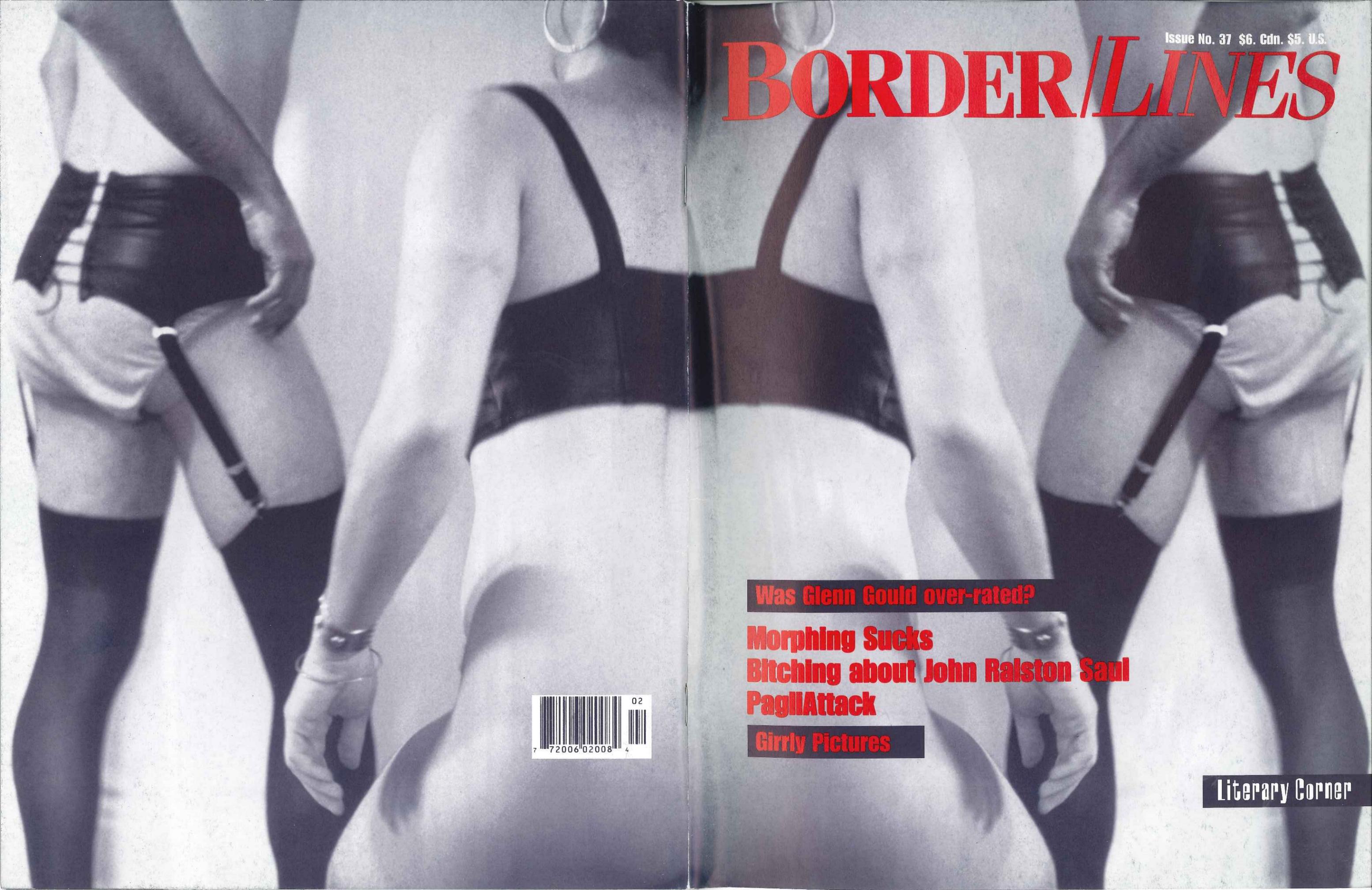


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BORDER/LINES

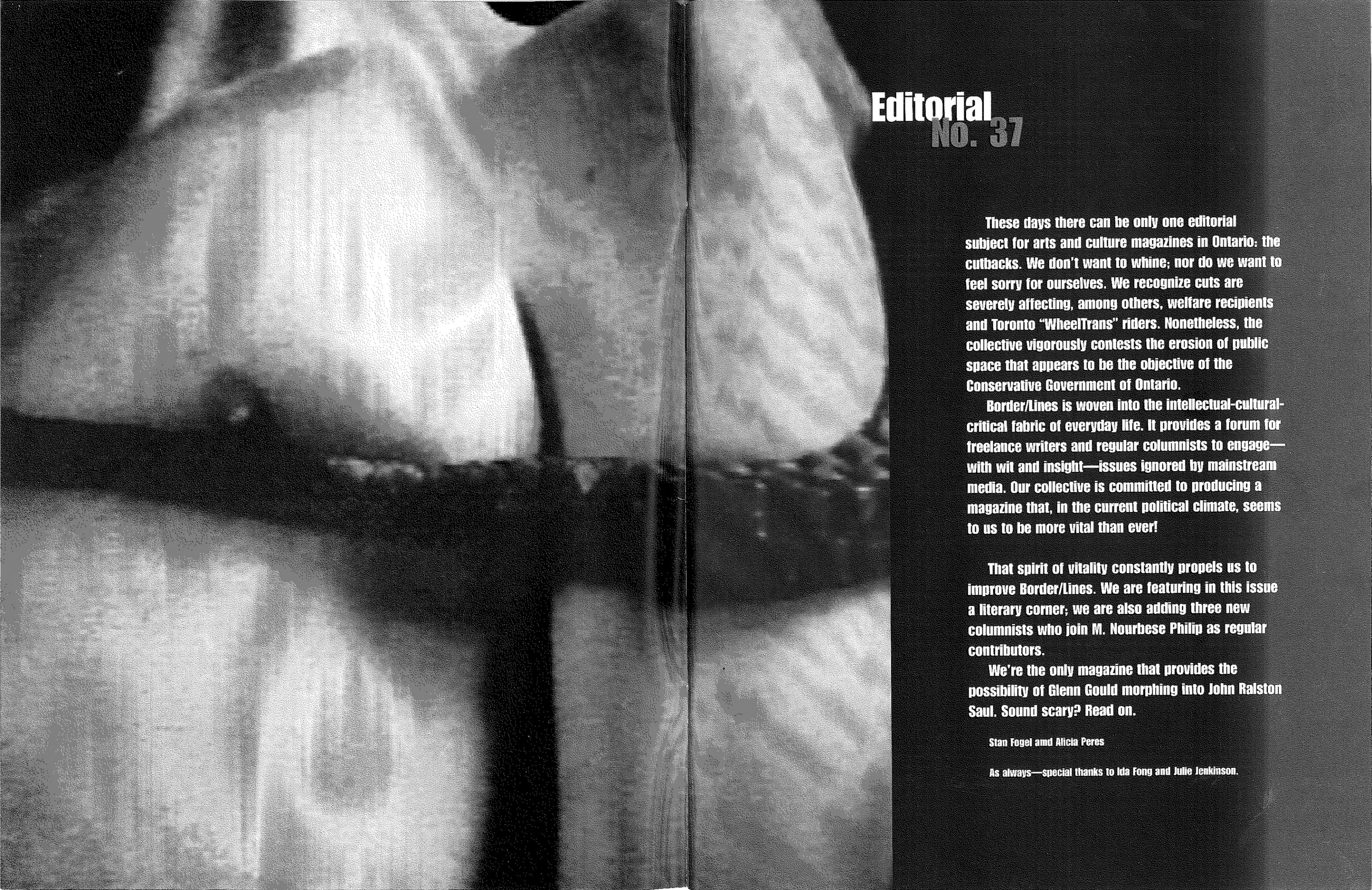


Was Glenn Gould over-rated?

**Morphing Sucks
Bitching about John Ralston Saul
PaglAttack**

Girly Pictures

Literary Corner



Editorial

NO. 37

These days there can be only one editorial subject for arts and culture magazines in Ontario: the cutbacks. We don't want to whine; nor do we want to feel sorry for ourselves. We recognize cuts are severely affecting, among others, welfare recipients and Toronto "WheelTrans" riders. Nonetheless, the collective vigorously contests the erosion of public space that appears to be the objective of the Conservative Government of Ontario.

Border/Lines is woven into the intellectual-cultural-critical fabric of everyday life. It provides a forum for freelance writers and regular columnists to engage—with wit and insight—issues ignored by mainstream media. Our collective is committed to producing a magazine that, in the current political climate, seems to us to be more vital than ever!

That spirit of vitality constantly propels us to improve Border/Lines. We are featuring in this issue a literary corner; we are also adding three new columnists who join M. Nourbese Philip as regular contributors.

We're the only magazine that provides the possibility of Glenn Gould morphing into John Ralston Saul. Sound scary? Read on.

Stan Fogel and Alicia Peres

As always—special thanks to Ida Fong and Julie Jenkinson.



features

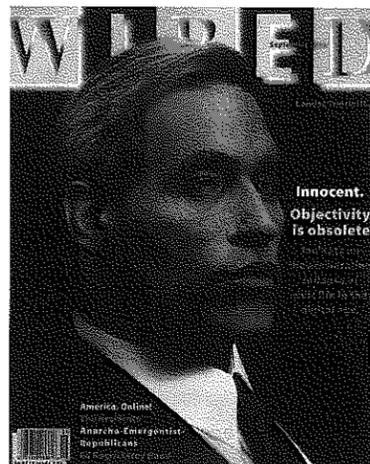
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BORDER/LINES MAGAZINE



What is Your Alternative?

art

no. 37

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Plus:
 Ellen Flanders
 Janieta Eyre
 Sylvie Belanger
 Jim Campbell

Cover: Ellen Flanders
 From the series "Lacking Desire":
Jewish Queers: A response to Otto Weininger

Inside front cover: From *Girly Pictures*

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Dear Border/Lines,

The Tower Records magazine has this column called "Desert Island Discs" where you write in what 10 records you would want to get stranded on a deserted island with? And lots of people write in.

Anyway, I was reading Dennis Sexsmith's 100 starting points of postmodernism article and I saw he left some out. So I got to thinking you could have a column of "Po-Mo-Moments"™ and have lots of people write in their personal choice of, oh, let's say 15 postmodern moments, and you could print them. Here's mine.

Note: I am not following Sexsmith's 61-69 rule. I don't have to.

15. Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated live on television as America watches. Bread & circuses make a quantum leap (1963):

"Ruby killed Lee Harvey: TV proved he did."

—Jay Cotton

"Lee H. Was a Friend of Mine"

14. Samuel Beckett completes and publishes *Comment C'est*, the last novel (1960):

"To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now."

—Samuel Beckett

13. Dada poet Arthur Cravan is k.o.ed by ex-heavyweight world champion in exile, Jack Johnson (Barcelona, 1916):

The end of Pop Art.

