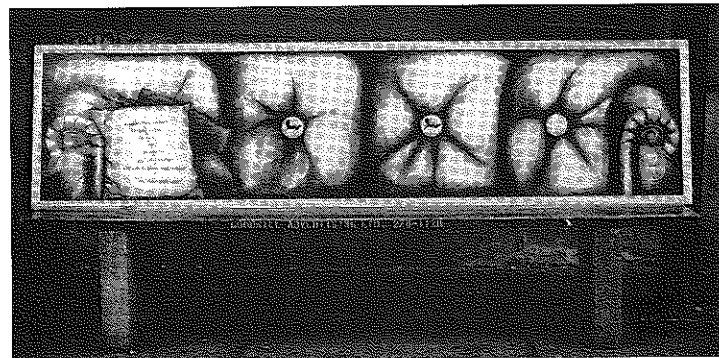
"Accessible Buses are (not) Designed for you. The lift is not intended for able-bodied passengers with baby strollers or large packages."

B.C. Transit's *Rider's Guide*

May 8th, well if it's not able-bodied passengers day

#### oil paint and pastel drawing

Installed April to June 94 at Main and Broadway, in a working class Vancouver neighbourhood.



...able-bodied passengers with strollers... this bus is not for you. Moms with large packages and strollers and kids in tow don't rate a lift onto an otherwise "accessible" bus. So jil p. weaving takes the language from a B.C. transit pamphlet and plays with it to criticize B.C. Transit's definition of "able-bodied." À la Magritte, a painting of a plump green couch, false comfort for Main Street commuters. Upholstery buttons with silhouetted babies, each with a reminder that "this is not a baby stroller"; "this is not a large package." Implied of course: this is not a comfy green couch; this is not accessible transit; and even if it's mother's day, tough luck lady. I was bothered by the implied analogy here between folks in wheelchairs and "able-bodied" parents, but weaving pointed out that young children require wheels and an adult escort to negotiate travel. With this in mind, one can see that kids are erased as subjects from B.C. Transit's reference to packages and strollers. Because weaving chose Mother's Day for her BENCHMARK, we are left to consider motherhood as occasionally dis-abling, especially for low-income mothers who travel by bus. After all, the women who negotiate the stairs and aisles of buses would spare themselves the hassle if they had Volvos with baby seats.

Shaira Holman

### Family values Queer families

Hate is not a family value. Love is.

#### black and white photograph with lavender vinyl lettering

Installed April to June 94 at Robson and Burrard, in downtown Vancouver.



The photograph on this bench by Shaira Holman shows someone lying across the laps of three adults and a kid. One of the adults wears a lapel button that reads "QUEER"; another of the jean-clad figures is a person "of colour" who sports a pink triangle. (Well, the photo was black and white, but the other lesbian signifiers suggest by association that the triangle was pink.) This bench thus represents an unconventional family, a chosen family, to address family values. Loud and clear. When "pro-life" advocates are shooting and killing doctors, when churches of the forgiven and born again are vilifying openly gay ministers, when Preston Manning is running on the spot attempting damage control, the Christian right could do well to listen to Tina Turner's "What's love got to do with it?"

## Taking it to the streets: the signs, the times, the Benchmarks

Jacqueline Larson

O n selected bus-stop benches around Vancouver these days, the slogans, photographs and graphic designs of real estate or soy sauce ads have been replaced by the slogans, photographs and graphic designs of an artists'

collective. Instead of restaurants and pubs that promise a party, instead of the anti-choice organization that promises to help if you answer yes to their "Pregnant? Distressed?" the artist-made benches make very different promises because they are another kind of writing. Although the bench art is not all textually based, its graphics, images and texts can nonetheless be read as a kind of language. Not quite advertising, and neither painting nor graffiti, THE ASSOCIATION FOR NONCOMMERCIAL CULTURE has left its marks, thus constituting a writing that yields, and "yield[s] itself to, reading and rewriting."<sup>1</sup>

Their BENCHMARKS project title is semantically multiple. It suggests at first an immediate reference to surveying (i.e. the "surveyor's mark...to indicate the starting or other point in a line of levels for the determination of altitudes over the face of a country"). The title thus promises that this project will read and measure *something*; perhaps instead of *altitudes* of a topography, some of the *attitudes* around this city—a cultural topography of attitudes—sometimes provocative, sometimes unexamined, definitely heterogeneous.<sup>2</sup>