12. Dylan kicks Phil Ochs out of his limo for daring to suggest that "Please Crawl Out Your Window" won't be a hit (1966):

The Immanization of the Eschaton begins.

11. "Shoot" Chris Burden (1971):

Heteropatriarchal aesthetics of penetration at their MOST—in one era and out the other.

"The rich are titillated by artists, because artists . . . don't try to lick rich peoples' assholes."

—Chris Burden (1978)

10. First Church of Scientology opens (Los Angeles, 1954):

Read "Bald Faced Messiah" and tell me that history shouldn't be divided into Before and After Ron.

9. John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg meet at Black Mountain College (1951):

letter to the editor

Hexagram 65: Infinite frontiers open from turning towards immediate moment. Remaining artifacts inevitably disappear. Tough shit.

8. Dr. Seuss publishes *And to Think that I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937):

"Give me a child for the first five years and it is mine for the rest of its life."

—St. Ignatius of Loyola

7. Ed "Psycho" Gein arrested for the murder of Bernice Worden (1957):

The murder, mutilation, paraphilia, and dissociative psychosis of Western Culture find local expression. People act surprised.

6. Wilhelm Reich dies in Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary (1957):

Afterwards he visits his son in a UFO.

"The goal of sexual repression is that of producing an individual who is adjusted to the authoritarian order and will submit to it in spite of all misery and degradation."

—Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*

5. Manson family fails to precipitate Apocalypse (1969):

Oops. Television specials follow.

4. Lenny Bruce dies of an O.D. (1966):

The last time a sane person was allowed to become a celebrity.

3. Barney and Betty Hill abducted by UFO and tinkered with (September 19, 1961):

Contact casts the humanities in a new light.

2. Faculty members Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, in the first such case in the twentieth century, are fired from Harvard — in Leary's case, "for failure to attend an honors program committee meeting" (1963):

"LSD is more important than Harvard."

—Dr. Leary

1. Poytetrafluoroethylene (Teflon) unveiled by DuPont (April 1946):

Nothing sticks.

Doug Harvey
Los Angeles, CA

P.S. Another idea is to pay a small honorarium, oh, say \$50, to the person who writes in "Po-Mo-Moments"™. Thank you for your kind attention.

MARY WALSH VS. THE HEIST-MEISTER

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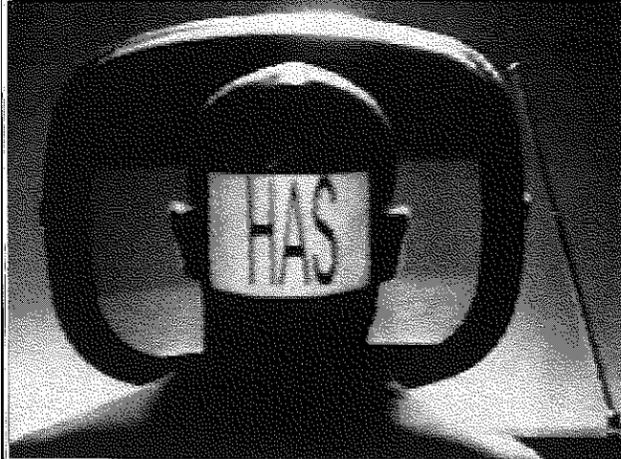


by **Julia Creet**

How Does Lesbian Parody Fare in Newfoundland?

"This Hour Has 22 Minutes" Takes Diesel Dykes to the Streets of St. John's... and the rest of Canada

On Monday nights in the '94-'95 television season, sandwiched between the buffoonery of "Kids in the Hall" and the patter of prime-time news was a show so politically sensitive that it came with a warning. "This Hour Has 22 Minutes" is a satirical examination of daily events. Some viewers may not share this sense of humour. The disclaimer was tongue-in-cheek, although, as the show's writers and producers clearly hoped, necessary. The popularity of "This Hour Has 22 Minutes" and its writers/actors — Mary Walsh, Cathy Jones, Rick Mercer, and Greg Thomey — constitutes, ironically, something of a success and a failure. By way of explanation, let me tell you about my favourite two minutes of "22 Minutes," why I think it's funny, and my search for viewers who might think it is not.



Walsh appears twice as Genoa Hallerstein, "This Hour Has 22 Minutes" special-affairs correspondent from New Jersey. Hot under the harness, so to speak, Hallerstein (close cousin of U.C. San Diego queer theorist Judith Halberstam?) pulls a smaller-than-life cardboard Paglia from a garbage bin as she storms into an alley. "Camille Paglia. What a heist-meister. Don't talk to me about that lipstick lezzie. She talks the talk but she don't walk the walk. Her whole shtick, she lifted it from me. And now in the sleaziest lesbosploitation move ever, she's an open lesbian? Oh please. Listen Camille, I

am a second-generation lesbian. I am the product of a diesel-dyke and a turkey-baster." Unlikely combination. But hey, every body has a story, and Genoa looks like what you might expect of this confused progeny: Joe boxers ringing her blobby white belly, spiky bad hair, army issue slashed sleeveless shirt open to a pointy white bra, woman's symbol tattoos. Unappealing, but ours.

This is an alley where lesbian lineage counts and where Paglia is "nothing but the darling daughter of a couple of heterobucolic breeders." She gets the boot from the butch-guard. "Oh you're so butch Camille with your 'I've kicked and hit more men than any other leading feminist in the world,'" jeers Genoa, feigning femininity. "Ohhh — take a number darling! And stand way behind me. Because you are looking at the original Macho Slut." We'll forgive her slight exaggeration here — surely Pat Califia claims that distinction — for Genoa is at least passionate about authenticity. "[W]here does she get off saying that she was on the cutting edge of butch-feminism because she was wearing Amelia Earhart Hallowe'en costumes in the fifties? (Incidentally, for those who have an interest in Amelia Earhart, see Mary Russo on aerialism in her book *The Female Grotesque*.) Oh, check out my baby pictures, Paglia! Read 'em and weep. I've been wearing a thigh harness since birth." (Grabs thigh with thrusting gesture.) With that lesson in butch realness, Genoa moves on to intellectual property. "She heisted *Vamps and Tramps* from my book. I wrote *Clamps and Lamps* three years ago. I talked about stratification and desexualizing. I called it infirmity feminism. I did the guys in dog collars and chains years ago." In a final burst of exasperation, Hallerstein tops Camille once and for all: "I'm obnoxious. I have an obnoxious personality. I'm an egomaniac. And I even talk faster than she does." Sorry Genoa, not quite. But Hallerstein really is obnoxious and Mary Walsh is not a lesbian.

As the credits roll for the "Best of '94" show, Walsh on Paglia is followed by Cathy Jones: "Joe Crow, here." White woman plays indigenous man. Not something you see everyday on television. All of a sudden I'm worried. It's a parody about someone else. Racist possibly. These folks have no fear. Joe Crow squatting on a rock says, "Listen to your mother," and talks about bears shitting in the woods and the Quebec hydro-electric dam which might grow back "like unwanted facial hair after dinner." One wonders — until he dances away from us chanting "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" à la Aretha Franklin (but in muted tones): "Find out what it means to me." At that moment I want nothing more than to find out what it means to him and them (or do I?).

I took a tape of these skits to a seminar on postmodern lesbian culture. Were they offended by the characters, I asked. No, but what would our parents think? What about that hypothetical viewer in Saskatchewan? Would they find Genoa not only offensive — for different reasons — but, missing the inside jokes, a believable stereotype? And Joe Crow made just about everyone nervous. What would the Native communities think?

The more I thought about the question of the imaginary viewer (easier in some ways to think about than oneself), the more it intrigued me. What *about* that viewer in Saskatchewan? Or Nova Scotia or Newfoundland? How would one find out?

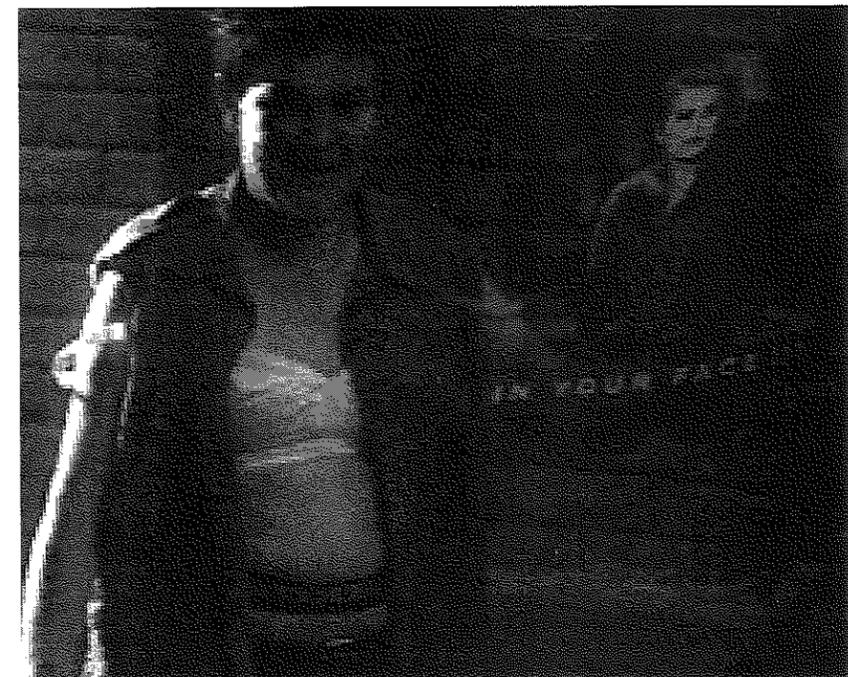
I called the CBC. I'm sorry we can't release that information, someone said; call the producer. So I called Michael Donovan, the executive producer of "This Hour Has 22 Minutes," a thoughtful man who can't quite figure it out. "I used to have ideas

and now I have none," he said, as a general statement, but also in response to my puzzlement (and his) about the lack of recorded response to "This Hour." We try, he said, to test the limits of tolerance, to push for reaction like the show's predecessor, "CODCO," which elicited a letter-writing campaign from east to west protecting religious sensibilities — sensibilities which finally caused Andy Jones to leave the show. But according to Donovan, letters in response to "This Hour" have been uniformly positive, asking for more of such-and-such or reminiscing about how much this or that character was almost exactly like someone near and dear. I imagine myself writing: "Dear Mr. Donovan: I just want to tell you how much I enjoy your show, particularly the character of Genoa Hallerstein. She reminds me of so many women I know (myself included) with her bad-hair bravado, her sexual braggadocio, her feminist one-up-womanship, and her theoretical chic. But, please, don't give her too much air time, she really is obnoxious, like all of the righteously hateful. After all, who'd go to hear Paglia more than once? Yours truly . . ."