The *mark* of a *benchmark* is defined as "a boundary, frontier or limit" which leads metonymically to its other meanings: "a *sign* of a boundary, position, etc." (from which we get monuments, targets for shooting, goals and landmarks) and finally a *sign, token, symptom (of something)*... a visible trace or impression diversifying a surface as a line, dot stain, discoloration, scar etc. A benchmark is a point of reference.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR NONCOMMERCIAL CULTURE describes the importance of a reference point in its mandate "to reclaim a portion of the public sphere for commentary from its constituents" (Catalogue 1988). The NON believes that such commentary can facilitate "a critical awareness of culture and the possibilities for social change." They have made public art in a number of sites. Collective member Margot Leigh Butler believes that certain public sites are "charged" (with their history, local politics, etc.); she thinks of public art as further "charging" these sites. (Butler's term suggests an electrical charge but given the advertising context here, the denoted credit card might also be appropriate.)

Whether they are "charging a site" or raising critical awareness, the assumption underlying both of these perspectives is that when artists use the surfaces of bus stop benches instead of any other media that appears in a gallery space, they are bringing art literally to the streets, to the non-gallery public, with social or political consequences. Their interventions are thereby meant to subvert advertising; perhaps they're meant also to subvert "high art." According to many critics, this kind of "low art" or popular culture is a better representative of the "cultural life of the people" (Bal 7) than is, say, Rembrandt or something in the Vancouver Art Gallery.<sup>3</sup> So public art is supposedly both representative of and also perhaps even *good* for "the people." While there are problems with both assumptions—i.e. who are "the people"? and what is "good" for them?—the BENCHMARKS project can interrupt the hypnotic commuter daze that envelopes so many people downtown. Its benches stop the eye—sometimes making a full stop in advertising's relentless grammar.

To do so, the artists of the NON had to straddle a number of contradictions that are perhaps indicative of art's current issues. Firstly, in order to make their art public, they had to pay for "the privilege" of their chosen site.<sup>4</sup> At first it seemed like a bargain: 75 bucks a month—\$55 outside the lower mainland—plus production costs. Because as far as advertising sites go, these benches are overlooked by ad agencies' big customers who prefer the \$1700/month billboard. Ad agencies don't "do" benches because there's no money to be made. Considering agencies get on average a 15% cut, bus stop benches are obviously small potatoes. So it's the small potato business or realtor who chooses such a site. The NON, however, discovered that small voices can make a lot of noise when they slip into the space of advertising.

When, for example, Leila Armstrong decided to send a special Christmas "Season's Greetings" with a lesbian positive message, Goodwill Advertising balked. Sales rep Karim Dharamshi explained that he had to "handle this situation very delicately." *Your God Loves*

<sup>1</sup> Although he isn't talking about visual art, Derrida's notion of writing is useful here. In "Signature Event Context" he says that "to write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive..." (91). This idea of a productive mark is a starting point for my reading of these benches. (I also want to thank C.J. Castricano for referring me to Derrida's essay and for her tireless editorial support and advice.)

<sup>2</sup> A bench is also "a judge's seat or seat of justice; hence the "...judicial status...a place where justice is administered." By extension, benches can represent "official capacity or the dignity of occupying such a seat," which is ironic when you realize this "art" supplants a relatively inexpensive form of advertising. Neither those who advertise here, nor those "in transit" who occupy these benches are typically granted much authority (never mind dignity!).

<sup>3</sup> Other critics, like Mieke Bal in her *Reading Rembrandt* claim that so called high art is also "part of popular culture.... These works may be part of the elitist culture, but the responses they elicit are not." (7)

<sup>4</sup> Or maybe there is no contradiction, since all galleries have to pay for their space. But while the NON has some of the responsibilities of a gallery, it is also unlike a gallery since it has no permanent space.



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## A brief history of the NON

The collective is a non-profit society which was formed by a group of artists associated with the (N)on Commercial gallery (an independent artist-run space which operated from 1984 to 1986 on Commercial Drive). The spring of 1986 witnessed the closing of the gallery and its founding members Kati Campbell, Warren Murfitt, Carol Williams and Don Gill, were joined by Lorna Brown, Margot Leigh Butler, Daniel Congdon, Amy Jones, Dennis Martin, Keith Martin, Ross Muirhead and jil p. weaving to form THE VANCOUVER ASSOCIATION FOR NONCOMMERCIAL CULTURE. Determined to make "non-consumerist" culture available in the public sphere, the NON founders used the lack of a permanent physical space as an opportunity to foster a shift in programming strategies, making room for a different genre of art practice, art work that exists outside of the usual, often problematic, confining space known as the "gallery."