In a very pre-postmodern way I wanted to know where Genoa Hallerstein came from. Perhaps to reassure myself about Joe Crow too. So I called Mary Walsh. "Why target Camille Paglia?" I asked. "Because she's mean," said Mary. I watch Paglia reruns on WTN (a channel which provides endless fodder for "This Hour"). Paglia puts down everyone within reach. As a feminist, she trashes feminism; as a lesbian, she despises lesbians. She is both pre- and post-feminist, claiming canonical intellectualism, Hellenic aesthetics, and drag queens as heroines. She is the vanguard, putting the boot to both Dick and Jane.

"Paglia can't possibly believe in what she says" Walsh points out with circular certainty, "because what she says has no basis in truth." Far from being in the vanguard, Paglia is following the trends she says she's setting and profiting by it. "She is up to her glamour-dyke neck in this sick patriarchal culture of acquisition and consumption and the cult of the buck at no matter what cost to whom," says (in one breath) Walsh through Hallerstein. In contrast, Hallerstein is absolutely sincere in her insistence that she (an imaginary character) is Paglia's precursor on all counts. The hollowness of the word "pastiche" comes to mind: a parody without an original, because the original is already a copy. This is an idea which has been used both as a critique of the emptiness (and humourlessness) of postmodernism by Fredric Jameson and alternatively as a testament to its political potential by Judith Butler. (See Jameson's essay, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*.) Walsh, however, is resistant to the idea that there is anything postmodern about this parody (though Paglia qualifies all by herself). No, there is something too humanistic about Hallerstein. "I know what's in my heart" says Walsh, meaning that she knows what's in Hallerstein's heart also. Walsh has no lesbian agenda: "I'm not doing a homo-promo here," says Hallerstein. Nonetheless, as in most parody, she has some affection for the thing she plays, legitimizing and subverting it at the same time. Genoa is an outsider revelling in her outsider-ness, with no apology, no blame, fiercely proud of who she is, willing to take on all imposters. Walsh's sincere parody stands in stark contrast to Paglia's self-aggrandizing sniping. Genoa as a television character is somehow far more real than Paglia as a stand-up intellectual; she excites me, whereas Paglia leaves me stone cold.

"Dear Mr. Donovan: I just want to tell you how much I enjoy your show, particularly the character of Genoa Hallerstein. She reminds me of so many women I know (myself included) with her bad-hair bravado, her sexual braggadocio, her feminist one-up-womanship, and her theoretical chic."



"Oh you're so butch Camille with your 'I've kicked and hit more men than any other leading feminist in the world,'" jeers Genoa, feigning femininity. "Ohhh — take a number darling! And stand way behind me. Because you are looking at the original Macho Slut."



**"If you're out,
you're in!"**

**"If you're out,
you're in!"**

According to Mary Walsh (who should know), Genoa Hallerstein was the only character ever to draw a spontaneous standing ovation from the studio audience in Halifax where "This Hour Has 22 Minutes" is taped. Even on the streets of St. John's, where Newfoundland conservatism runs deep, there are surprising reactions. "Mary," said an old man who approached her, "Love that diesel-dyke." I'm not sure that Genoa could ever be reproduced as effectively as the first time she entered the alley. (Her second appearance on "This Hour" lacked focus, though her rally cry — **"If you're out, you're in!"** — is a keeper.) But she does deserve dissemination, to as wide an audience as possible. I don't mind being her cheering section, her adoring audience; I might even lick her boot if she asked me to. For all my years of lesbian outness, activism, and intellectualism, I wonder if Genoa hasn't done more to further a lesbian agenda than most political polemics. To understand Genoa, a viewer must have inside information, must be able to read the codes, know the significance of the words "macho" and "slut" in combination. [remark] 2: Parody is only perceptible to those who know the model." (Bernard Dupuis, *Gradus, A-Z*.) A viewer who recognizes the walk and the talk must acknowledge a presence that has staked a territorial ground of "visibility." Genoa Hallerstein makes me proud of that knowledge, makes me laugh at myself, makes me feel loved, even if I would give her wide berth in a bar.

The edge of this company of humourists seems to cut with rather than against the grain of national humour. Its members are Newfoundlanders telling Newfie jokes about themselves and the rest of us. So what does this say about us, about the viewer in Saskatchewan, about the Native Canadian? Both Donovan and Walsh say round-about reports are that people from Native communities approve wholeheartedly of Joe Crow, who did, after all, provoke a discussion in our class about the significance of bear shit, facial hair, the Great Whale hydro-electric dam, and the dyke with (bad) attitude. "Who watches your show?" I asked Donovan. I was told it's proportional across the country: rural/urban, older, mostly with post-secondary education. I should have asked for numbers. Maybe I should call the CBC again. The humour seems to appeal to a wide swath of viewers but in unknown numbers.

So much for empiricism, back to the question of subjective response. What strikes me the most about these parodies is, and here I begin to sound not only like a sycophant but a raving nationalist as well, how they would play in the States. I've spent lots of time in American TV land — haven't we all. Thus, I can understand the apocryphal bridge-playing friend of Donovan's mother (a recent immigrant from the south) who said that she found Canada puzzling, especially the news; then she proceeded to describe "This Hour Has 22 Minutes." Nice story, Donovan. We try to be an antidote to news, he says, an antidote to depression; we believe in the value of silliness. I then asked Walsh, "Doesn't the popularity of your show [the series concept was created by Walsh] also constitute a failure? Isn't political satire supposed to piss people off?" Yes, she admitted, she is a bit uncomfortable with its popularity. But she

pointed to the temper of the times: helpless and hopeless, with nobody doing much politics or parody. "This Hour" at least provides a half hour — make that 22 minutes — of some kind of protest.

A "CODCO" Coda

As a final note, since I'm on the topic of "CODCO" alumni, I would like publicly to applaud some of the best queer acts I've ever seen: Tommy Sexton singing "My Heroes Have Always Been Drag Queens" (to the tune of "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys"), with his cherubic face, his fancy shirt, and, as the camera pulled back, his high heels and gartered stockings. You are missed, m'lady. And Andy Jones's belly in the eight-year-old girl's interpretive dance segment of his stage play "Still Alive." And Greg Malone as Barbara Frum. (Who is also missed, but can't somebody tell her son to shut the fuck up? Greg, I think it's incumbent upon you to don your wig one more time and do it.)

**22
MINUTES**

Morphing Sucks

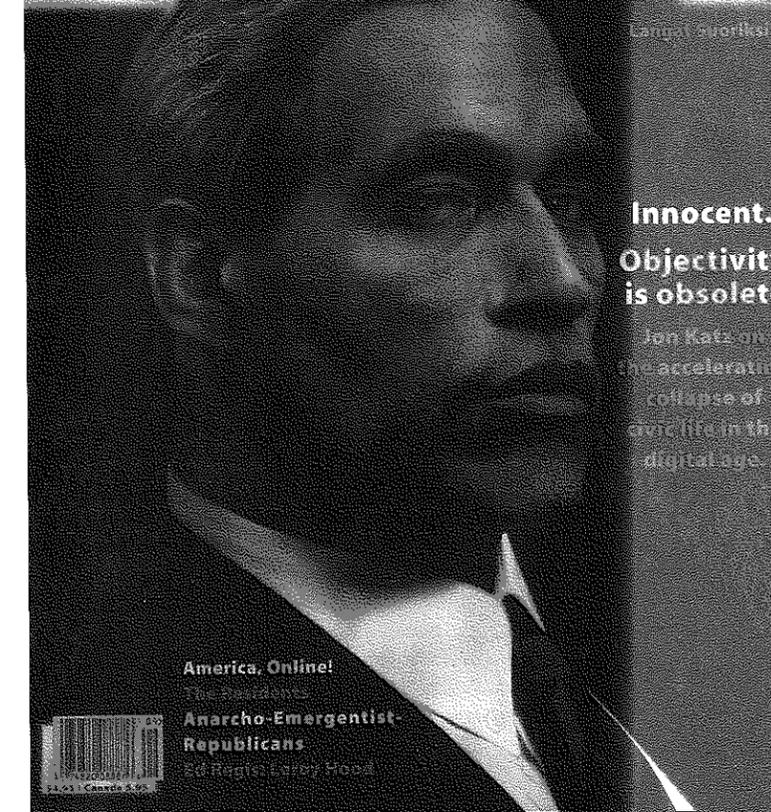
The Unbearable Lightness and Goofiness of Morphing

by Steven Whittaker

Morphing disheartens me. What? Am I squeamish of cybernetic permeation?

Stay tuned. To me. And to TV. Note the current ad fad in which images seamlessly change, or morph, into other images. An ad for razors shows a series of faces, each dissolving into the next. Another ad shows a video-game enthusiast's face morphing into various goofy discombobulations. In an ad for a nasal spray a man morphs into a six-foot nose, which the product then morphs back into his body. Let those images be a ductile muffler around your senses. Muffler morphs to a python, tightens. Python loosens to a tea cozy, then eats the dead sensorium

W I D E D



**Innocent.
Objectivity
is obsolete**

Jon Katz on
the accelerating
collapse of
civic life in the
digital age.

America, Online!
The Best of
Anarcho-Emergentist-
Republicans
Ed Regis: Early Hood





What's wrong with morphing? Morphing is goofy. What's so bad about goofiness? Its spastic exuberance exceeds its own content. Goofiness is the reverse of diffidence. The goofy face is plastic and sorry it is plastic all at once. It mimics *and* it defers to an original face of composure it despairs of assuming. So it is angry — all that genuflecting.

Goofiness is kiss-ass rage. It is an expression of conciliation-through-self-discomposure. "Yuk, yuk, I'm innocuous," says the goofy face, meaning, "Don't hurt me." Goofiness tucks its already receding chin into its collar, and raises its eyebrows ingratiatingly towards its hairline. It bends over backwards to apologize for its goofy prostration.

But even as the goofy face genuflects, it is strangely aggressive. Take the dinosaur, Barney, of the children's show. This Pollyanna-saurus marshals a gaggle of kids through routines of niceness. Underlying his rictal grin and continuous nodding is an imperative of permanent FUN. Each of Barney's child actors wears, to steal a phrase from poet George Jonas, an absolute smile. Every potentially quiet moment is filled with Barney's gurgles and coos and yuks. Barney's producers are scared of the silences and composure you'll find in Mr Rogers who, all pedophile parodies aside, manages to be both sober and comforting when he advises children, "No one is happy *all* of the time."

The most understated excess of expression can make a face goofy, yet excess expression is the defining quality of our media. We are the live hosts of a goofy culture. Goofiness invites us not to respond in an adequate way to considered context, but to react with a zany self-immolation that implies any response would be inadequate. Goofiness both expresses and incites despair. It's even worse when a face achieves its goofiness with the help of morph technology, for then it lacks even the minimal dignity of the face which immolates itself. The morphed face has goofiness done to it!

Morphing makes matter itself seem goofy, for it becomes merely the servile medium of facile alteration. In the morph universe, a face becomes another face as easily as an automobile becomes a tiger, as easily as Ralph Klein becomes a bodhisattva. Morphing robs matter of its integrally grown form; it separates

that form from its material medium. It makes us accustomed to repetitive, trivial change.

When an image is morphed into another image, the metamorphosis is unlike any transformation occurring in nature. Morphing effects a *lateral transformation*. It takes one realized form, posits it as starting point, and designates another form as destination, "realizing" or making explicit the inferred intermediary forms along the way. Thus, the car becomes a tiger, and, less tenable still, Michael Jackson becomes a black panther (in his video for "Black and White").

The lateral transformations that morphing effects between images insult the changes in nature. Think of the shaggy-mane mushroom. This soft fungus can breach asphalt and in the course of one day end up standing a foot tall. Try to imagine the essence of that growth, and place it next to what happens in a morph event. The growth of a shaggy-mane describes the formal organic party of live matter meeting inert resistant matter, and the organism's winning integral thrust. Reaching its full height, the fungus's fruiting body melts into an amorphous soup to spread its spores. It has grown through a penetrating formal integrity to a formless mass in a matter of hours — a testimony to the substance of organic matter.

The awe of the organic is that it is *one* — but one becoming complex, *organizing*, and reproducing; growing out of itself while remaining itself; and preserving in its nuclei a record of and code for its own development.

This is all foreign to morphing's alteration, which synthesizes form out of the material world, and then leaches a made dynamism back into that dematerialized form. This is the reason that morphing's finessed continuities and hybrid versimilitudes are unsuitable for tracing the most mundane transcendences happening in nature.

The transformation that happens in organic growth, as well as in thinking, refers to a centre and a context simultaneously. In the case of a cell, there is individuation; at the same time there is cooperation in the context organism. In the case of thought, or at least self-critical thought, analysis serves the synthesis that depends on it, and which itself redefines the terms and context of analysis.

Morphing makes for a graphic contrast. It extracts images from their context and "grows" them into other images. But the growth is malignant because it returns nothing to its nutrient organism, which was its context. Computer-morphing is the inverse of morphogenesis. Morphogenesis is life-forming and re-forms its substance. It is life-differentiating and -organizing in the same impulsion. Morphing, by comparison, is goofy, cancerous change, a lateral merging of the tissue of images that does not own up to all that is necessary in its made-ness.

What we've got now are oncomedia [onco = bulk, mass], one of which is called morphing. Morphing's fluid, lateral realizations of change depend on nature for attaining distinct forms in the first place, and on the intensive technical culture from other agents, which the morph ad or morph software represents. Our senses have the dubious honour of witnessing the graphics of cybernetic metastasis.

The idea of lateral transformation applies not only to morphing proper, but also to the myriad trivial changes with which our commodity culture distracts us from the possibility of actual change. The morphomania we find in popular culture is fundamentally conservative. Look at Transformers. They are toys that change, but consider their narrow vector of the metamorphosis — from tank to deadly robot. A weapon becomes a humanoid weapon. The ghost in the machine grows more ghoulish. Or think of the TV show "Super Morphin' Power Rangers." I suffered through an episode in which the team of teens morphs into savvy machine dinosaurs, which then organize into a single robot. They do this to rescue a distinctly goofy leprechaun from a malevolent witch. A whole lotta change, going nowhere fast — that's the goofy *Zeitgeist* of the morpher.

It is tempting to focus on the idea of the capitalist-as-abstract-agent, and to accuse that figure of blithe, ruthless action. I could then argue that those who buy Morph or MorphWizard software suffer morph envy of capital's fluidity. Capital may be the only tangible image we retain to function in place of Aristotle's unmoved mover, that stable agent at the centre or periphery of things who impels all appetite, motion, and growth, while remaining still. As Terry Eagleton comments, "Both capitalist and capital are images of the living dead, the one animate yet anaesthetized, the other inanimate yet active."

When we buy the myth that we are unmorphed morphers, do we become the dully alive or the antic dead? A goofy hybrid of both? How do we subtly redefine and mediate our sense of responsibility when we are subjected to the deadening hyperactivity of morphing?

Steven Williams, morph foreman at state-of-the-art morph manufacturer Industrial Light & Magic, which produced the special effects for films such as *The Abyss* and *Terminator 2*, says, "We have conquered the physical laws of nature. We can do tree bark; we can do grass blowing and water rippling." *Time* enthuses that we can look forward to "flights of fancy so realistic that audiences won't ever suspect they're seeing an act of industrial imagination."

An object's nature, its arduous immanence, is irrelevant to the equation during the humanly organized technique of morphing, in which images meet pure torque of will. This is something other than cultivation. We are manufacturing a culture that no longer thinks cultivation a worthwhile, practical metaphor. Cultivation seems just a waste of time when you can simply "do nature."

Commodity culture makes everyone an aristocrat, or at least a manager. With the help of your own home version of Morph Software, it has finally democratized and finessed the means to indulge (read: exacerbate) your appetite for the new. Morph Software promises you infinite jurisdiction over matter. Everyone's an individual, but managing the same range of products and now doing the same morphs.

A chameleon changes colour as it descends from a plant. Natural enough. But as it walks across a telephone, a replica of the dial and numbers morphs on its back. It seems sort of real. . . but you know it isn't. The ad is for a telecommunications company asserting how adaptive it can be in billing you, the client. It will be as servile to you as this chameleon's image is to it. The ad concludes, "After all, when it comes to business, you'd better be able to *change*."

Another ad poses even more problems, because of its positive ecological message. Promoting the value of trees and tree-planting in Canada, the ad features a real tree that seems, through the application of morph technology, to breathe. This medium undermines

the message. The adulterated tree gives the lie to the message of cultivation. The ad kowtows to a culture become incapable of imagining *non-appetitive* immediacy. It offers a tree made goofy with accelerated, anthropomorphed breathing, as if this helps us better understand our dependence on trees.

The idea of a world of supple matter isn't new. Stories of the Buddha's birth tell of lotus leaves springing up to receive his foot-fall, and of the ground adapting to meet his feet with a Birkenstock fit. Another story recounts a priest who admonishes a Hindu ascetic who is reclining in the temple with feet propped on a sacred lingam. The ascetic asks the priest to help him place his feet where there is no lingam, but when the priest tries, every time he moves the man's feet, a lingam springs from the ground to receive them. Meanwhile, a hemisphere and a couple of millenia away, the kneeling St. Theresa of Avila prays with such devotion that she levitates, and the burliest of her Sisters can't pin her to the prayer mat.

In all these cases, matter curtsies for someone who has, through one form of arduous immanent transcendence or another, gained a spiritual pedigree. In contrast, we mongrels of abstraction also want the lotus and the lingam underfoot, but we want them supple to whim rather than worthiness; thus, we lack proof our whim is worthy.

In morphing, one transformation is as plausible as the next. Why is this? Scientific modernity has finally commodified its break with the traditional Western belief in what one conservative theorist called the "infinite continuance of God." This break, though, was by no means a clean one. Morphing gives an indication why. In morphing, scientific modernity commodifies and makes graphic its own belief in a quantifiable equivalence of, or a mediated elision between, things.

This equivalence or elision replaces the former "continuance of God." Or rather, that continuance is now concentrated so that it fits inside an event of change, rather than overarching that change as it did before. Morphing reveals technocratic modernity valorizing a change that turns out to be a highly resolved continuance between this stasis and that. Like Odo, the morphing security officer on "Deep Space 9," this pseudo-change protects the status quo from the threat of real — that is, socially rather than technically achieved — change.

Morph software permits the individual — you, in the privacy of your own home! — as one reviewer says, "to get in on the fusing fun." Confirm your own unmorphed individualism by blurring the individuality of any other naturally or technologically attained form. Move the world on your joystick. You, the unmorphed morpher, are free to "realize" any change. Why honour the history of self-transcending form, recorded in each and every instance of life? Merely move the cursor and that magnified amoeba becomes your limousine. Morph a face into another face or a tumour into an angel: it's all the same. "Why did you stop to morph the rose?" "Uh, I no longer quite believed it was there."

CNN's motto, "Capturing history, moment by moment," sums up morph culture's view of history as a series of segues. News must be new, momentous, goofy. Zoom in, pan out, move on. Pause. See the Bangkok brothel child. She has calluses that morph into petals.

Morphing decontextualizes its objects, but it is not a medium for thoughtful context-breaking. It reinforces an idea of change as mere exchange of one thing for another, instead of change as identity-preserving growth.

Even the biologist studying cellular growth knows that the essence of organic change is not summed up in the static slices of structure she necessarily isolates. The essence of growth is in how each "stage" produces the next one out of itself, as it in turn unfolds out of a previous stability. The biologist knows that the growing eludes her, even as she tries to fill in the blanks between each "snapshot" within the process. By contrast, morphing implies change is exhausted by that elision which fills in the blank between decontextualized points of stasis. Morphing "naturalizes" by reifying, in high-resolution, that blank between-space of the lateral alteration. Morphing commodifies pretend change.

Did you ever feel a dull dread in your only functioning lung and realize suddenly that all the plants in the room are plastic? Did you ever eat ashes unknowingly? Did you ever recognize a face that then turned into a footstool? In my aesthetic, morphing is like that. In other words, morphing sucks.

Guidelines for contributors

Who Are We? *Border/Lines* is an interdisciplinary magazine committed to exploring all aspects of culture — including popular culture, fine arts, visual arts, gender, literature, multiculturalism, mass communications and political culture. Although its geographic focus is Canada, this is taken as meaning anything that is relevant to understanding Canadian culture.

Who Are You? *Border/Lines* aims to fill the gap between academic journals and cultural magazines. Our audience is diverse and eclectic, so too are our contributors, drawn from a broad base of writers, artists, culture producers and animators. Potential contributors should bear this diversity in mind and try to address cultural issues with spunk, humour and the occasional sideways glance. Please avoid pedantry, footnotes as well as excessive allusions and isms.