The last eight years has seen a diverse group of artists from many disciplines conceive and execute innovative projects. These projects have employed various strategies of getting art work out into a variety of publics. Venues have ranged from storefront windows to bus shelters. Installations moved around the city on the back of a truck; newspaper flyers distributed to 30,000 households contained pages created by 16 artists; and works produced as brochures boarded the B.C. Ferries: these represent just some of the previous projects that the NON has been responsible for.

The membership of the NON has also continually shifted. At the time of the BENCHMARKS project the collective consisted of Leila Armstrong, Margot Leigh Butler, Ana Chang, Susan D. Edelstein, Kenna Fair, Suzo Hickey, Shaira Holman, Lizard Jones, Clo Laurencelle, Vicki Moulder, Karen Tee and jil p. weaving. As members of the collective, artists act as board members and volunteer their skills and time to do the administrative work of the NONCOMMERCIAL; they also participate as artists in the projects. In addition, the collective invites guest artists to participate on a project-to-project basis.

Susan Edelstein

ESSAY COMMITTEE  
WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF Susan Edelstein, Vicki Moulder, jil p. weaving  
Margot Leigh Butler and Karen Tee

PHOTO DOCUMENTATION Kim Clarke, Shaira Holman, Vicki Moulder, Clo Laurencelle,  
Karen Tee and jil p. weaving

COPY EDITTING Jacqueline Larson

PROJECT COORDINATOR Darlene Gage  
ESSAY COORDINATOR jil p. weaving  
GRAPHIC DESIGN Keith Martin of two[2]cats.working inc.

(Note: this project engendered the NON's subsequent project, BENCH(re)MARKS, installed June to Dec. 1994.)

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# rampike literary supplement

# #3

## The RAMPIKE LITERARY SUPPLEMENT/LITTÉRAIRE: #3.

Correspondence Correspondence

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Editorial/Rédaction

Jim Francis Karl Jirgens Carole Turner

Le Supplément Littéraire Rampike paraît deux fois l'an dans *Borderlines*. Le *Journal Rampike* continuer son production **independent**. Les manuscrits adressés à la rédaction doivent être dactylographiés a double interligne et au recto seulement. Les auteurs dont priés de conserver un double de leurs articles. La revue n'est pas responsable des manuscrits ou ouvrages adressés. La rédaction reçoit sur rendez-vous. La rédaction est responsable du choix des textes qui paraissent dans la revue, mais les opinions n'engagent que leurs auteurs. Tous droits réservés, "copyright" les artistes/auteurs.

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## Editorial:

Welcome to the third "Rampike Literary Supplement"! In this issue we feature samplings of visual art from Germany and Japan, poetry from Canada, fiction from Australia and art criticism from the United States. This "Literary Supplement" is in the spirit of the next issue of "Rampike Magazine" which will appear by the end of this year and will feature art and writing engaged with the notion of "Creative Misunderstanding." We the editors of this literary supplement take this opportunity to point out that the distortion of facts and the forwarding of the preposterous are not solely the domain of television and newspapers. We hope you will enjoy these prevaricate hors-d'oeuvres and we thank you for your on-going readership! Ciao for niao!

*Correspondents/Collaboration:* Montreal; Claude Beausoleil, Michel Gay, Fortner Anderson, A.A. Painchaud, Nicole Brossard, Jean-Paul Daoust, Toronto; Carol Anderson, Banuta Rubess, Vancouver; George Bowering, Québec; Richard Martel, Pierre-André Arcand, Alain Martin Richard, New York; Michael Winkler, Robert Morgan, Joanna Gunderson, California; Marina La Palma, Opal L. Nations, Robert Dassanowsky-Harris, Oregon; Misha, Latin America; Cola Franzen, Lake Sagaris, France; Roland Sabatier, Abigail Simmons, Italy/Italie; Enzo Minarelli, Giovanni Fontana, Germany/Allemagne; Jürgen O. Olbrich, Ulrich Tarlatt, Guillermo Deisler, Switzerland; Manfred Vanci Stimeman, Latvia/Letonie; Arvids Ulme, Anita Zalite. Jugoslavia/Yugoslavie; Balint Szombathy, Poland/Pologne; Andrzej Dudek-Dürer, Australia/Australie; Brian Edwards.