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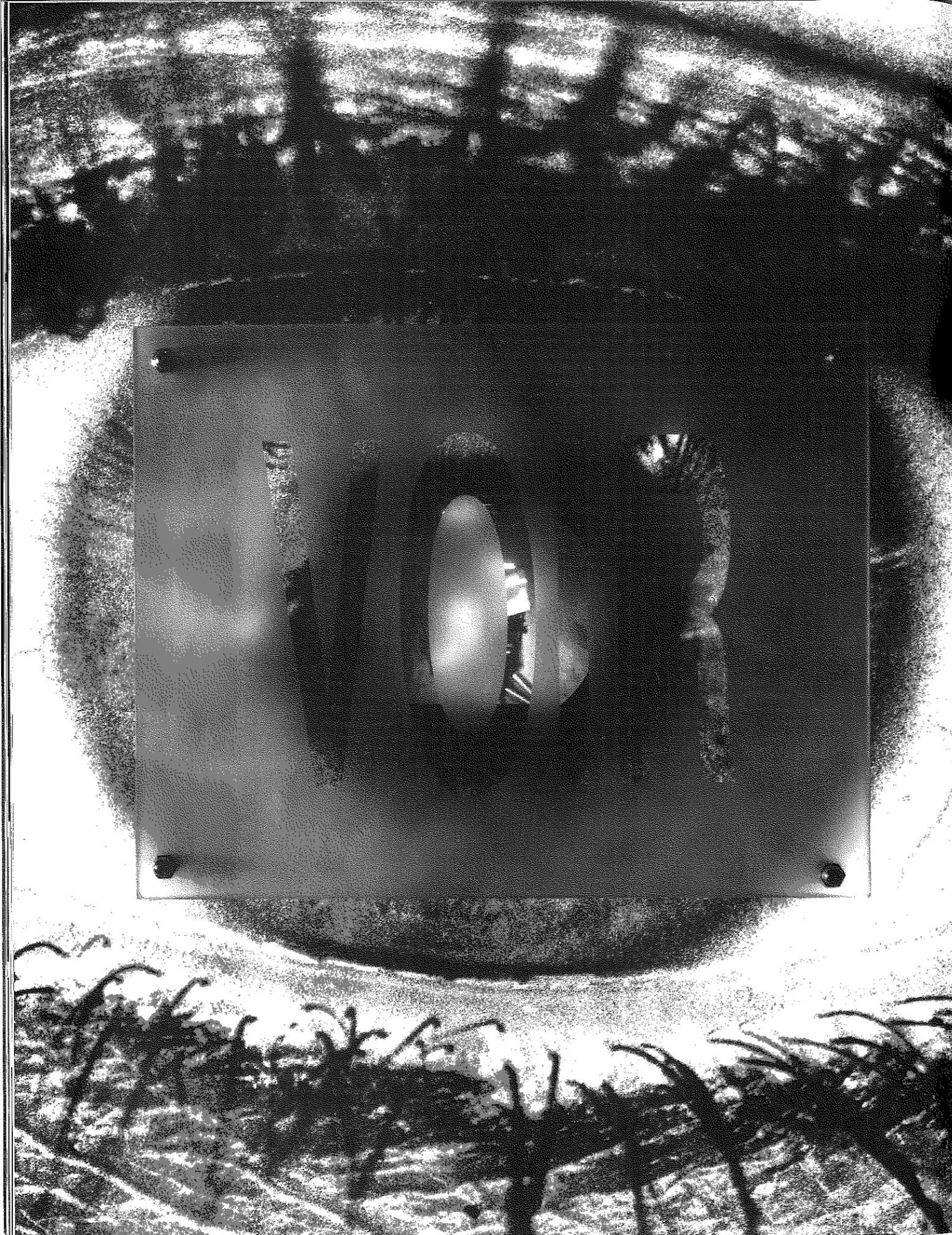
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Sylvie Belanger, *The Silence of The Body, Detail*, 1994. Photo by Barri Jones.

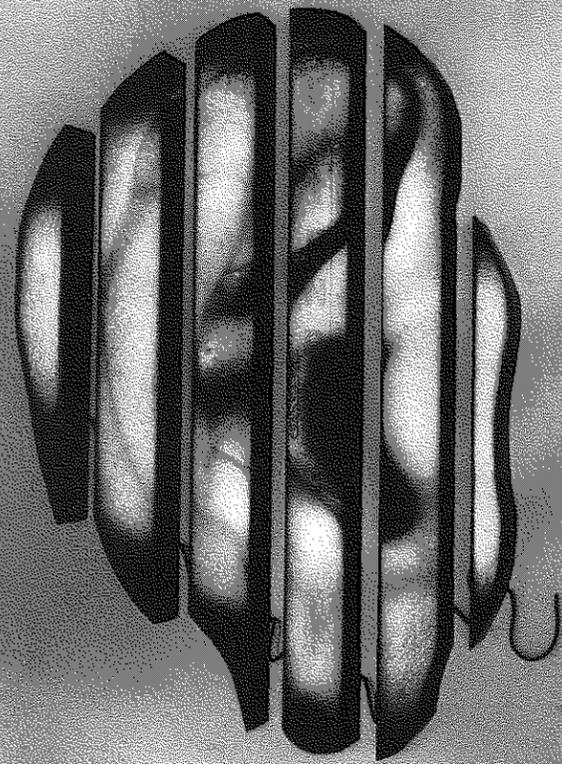
by DOT TUEB

From XeroX PARC to the Kitchen Table: Playing the Artistic Stakes in Cyberspace

The other night I dreamt I was in a meeting with an information systems manager. Culture was on the table, literally: novels and poems and films and videos retrieved from the Internet, downsized into digestible microchip bits of information, and served up in a glass bowl. With a menacing glint of conviction in his eye mirroring the silicon edges of the glass bowl, the information systems manager leaned over the table towards me. Carefully stating the obvious in the measured tone of someone talking to an uncomprehending child, he urged me to consider the importance of embracing a "new dynamic ecology of communications." Beginning to sound like a parrot repetition of *Wired* magazine articles I had been reading, he told me that a co-evolution is taking place between the consumer as the receiver of information and the corporation as retriever of information. "In the past," he suggested without a hint of nostalgia in his steely voice, "technology served to enhance the effectiveness of the individual mind. In the future, the focus will be on the expansion of the organizational mind."

As I looked around the room, I realized that we were in a meeting at the Canada Council. A video camera was recording our conversation. On computer screens behind us, I saw ourselves dissected and reconfigured as minute body parts. Looking at these images, I noticed that his earlobe was dirty, that my eye twitched nervously. On other monitors, I could see meetings taking place in other rooms. Here the image data bank was no longer a window on the world, or parking lot surveillance footage, but an interactive office pool. Suddenly, the features of the information systems manager began to change, transforming into a combination of a bit-chip character out of a Bruce Sterling cyberpunk novel and Ontario Conservative Party leader, Mike Harris. (Odd, I thought to myself, that Harris should appear in my dream, since his proposed solution to a fiscal cultural crisis has less to do with new technologies than a nineteenth-century idea of cultural charity. Only days ago, at a forum on the arts, a spokesperson for the Conservative Party announced that the arts funding infrastructure in Ontario could easily be replaced by a system of volunteer patrons paid a dollar a year to administer and disperse cultural funding.)

Taking a notepad and a pencil from the table, the information systems manager began to draw a graph that simultaneously appeared on one of the computer screens. With his tools of corporate wizardry in hand, he launched into a stern lecture on the foibles of the public purse. "I understand," he said, "that there has been some hostility in the arts community against the decision to dismantle the Art Bank. But it's a simple issue of economics. As you can see from this graph, we have measured the potential rentals of art works against the predicted loss of governmental and corporate office space through restructuring and cost efficiency measures. Future projections point to a radical reduction in the need for objects to fill a radically reduced work space. With everyone working at home on contract and attached to a computer screen surfing the Net, there will be no demand for material objects of contemplation. Besides, I don't see why artists don't sell their work on-line. There has just been an agreement reached that will allow direct credit card purchases through the Internet. It makes much more sense to have artists explore home shopping networks and direct consumer access than to continue with a cumbersome and inefficient system of individual grants. The information highway, my friend, leads to direct democracy in the arts."



Sylvie Belanger, *The Silence of The Body*, Detail, 1994. Photo by Barri Jones.

pointing out the virtual blackboards in conference rooms, activating the computerized tabs that track the movement of the employees through the complex. Enveloped within an hermetically sealed technological wonderland, I was struck at how benign the whole project seemed, gently nestled in the rolling green hills of Palo Alto and populated by scientifically sheltered minds.

Far removed from the enclosed sanctuary of Xerox PARC, however, I have the uncanny feeling that the myriad strands of technology infiltrating my consciousness are not so benign. As I look around my own office at paper cascading from the fax machine, e-mail piling up into a metaphorical mountain in a virtual mailbox, the voice-mail button blinking on my telephone, daytime talk shows blaring a cacophony of television neuroses, I have the sensation that technology has invaded everyday life. Producing a constant debris of interference, technology wraps its tentacles around the thin line between the plausible

and the absurd. Blurring the boundaries between reality and the imagination, it usurps my sense of being in the world in ways that are as fantastical as the hallucinatory interconnectivity of my dream, and as ideologically opaque as the seamlessness of ubiquitous computing.

It is this sensation, a sensation of technology as pervasive, invasive, a "desiring machine" penetrating vision, dreams, politics, passion, that has come to stalk me. It follows me into bank machines, corner stores, apartment lobbies, government offices. It trails me like a secret agent who is discreet in his distance, but nevertheless persistent in his task of shadowing my every activity. Its discursive omnipresence ranges from the cover of *Newsweek* announcing "TechnoMania: The Future Isn't What You Think" (Feb. 27 '95) and *Utne Reader's* wrap-up summary of "Cyberhood vs. Neighbourhood" (no. 68 [Mar./Apr. '95]) to *The Globe and Mail's* incessant chatter about the far-ranging implications of the Internet and the looming transformation of an information-based economy that will be akin to the Industrial Revolution in its consequences. On television, it has found a permanent home as a visual projection: computer screens within television screens becoming indispensable aids for an endless parade of commentaries explaining life and religion and science and technology on the new cable channels.

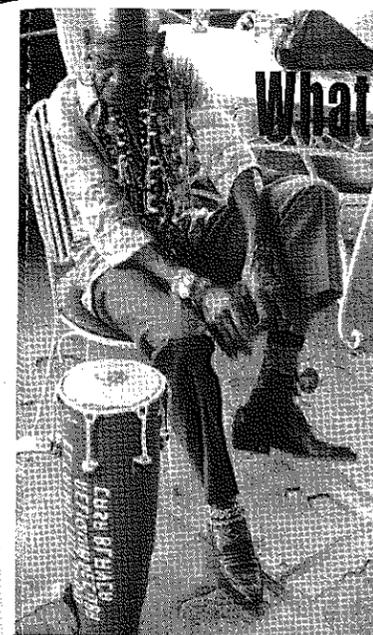
A dream is just a dream . . . or is it?

Last February, I toured Xerox PARC (Palo Alto Research Center), which recently initiated an artist-in-residence program pairing local San Francisco Bay artists with staff researchers to provide what Xerox describes as "interventions into a contained community." Funded by Xerox Corporation to explore and study technological innovations in the workplace, PARC prides itself on its visionary investment in the development of ubiquitous computing. Its teams of scientists, anthropologists, and engineers have already realized prototype models of cybernetic interactivity. Mark Weisner, the head of its Computer Science Laboratory, extols a future in which computers are incorporated into the walls and surfaces of the work environment. Writing in *Scientific America* about Xerox PARC's research philosophy, Weisner proposes that "the most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it" ("The Computer for the 21st Century," 265, no. 3 [Sept. '91]).

When I arrived at the entrance of PARC for my tour, security was tight. I filled in an identification form that would have made the Pentagon proud. Once inside, cameras recorded my every movement and conversation. Yet despite the Orwellian implications of the environment, the atmosphere was relaxed. Collegiality prevailed. Everyone I met was eager to demonstrate his or her wares, opening computer screen windows from one office into another, calling up files,



Jim Campbell, *Digital Watch*, Detail, 1991. Photo courtesy of the artist and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art



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over cyberspace's conceptual frontiers.

Sylvie Belanger, *The Silence of The Body*, Detail, 1994. Photo by Barri Jones.

With the recent flurry in the Toronto art world to champion the semiotic coupling of art and technology, it seems that the sensation of technology as the desiring machine of late capitalism is also stalking artists. In contrast to the art world of the 1980s that heralded strategies of appropriation, media deconstruction, gender analysis, and identity politics, the art world of the 1990s has become a launching pad for an embrace of technology qua technology as the object of investigation. From Public Access's high profile lecture series in February 1995, *Retouch: Art, Gender, Technology*, to the more modest and ongoing investigations sponsored by Inter/Access, an artist-run centre, and from the Science Centre's interactive new media *TechnoArt* show in the fall of 1994 to The Power Plant's splashy *Press/Enter* exhibition in April 1995, artists and writers who can "talk the talk" about technology are in demand.

Catapulted from relative obscurity to centre-stage in less than a decade, the technologically focused art comes gift-wrapped in a discourse of utopian futurism that is as expansionist and visionary in its conquest of consciousness as the corporate sector's conquest of a global information economy. What is at stake here, according to the gurus of new technologies such as Sandy Stone and Jaron Lanier, is the transformation of identity, sexuality, eroticism, and the self: in short, the end of humanity as it has been historically comprehended in time and space. For Stelarc, an Australia-based performance artist who has built himself a computerized Third Arm and fights cybernetic robots gladiator-style, the body is an outmoded container of physical impulses and genetically programmed obsolescence. In a bid to replace biology with artificial intelligence and to reformulate the body "not as an object of desire but as an object for design" ("Phantom Body/Fluid Self: Images as Post-Human Entities," unpublished paper, nd.), Stelarc imagines his physical presence as no more and no less than an interface between machine and image. "Images are immortal, bodies are ephemeral" proclaims Stelarc, and promises that the tiresome binaries of body/soul and female/male haunting human existence will be swept away by the emergence of "hybrid image-machine systems."

a dream
is just a dream...
or is it?

the great appeal of cyberspace lies in its lack of... historical constraints

With the popularization of "cyberspace" through *Neuromancer*, cyberpunks and virtual sex achieved cultural notoriety. Hackers were elevated to the status of the new cowboys of a virtual Wild West, and artists from the now passé eighties, such as Robert Longo, found new careers in cinematically adapting images from the future rather than photographically appropriating images from the present. Gibson's vision of a cybernetic future also served as a grab-bag rubric for academic studies, spawning a growth industry in books, journals, and conferences devoted to the promise of an endless horizon of virtual interactivity. In an inverse relationship to the media slogan "Coke — it's the real thing," where metonymy constructs a commodification of experience,

Gibson's dystopic coinage of cyberspace succeeded in constructing a metaphoric commodification of the simulacrum.

So ubiquitous is Gibson's vision of a technologically saturated future that in M.I.T.'s 1991 anthology on new technologies, *Cyberspace: First Steps*, Michael Benedikt introduces his rapturous descriptions of cyberspace with a nod to *Neuromancer*. Noting that in Gibson's novel cyberspace is an "unhappy word," Benedikt then proceeds to dissociate it from its unfortunate lineage, redesignating Gibson's cyberspace as a word "that gives a name to a new stage, a new and irresistible development in the elaboration of human culture and business under the sign of technology." In the same anthology and in a similar vein, Michael Heim, a classical philosopher, uses Gibson's novel to construct a phenomenology of cyberspace that smoothes over Gibson's dystopic edges. Built upon the chimera of "jacking in" to virtual worlds, Heim's philosophical musings upon the material perfection of Platonic ideals within virtual reality are illustrative of how elastic the parameters of cyberspace have become.

In one breathless holistic swoop, cyberspace is now expansive enough to accommodate the referential collapse of Paleolithic paintings, fractal graphics, feminine *jouissance*, ancestor worship, and Zen Buddhism into a picture-perfect vision of the omnipotent grip of new technologies over old categories of art and consciousness. Since cyberspace does not yet exist, apparent contradictions that arise from Heim's glorification of ideal forms, and the simultaneous celebration of their dissolution by theorists such as Sadie Plant in her writings on cyberspace's feminine fluidity, are rather beside the point. After all, the great appeal of cyberspace lies in its lack of materialist and historical constraints. To plunge such a utopian projection into a discussion of global economic inequities, multinational corporate concentrations of knowledge and resources, and military intensification is seen as a crass attack on imagination. Within the discursive realm of cyberspace, positions should be argued with rhetorical grace and messianic conviction, unsullied by the mundane realities of eating, shopping, sleeping, racial tensions, sexual anxiety, losing one's employment to restructuring plans, etc.

What seems to be at stake in cyberspace, then, is less the transformation of metaphysics, identity, sexuality, and the self within a technological reality than an investment in the remapping of consciousness within a technological imaginary. Cathected through machines rather than through the body, desire for a future that will

affirm the omnipotence of technology gives rise to an old dream of mastery masked as a new dream of liberation. When a respondent in a discussion of cyberspace at Inter/Access can argue with impassioned conviction that on the Internet one "floats above capitalism," and that, in the Gulf War, coverage of battles was simulated and "collateral damage" replaced causality statistics, what also seems to be at stake is a tenuous grasp of the conditions of technological oppression. The "free flow" of on-line information pales to insignificance when compared to the public-opinion net cast by Rupert Murdoch, whose monopoly grip on a mass media empire reaches seven hundred million people daily. Virtual reality art projects are but the shadows on Plato's cave when

compared to the virtual world of the American military offensive, where soldiers train on simulators, and "digital divisions" outfitted with high technology are the first step in the Pentagon's creation of a "synthetic theatre of war."

Given what the stakes are, artists seeking to explore this technological imaginary have entered a highly contested arena of power and representation. If the recent Power Plant exhibition, *Press/Enter: Between Seduction and Disbelief*, is any gauge of how the artistic stakes are being played out in cyberspace, however, art is less a site of contestation than one of capitulation to the allure of cybernetic interactivity and computer-integrated virility. It is not that the visible icons of technology's omnipotence were absent from the exhibition. On the contrary, the sensation of technology as a desiring machine stalking the self pervaded the viewing experience. At every turn, the viewer's image was dissected, projected, reflected, deflected through the looming eye of the surveillance camera and neat visual tricks of image interactivity. What was absent from the exhibition was a critical perspective that pointed to the ways in which technology constructs invisible economies of domination. Like the technological wonderland of Xerox PARC, the privileging of technology's hardware in the exhibition served to mask the ways in which the proliferation of software through computer networks and coaxial cables has constructed a politics of exclusion that no one can see.

While not all of the artwork included in *Press/Enter* lacked a conceptual framework that questioned technology's utopian gift-wrapping, the thematic grouping of the works around a curatorial position exploring "the dialectics of seduction and belief" neutralized the content of individual pieces. Lost in the curatorial shuffle were the subtleties of works such as Christine Davies' *Le dictionnaire des inquisiteurs (tombeau)*, in which the inscription on contact lenses of words from the dictionary of the Spanish Inquisition investigated ways in which the doubling of the eye and the body in technology embodies issues of language and power. Similarly, the questions raised by Jim Campbell and David Rokeby's works of the ways in which new technologies alter perception and memory in a time-space continuum were obscured by the overwhelming literalness of the technological metaphors used by most of the other artists in the exhibition. Like the preponderance of white, middle-class males on the Internet, whose enthusiasm for on-line exchanges does not extend to a consideration

of how consent is manufactured through a circular loop of "interactivity," *Press/Enter* offered an arid vision of a future that privileged access to technology over a critical assessment of its infrastructure.

Given the resources and publicity devoted to *Press/Enter*, I had hoped for a glimpse of a cyberspace future in which criticality and diversity were part of the picture. Instead, the net effect of the exhibition was one of repetition and self-referentiality, as if I had been transported back in time to a McLuhanesque spectacle of the 1970s. But while the first wave of enthusiasm for new technologies that prompted this sense of déjà vu was ushered in by the social and political upheavals of the 1960s, the context for the reception of art and technologies in the 1990s is radically different. In the "free-market" multinational capitalism of the post-Cold War era, a vision of a cyberspace future is more likely to be framed by a symbiosis between art, technology, and corporate partnership than by calls for technological autonomy and anti-imperialist platforms of self-determination. For as AT&T, the official sponsor of *Press/Enter*, clearly outlines in its catalogue introduction to the exhibition, the "valuable insights" and "new perspectives" that artists provide are "essential to the creative process in the R&D laboratory and to the innovation in the marketplace."

In AT&T's claim that its "association with the arts is rooted in our belief that the arts are an important form of communication — and, of-course [*sic*], communication is at the core of our business," a number of questions concerning the relationship of art, technology, and ideology are raised. In a free-enterprise equation of art and technology, who is complicit in setting the acceptable limits of dissent? The artists? The curator? The corporation? Will the helping hand of corporate funding and institutional support be as easily extended from the artists in *Press/Enter* to artists whose alliances lie with the lived experiences of past colonial oppression rather than in the future projections of "hybrid image-machine systems?" Will artists committed to exposing the ideological underpinnings of a post-industrial "desiring machine" disappear from the official face of culture, elided by the ascendancy of the private sector interests over state-brokerage funding of the arts?

While the answers to these questions lie in the yet undecided future of a cybernetic universe, playing the artistic stakes in cyberspace at the present time does not necessarily entail striking a Faustian bargain with technology that leaves artists as the initiates of a new magic cult, scientists as wizards ensconced in the corporate laboratories, and neo-liberalism as the arbitrator of technology's grip upon the cultural imagination. In the heart of Silicon Valley, a number of artists working on issues of art and technology have extended their investigation of technology from "seduction and disbelief" to a critique of its narcissistic infrastructure and its politics of domination. For instance, Gail Wight, a young San Francisco-based artist, has translated her interest in neurological video-imaging and biological mutation into an exploration of the intersections of poetry and science. In a piece entitled *Residual Memory*, mould is grown on discarded computer chips placed in petrie dishes on a bed of sand to suggest the biological fragility of the seemingly invincible silicon fantasies. Lynn Hershman, working with interactive video imaging, has constructed a model of an M-16 in which trigger-happy viewers witness the superimposition of their own images with archival footage of the weapon's historical targets. Entitled *America's Finest*, Hershman's work serves to remind the viewer of

the invisible targets that lie within the shooting range of cyberspace's bodiless image plane. Natalie Jeremijenko, the coordinator at Xerox PARC's artist-in-residence program, deploys strategies of alterity in her artwork to construct site-specific architectural disruptions, turning the metaphors of cyberspace back upon themselves in real time and space. Jon Winet, as an artist who is currently in residence at Xerox PARC, has chosen to use the resources of the corporate laboratory to construct a WEB site that raises issues around the field of mental health.