### **Contributors: Rampike Literary Supplement #3**

Gary Barwin live in Hamilton, Ontario, and frequently reads and performs in Toronto. His books feature surrealist arabesques of thought.

Brian Edwards teaches and writes in Australia. He recently visited western Canada where he met up with writers such as George Bowering. Brian has made several previous appearances in *Rampike* magazine.

Robert Morgan is an active and well-known New York art critic examining "New Media Arts." He has appeared several times in *Rampike*.

Stan Rogal is a poet/dramatist living in Toronto who has organized a series of energetic readings at the Idler Pub.

Johan de Wit takes the floor for the first time in the *Rampike* Literary supplement with this issue.

**Front Cover Image:** featuring artist Jürgen O. Olbrich of the "No-Institute" Kassel, Germany "Will you be Hammer or Anvil?"

**Back Cover Image:** by mail-artist → K. Takeishi-Tateno 390-31 Maraubayashi, Nogimachi, Tochigi-Japan, 329-01.

## The First Indoor World Surfing Championships by Brian Edwards

When Clío complained that my stories started like essays and my essays like stories, she was referring to an early draft of this one. It began with a reference to the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon concerning philosopher rulers and their passion for the truth. In response, I repeated the old line that stories are about story-making and that they are, therefore, explicitly or implicitly discursive, like an essay. Similarly, I said, there are stories presented in essays...

"Take Montaigne--"

"But as with history, essays purport to deal with truths of the world. Like Michelet, Taine and Tocqueville, Montaigne muses on realities."

"Of drunkenness, liars, pedantry, idleness, sleep and death? Is this what you mean?"

"And ancient customs, judgement, education and books. You know what I mean. But, in any case, an essay declares a particular style of address and a particular sort of expectation for readers, different from 'story'..."

Round we went, on questions of form, style and expectation, skirting the great problematic of being and truth with not much damage, really, to continuing discourse. Soured early on the subject of transcendence, even before Philosophy I, I had never held much hope for The Form of the Good as the cause of knowledge, truth and the purity of forms.

So long ago, we listened to Professor Gibson in the cavernous PLT of the University of Melbourne interpreting the pile of lecture notes he handed out each year, his revisitations to *The Republic*. Tricked by shadows, accepting illusions as the real, we became prisoners in Plato's cave. But what should we expect? When scepticism questions ideas of an intelligible world of ideal forms and pure thought, and mocks the distinction between knowledge and opinion, the cave subsumes the sunlit world. How then shall we distinguish between illusion and reality. Clío, I said, There may be conventions of discourse, the uses of which are in themselves a courtesy and a signal of intentions, but even these are eroded: Farewell Pure Forms where Truth forever dwells; All hail the world of shadows! You know, she said, Cornford suggests that readers may better appreciate the figure of the cave by reading it as cinema, the shadows on the curtain as images on the screen and so on. The analogy is neat, even to the "fire" in the projectionist's box, though it finally reminds us of difference while leaving untouched the tough issue of the truth value of what is outside the cave or not upon the screen, be the revelation, provide the answer. There is so much going on in the darkness and it is difficult to separate reality from illusion, truth from lies, not only because the category distinctions themselves are suspect but also because of the inevitable cast in every watcher's eye. Who's to be trusted? Besides, some of us have always appreciated, Clío added, that the old distinction between history and aesthetics is false.

Let me tell you the true story of the First Indoor World Surfing Championships.

It was in 1985 that I heard rumours of a new event in world surfing, a contest to be held in Alberta. Surfing in landlocked Alberta? This is someone's joke, I thought immediately, an absurdist bit of play circulated by wags for diversion of the people. It's an old saying that the most serious of people and times and cultures benefit from play. We need diversion. It is a more recent saying that the opposition is misleading, that just as play can be serious so seriousness always involves play, as an irresistible part of the enabling structure itself. In any case, applauding the idea I also forgot about it until the notice arrived from my good friend, M.R.:

**THE FIRST INDOOR WORLD  
SURFING CHAMPIONSHIPS  
EDMONTON ALBERTA  
SEPTEMBER 1-4, 1986**

Michael is a literature man, a professor who writes stories and who is also an expert on theories of play and game. We had surfed together in Australia, mainly along the south coast where waves roll in cold and blue, and in addition to our shared speculation upon conceptual problems, critical theory and narratology, we professed an interest in Latin American magic realism. I thought he was playing another trick, though he usually confined these to narrative. Surely he had a friend in the University printery; together they had produced this notice for the entertainment of game enthusiasts. A surfing competition on the Prairies! How ludicrous! Michael's interest in game theory and play concepts did not concern mathematics or anthropology but, rather, their relationship to patterns of communication. He applied them to the study of literature. There it was. Case solved. The trickster figure of the cold north was showing his hand.

But when I received an invitation to the Badlands Conference in Southern Alberta, a conference devoted to literary connections, I wrote immediately to Michael suggesting I would visit him. His reply came by return mail: "Delighted. And we can watch the Indoor Surfing Championships. Australians are competing!"

Three hot air balloons drifted lazily in the blue sky, and off to the south a 747 left a brief trail of exhaust fumes as it lifted above the city. We entered West Edmonton Mall from the southern car park where a screen flashed information about the competition and the competitors along with action shots from the beaches: Santa Monica, Laguna, Waikiki, Bells...

"Remember the morning at Winkie Pop, alongside Bells, when Nat wiped out, broke his board in half...?"

I remembered clouds of yellow butterflies, golden fish and how Remedios the Beauty rose into the air trailing the family's second-best sheets. This was magic realism transformed, built by expatriate Iranians whose fortune started with carpet sales. With a family history traceable to



Azerbaijan, tough experience in Tehran, and Canadian beginnings in a drug-store on Sherbrooke Street in downtown Montreal, the brothers Ghermezian had propelled flat-land Edmonton on a magic carpet ride -- five million square feet of dream creation to draw people away from the city centre in a whole new form of tourism. According to Michael, father Jacob built a thriving business in Tehran in the forties, moved the family to Canada in the early fifties and urged his sons, Eskander, Raphael, Bahman and Nader, to attend university, study hard and brush up on their skills in design. Not even he could have foreseen that their sills would be in dream design, in land speculation for the dissemination not of house lots, apartment buildings or industrial real estate but of fantasies. Edmonton's aldermen now tell stories of the brothers' enterprise, and persistence. It is ancient history.

I was about to ask Michael which way the beach faced. Would the wind be off-shore? But then I realized that wave formation here would not depend on beach configurations and wind direction.

Part of the car park was cordoned off, and there they were, the vans, combies, and even a couple of wide-tracking buggies, all wearing their badges, symbols of an international passion become a way of life.

"I should think they'll be favouring short boards for quick action on the waves," said Michael.

A student of the bizarre, he too was excited by this prospect of a new variation upon outer limits of the previously possible. It is one thing to construct an artificial sea in a shopping mall, but to stage a first in world sporting competition...

"This is peculiar, you know, as if Scheherazade teamed with Kafka to produce the script for a postmodernist film."

We walked past exotic birds in cages -- macaws, toucans, parrots, white cockatoos, flamingoes and even emus and ostriches, past aquariums filled with gaudy fish, the dolphin pool, monkeys, the scaled replica of Columbus' "Santa Maria", submarines, a vast amusement park with its twelve-story labyrinth of coloured tracks, the Mindbender Rollercoaster, and the Drop of Doom, an ice rink... In this setting, a carousel is an exercise in restraint.

"This rink is where the Oilers practice, but if you're not interested in ice skating there is a miniature-golf replica of Pebble Beach Golf Course. Par 46."

Here was Twentieth-century Desire fashioned on a large budget and placed on technicolour display. Available to all. There shall be no lack in West Edmonton Mall. Terrazzo and Italian marble floors stretch on two levels for eight city blocks, for almost two kilometres; there are more than eight hundred shops, and famous streets in facsimile; "The largest shopping centre (in the world) is West Edmonton Mall" (*Guinness Book of World Records*).

"It's open twenty-one hours a day, you know, three hundred and sixty-five days of the year."

We stopped for a beer in the Sherlock Holmes at 1650 Bourbon Street.