Closer to home, there are also a number of Canadian artists, such as Nell Tenhaaf, Catherine Richards, Doug Back, and Norman White, who seek in their work to unveil the ethical implications and ideological cracks in the crystal ball of cyberspace. As Kim Sawchuck writes about Nell Tenhaaf's work in *Parachute* magazine, "rather than lamenting the current decline of knowledge in the era of micro-processing or victimization by doctors or scientists, Tenhaaf concerns herself with the limits — both ethical and epistemological — and the potentials of science, technology, and language" ("Biological Not Determinist: Nell Tenhaaf's Technological Mutations," no. 75). Deploying what Sawchuck has termed "strategies of occupation," Tenhaaf and other artists have found ways to operate "within the fissures of these hegemonic, extremely profitable and socially potent enterprises" of new technologies. In so doing, their interrogation of the issues raised by an embrace of a cyberspace future, such as Tenhaaf's examination of gendertyping in DNA research, Richards' critique of the virtual body, and Back and White's refusal to acquiesce to the seduction of technology's hardware in their investigations of cybernetic interactivity, offer an antidote to *Press/Enter*'s arid vision of the future.

A few weeks after my visit to The Power Plant, I was sitting at my kitchen table and contemplating another arid vision of a future: the landslide victory of Mike Harris's Ontario Conservative Party based on an election platform of fear-mongering against immigrants, gay rights, affirmative action, welfare recipients, high taxes, and photo radar. With me at the kitchen table were two friends having an impassioned discussion about democratization through the Internet. One argued ardently for the potential of the Internet to construct alternative communities and new on-line identities. The other responded by asking, "if a number of prisoners are given access to the Internet and believe themselves to be free in cyberspace, are they free?" Their conversation abruptly halted, and my mind began to wander. I began to think about the technological prisons that we have built, and that for all the talk of a utopian future, I have been unable to find concrete evidence of a new-found freedom. When *The Economist* can feature a sixteen-page spread on the use of information technology in war that leaves a discussion of deterrence to the last paragraph ("Defense Technology: The Information Advantage," 335, no.7918 [June 10-16 '95]), and Michael Benedikt can claim in his introduction to *Cyberspace: First Steps* (1991) that a realm of pure information will decontaminate and redeem natural and urban landscapes, I begin to wonder if the enthusiasm generated by the fantasy of cyberspace is not a shield that deflects our capacity to understand technology as both a pleasure principle and a death drive.

In *The Book of Embraces* (1991), Eduardo Galeano writes that "blatant colonialism mutilates you without pretense: it forbids you to talk, it forbids you to act, it forbids you to exist. Invisible colonialism,

however, convinces you that serfdom is your destiny and your impotence is your nature: it convinces you that it's not possible to speak, not possible to act, not possible to exist." As I look around at the world I live in, rather than at the projections of cyberspace, I think to myself that it is time to start speaking about, and acting upon, the realities as well as the dreams of a technological imaginary. To adapt Mark Weisner's claim that the "most profound technologies are those that disappear," the most profound ideologies are also those that disappear — through technology's invisible economies of domination. To challenge these invisible economies of domination is not to refuse technology, nor deny its potential for liberation, but to construct through technology a process of questioning the future. What is at stake is not only the means of production, but also the means of desire, and the means of consciousness.

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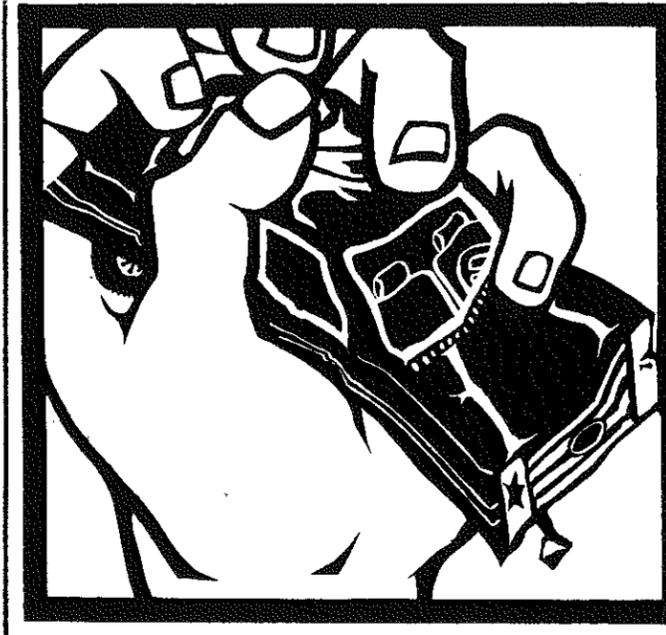
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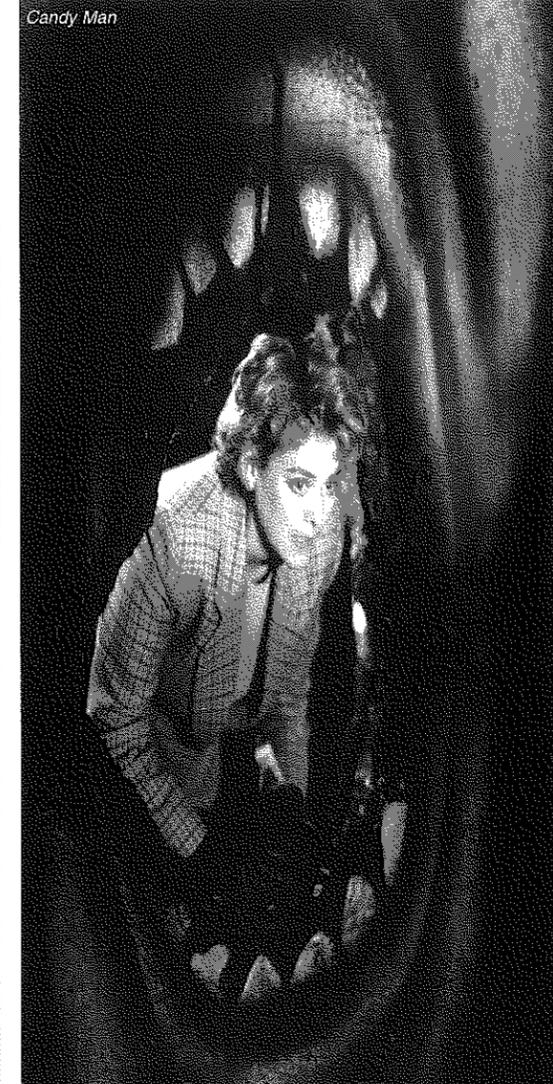
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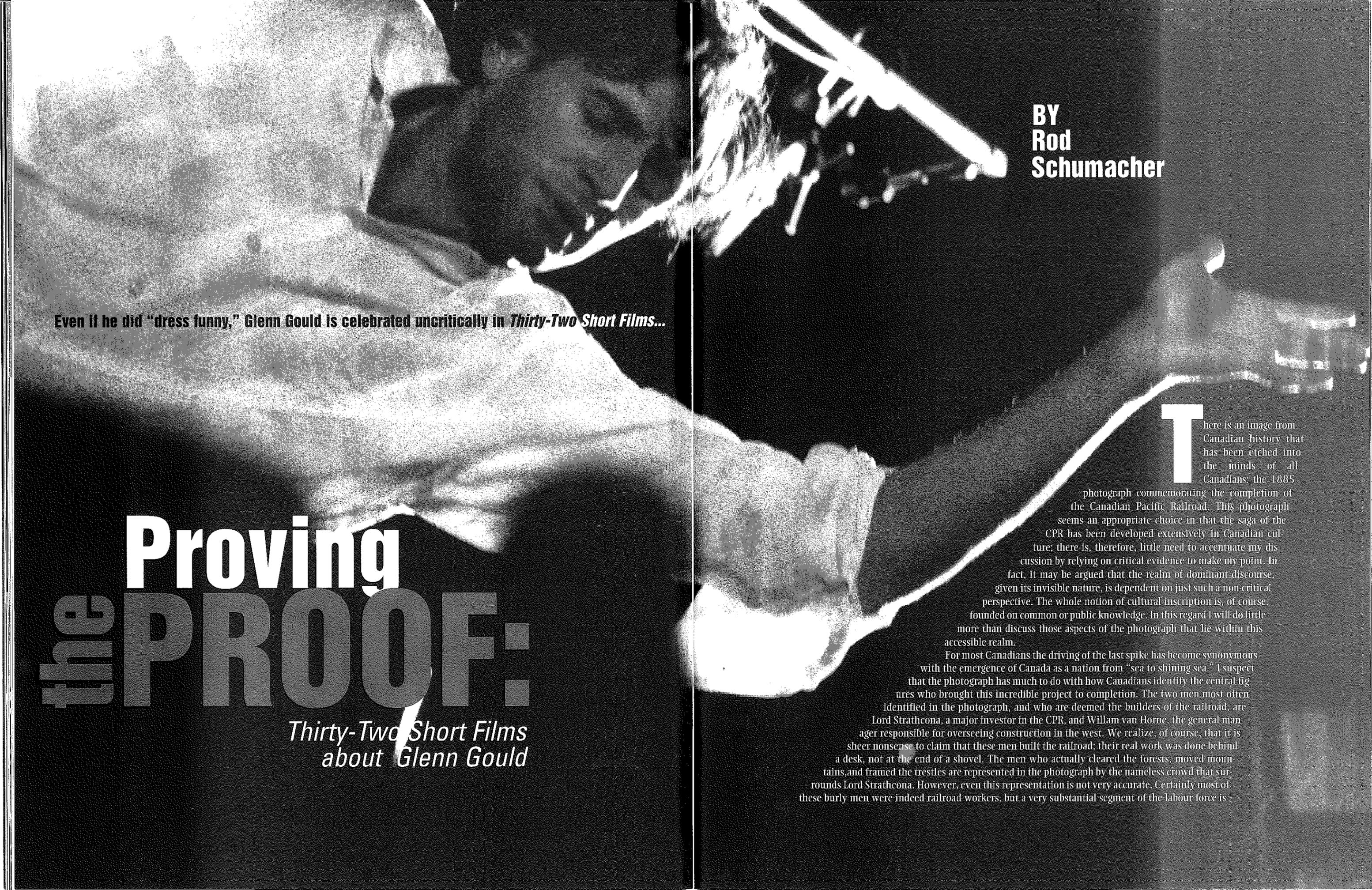
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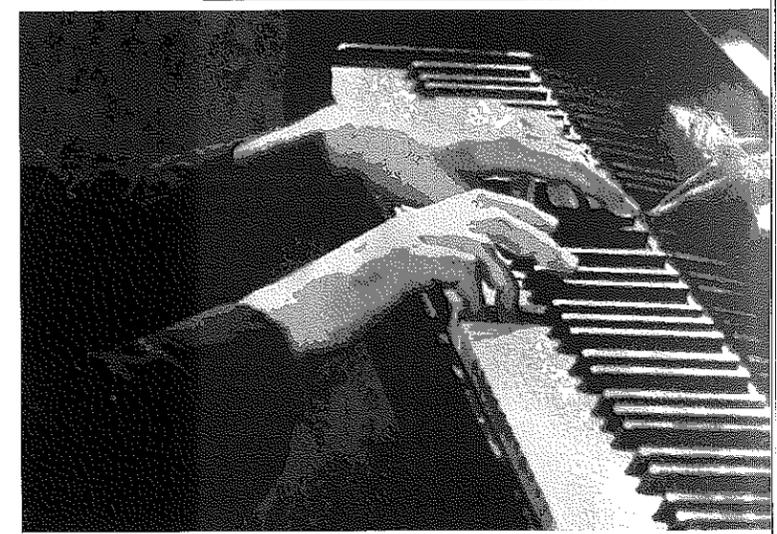
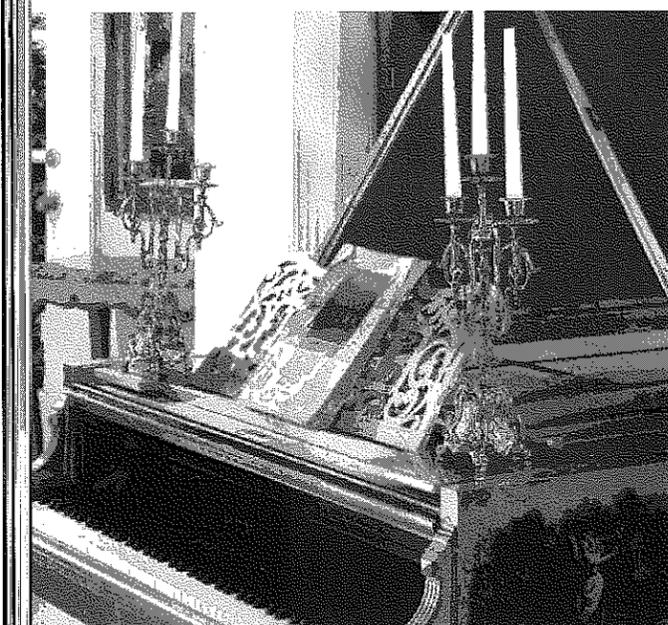
Even if he did "dress funny," Glenn Gould is celebrated uncritically in *Thirty-Two Short Films...*