The waves were rolling in smooth funnels,

peaking around six feet and with troughs beaten as if heavy fish skittered there for fry or a light wind ran creases in the surface. This would suit "The Rabbit". It was a fine day for the heats.

Swimmers and mat-riders tested the waves, careening down the face to run the gauntlet of kids in the shallows. Other kids plummeted through the water slides, turning through their long spirals of steel and plastic, women in bikinis sat in deck chairs on a sand-coloured rubber shore, and photographers were setting up, preparing to catch contestants and the audience, this flavour of carnival, this indoor surfing competition.

Already a large crowd had gathered. People were draped like a Victorian stage-setting upon the multi-storied wrought iron fantasy at the head of the beach and spreading quickly around the viewing galleries, shuffling for position, ready for a world first. A band played, or was it muzak? Sunlight streamed through the fretwork glass canopy. I noticed a life-guard take out his sun-tan oil.

There is an aesthetics of surfing. At daybreak, from clifftops, I have watched them rise lazily on long walls of water, taking the wave three-quarters of a mile off shore to ride it out in one long smooth glide; and you can feel it on your tongue, this indolent sweep as the ocean buckles, and aristocratic assertion. But competitors work the wave in a flurry of cuts and crosses, side slips, back entries, drops and turns -- and rococo replaces classicism.

Here, we were told, are surfers from the beaches of California, Hawaii, South Africa, Australia...

Thinking over that experience now, it is difficult to represent accurately the contradictory sensations of the moment. Naturally, there was a sense of unreality about the whole concept of the context and its setting. Locked into the crowd, and with sunlight pouring through the glass, I felt that some "magister ludi", some gamesmaster with a strong sense of the absurd and considerable resources, was creating a hoax, that we were -- like Nicholas Urfe at the hands of Conchis -- victims of a godgame, or travellers on a new magic carpet ride. But the ludicrous was inseparable from the fascination, the excesses from the fact that it was real. There were the waves (360 feet long and 6 feet high, computer controlled, Michael said later), the extraordinary fanfare and the watchers. Gasps of incredulity defined visitors, for locals seemed to take it as not some postmodern freak but the ordinary at work, another event of the West Edmonton carnivalesque in action. And to think that this could be happening if the temperature was -35C. outside with flurries whirling about the canopy, and not a sunny 22C. as it was on that day. Medieval carnivals provided rituals of inversion; this one demanded, at least, a suspension of one's capacity for disbelief. If jesters could be king for a day, then, maybe, in the fantasyland of late twentieth-century Alberta, surfers could compete in the climate controlled atmosphere, a constant 30C., of a mall on the Prairies.

"And what about the Australians?" asked Clio. "Was it so unreal that they packed up their boards and left Canada to Canadians, and other tourists?"

Michael and I watched only the early heats. Two

of the five Australians in the contest survived the, Shane Donaldson, a goofy-footer from Cronulla, and "Tall" McMurty from Torquay who grew up surfing the Victorian west coast. Tall's quick action seemed to suit the conditions. Being short, he used a light-weight board that he could whip about in those regular waves. This context would not have suited the Hawaiian Duke.

It was two weeks later, when Michael's letter arrived, that I learned the results of the competition and heard some of the stories of its aftermath. The First Indoor World Surfing Championship was won by an Albertan. James Grassick was seventeen years of age. He had lived in Edmonton for five years since his family had sold up their farmland fifty miles north-east of the city. He had just completed secondary school; he hoped to study mathematics and computing at the University of Alberta; he was, he said, a surfing fanatic who loved surfing films, read the surfing journals and could talk about the famous beaches and top surfers as everyday familiars. He had never seen the sea.

Grassick lives in the village that has sprung up alongside West Edmonton Mall, an artfully designed satellite to the pleasure palace itself. He surfed the mall's waves most mornings and evenings, before school and after home-work. Though in this instance, and for obvious reasons, the figure may seem strange, he knew those waves like the back of his hand. Their regularity makes the figure appropriate because, although the wave-making machine can be adjusted to vary both size and time lapse, nothing can be done about beach configuration and vagaries of weather, those factors of uncertainty which in regular surfing events demand a special resourcefulness of competitors and the capacity to improvise. McMurty, a bit piqued by the result (for he had lost out to the Albertan in the final), said the whole show was a defence against Australian inventiveness, damn near an assault on the Australian national character, on "our" capacity for improvisation and sense of fair play. There's irony in that, though Tall McMurty didn't know it. But Grassick's home-ground advantage is an important factor. He has perfected high-scoring routines, with perhaps eight or ten variations, that he can manage faultlessly in the perfectly regular surf. Untroubled by blizzards, flat oceans or travel, Grassick practised day-in-day-out, varying practice sessions with time spent on video games, his other obsession. He is, so the commentators are now suggesting, the automaton of surfing, not only First Indoor World Surfing Champion, but also surfing's first freak.

"How would he go at Bells?" said McMurty in an interview, presenting the rhetorical question shared by those who followed surfing's calendar around the edges of the world's continents and islands.

Intrigued by all this, Michael visited that village alongside the mall. Although the buildings look like buildings you could find in other real estate developments in cold country, and although street plans repeat the patterns of other places, there are commuter networks,

electronic "walkways", both above and below ground, that connect the individual units of the development with the mall itself, a series of veins and arteries linked with this gigantic heart that promises to cater for every need. Even now excursion deals are being offered in Los Angeles and Tokyo, London, Paris and Melbourne, with special promotion of fantasyland Hotel and the opportunity to realize "your" fantasy in an African Safari Room, a French Revolution Room, a 1001 Arabian Nights Room, a Roman Room or a Truck Room with the bed in the Tray of a pick-up.

Packages will likely next include a round trip to downtown Edmonton, the deserted commercial centre as a contemporary ghost-town, for comparison with old mining towns as a place where people once gathered, now an existential labyrinth of marble floors, Italianate tiles and intricacies of glass where Culture moves toward Nature in the splendour of the Manulife Building and may be taken in free from the crush of population.

There it is, dear Clio. How does this event affect the measure? Who can be sure? That which seems preposterous challenges criteria of the real, causing us to add there a point, or subtract two, shake conditions a little, unsettle the standards. If indeed the world's gone mad on artifice, what is "natural" any more? What would Socrates say?

### MY AUNT AND MR BLEM by Gary Barwin

one june day  
when she was young  
a man layed her & she misted  
& though she had a suitor later  
she never had him  
he didn't suit her & she missed it  
he wasn't she said playing  
with a full dick he had lost  
his marvels & she dismissed him  
her mist ache remaining

then saturday next another mister arrived  
this one was blem  
he came -- leaving soon after  
he hadn't missed & he knew  
she would come round  
before he came round again

but later that fall  
he returned for he missed her rising  
to the occasion though this time  
an altared man

this the story how my aunt  
was blemished  
how mr blem came into her  
life went up my auntie

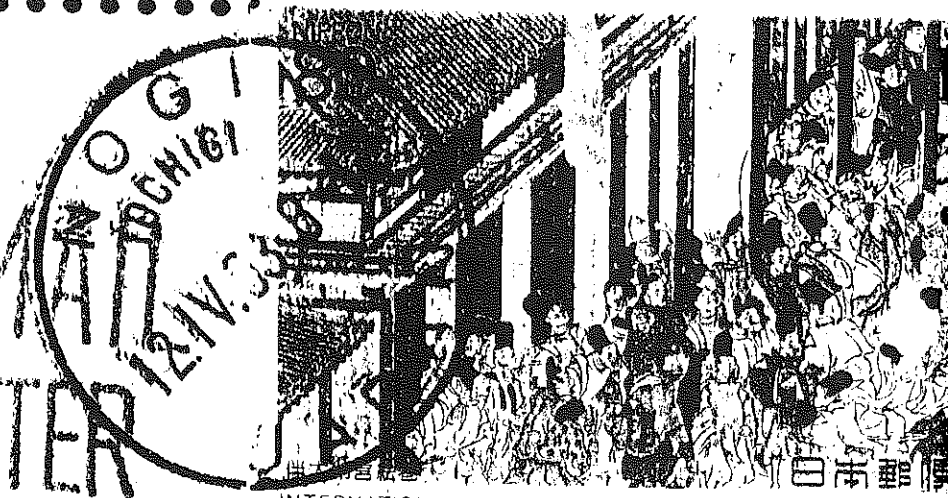








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**YELLOW**  
Frozen Correspondence

**HUBERT AQUIN**

Occupation:  
Writer

**R A D I O**

Marc Raboy  
Jody Berland