Proving THE PROOF:

*Thirty-Two Short Films
about Glenn Gould*

There is an image from Canadian history that has been etched into the minds of all Canadians: the 1885 photograph commemorating the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. This photograph seems an appropriate choice in that the saga of the CPR has been developed extensively in Canadian culture; there is, therefore, little need to accentuate my discussion by relying on critical evidence to make my point. In fact, it may be argued that the realm of dominant discourse, given its invisible nature, is dependent on just such a non-critical perspective. The whole notion of cultural inscription is, of course, founded on common or public knowledge. In this regard I will do little more than discuss those aspects of the photograph that lie within this accessible realm.

For most Canadians the driving of the last spike has become synonymous with the emergence of Canada as a nation from "sea to shining sea." I suspect that the photograph has much to do with how Canadians identify the central figures who brought this incredible project to completion. The two men most often identified in the photograph, and who are deemed the builders of the railroad, are Lord Strathcona, a major investor in the CPR, and Willam van Horne, the general manager responsible for overseeing construction in the west. We realize, of course, that it is sheer nonsense to claim that these men built the railroad: their real work was done behind a desk, not at the end of a shovel. The men who actually cleared the forests, moved mountains, and framed the trestles are represented in the photograph by the nameless crowd that surrounds Lord Strathcona. However, even this representation is not very accurate. Certainly most of these burly men were indeed railroad workers, but a very substantial segment of the labour force is



My focus is on three ideological signifiers that serve to promote the vested interests of dominant culture in Western society: classical music, the piano, and the role of the artist. The figure of Gould represents the quintessential site wherein modernist constructs of human desire and technology, theory and practice, and art and life, are hailed as achieving a perfect balance. My intention is to reveal how these three cultural centres are implicated in modernity's self-declared claim to authority, and how dominant culture privileges them over other cultural forms in order to sustain its social and political status.

The very mention of classical music immediately brings to mind a specific segment of society. It is virtually impossible to think of a person such as Bach without associating his music with European aristocracy, the magnificence of cathedrals, luxurious concert halls, and very particular notions of human refinement. We do not, upon hearing his name, contemplate the working class, town halls, affordable housing projects, or illiteracy. Bach, along with Mozart and Beethoven, Milton and Shakespeare, has been positioned by the cultural elite as a canonical and rarefied being. Having achieved such a privileged status in the minds of those who tend to view themselves as the purveyors of "culture," Bach has been granted a place at the top of the cultural hierarchy and has been inscribed as one of the principal signifiers of Western culture. Therefore, Gould's remarkable ability to interpret and perform Bach's work places him within a similar rarefied realm.

However, classical music does not speak to the aspirations of all those who come into contact with it. We may believe that there is some "natural" or soul-sustaining essence that sets classical music apart from other forms of music — this is the position taken by high-modernists and the cultural elite — but such a belief is implicit in the imperial designs of modernism.

Classical music, like a literary text, requires a certain level of intellectual sophistication in order to be fully appreciated; however, before an individual begins to develop his or her mind in this particular Eurocentric, cultural way, he or she must first be inscribed with the desire to consider such a pursuit worthwhile. Let us create a fictional subject who fulfils the above criteria and is striving to become educated in the complexities of classical music. I will call him Joe, and in order to situate him in our minds I will present him as a fifteen-year-old Cree from the Poundmaker Reserve in Saskatchewan. If we are beginning to work our way out of a modernist mind-set, we will be wanting to know why Joe is motivated to align himself with Western culture rather than Native culture. In addition, we may wonder how he will acquire the finances to support his pursuit, how he will defend his position against those in his own community who will criticize him, and finally, why he would not view his own cultural music as an inspirational source.

The simple association between Gould and Bach feeds into a vast network of cultural signifiers that assist in positioning Western culture as a monolithic construct. We need to remind ourselves that viewing Western classical music as superior to other musical expressions can also become a form of cultural colonization. There is no more cultural importance in fifty musicians filling the air of Roy Thompson Hall than there is in a single Native person tapping a drum by a fire and singing a traditional song. To consider Western classical music as the grand anthem of human emotion

"Would we ever have heard of Glenn Gould had he chosen to play the tuba, the accordion, or the harp?"

noticably absent from the photograph. Where, for example, is there any evidence of the seventeen thousand Chinese labourers who were enticed to come to British Columbia in order to insure a cheap source of labour for the final leg of the railroad's construction? If we are unaware of their significant contribution, it is because the compilers of our "official history" have always been eager to portray the van Hornes and Lord Strathconas as the heroic representative of progress. As Toni Morrison asserts, the question that arises from all dominant cultural narratives is, "What intellectual feats had to be performed . . . to erase [Blacks, Chinese, Native Indians, etc.] from a society seething with [their] presence . . . What are the strategies to escape from knowledge?" These "strategies" are not necessarily contrived by a select group of individuals who busy themselves insuring that all dominant narratives valorize the ruling class. In other words, the strategies are not the result of any conscious plan to erase or ignore the contributions of the Chinese or any other marginalized segment of Canadian society; instead, they are the consequence of the authority invested in the ideological centres of modernism. We cannot "blame" the photographer for not insisting that there be Chinese workers in the crowd any more than we can "blame" the chairman of the Exxon Corporation for an oil spill. Striving to place blame on some individual or group tends to do little more than deflect the problem of cultural representation away from the ideological structures that have always already colonized discourse. If we wish to discover why the Chinese are absent from this photograph we need to identify the ideological centres that determine how certain cultural representations become privileged over others.

Our sense of awe about his "genius" is very much constructed by the film's representation of his life.

In *Thirty-Two Short Films about Glenn Gould*, the authority of dominant culture is similarly sustained. Uneasiness about the representation of such a glorified figure as Gould can, perhaps, be understood as another persuasive influence of dominant culture. All of us have, after all, already been inscribed by our public institutions with the imperative to accept and defend a variety of complex ideological positions.

is akin to believing that those individuals who have the material resources to become educated in the worship of certain cultural products also have the right to colonize the aesthetic tastes of the rest of society. When we observe Gould's fascination with Petula Clark singing "Downtown," we should take it as a clue to consider the way the film privileges classical music as an emblem of Western progress. At the same time we can ask ourselves what investment dominant culture would have in Gould had he been an astounding interpreter of Gambian folk music.

... three ideological signifiers that serve to promote the vested interests of dominant culture in Western society [are]: classical music, the piano, and the role of the artist.

Virtually everything stated so far regarding the associations attached to classical music can also be said of the piano, which has historic connections to dominant culture. It is, also, a signifier of technology. Most musicologists agree that it was invented in the early years of the eighteenth century by an Italian named Cristofori. Thus, the date of its inception situates the instrument as a product of modern technology. There were, and still are, many other instruments similar to the piano — the harpsichord, the virginal, the clavichord — but they have all remained period instruments. The piano is the only member of this family that continues to be considered contemporary: it is also the only one that has received the constant attention of inventors throughout the centuries. There is virtually no similarity between the instrument of Gould's era and the one created by Cristofori, simply because no other musical instrument has been scrutinized so rigorously.

There are a number of obvious reasons for the attention that has been given the piano, but not all of them have to do with music. It is true that when we sit at the keyboard we situate ourselves in the presence of the entire tonal schemata of Western music. It is also true that the first or second instrument of virtually every performer of classical music is the piano. Finally — and perhaps most importantly, given modernity's valorization of individualism — the piano is "the" primary instrument for solo performance. Aside from the pipe organ — which has always been sluggish to human touch, enormously cumbersome, and prohibitively expensive — there is not other acoustic instrument capable of producing and sustaining such a subtle and dynamic range. By acknowledging the stature of the instrument, it is possible to understand how the segment in Girard's film entitled "CD 318" — a title that clearly designates the instrument as its focus — directs our attention away from the world of music and situates the piano squarely in the world of technology.

There is a separate narrative developed within this vignette that valorizes modernity's ambition to master the physical world. The figure of the artist and the music being performed are both positioned as products of an elaborate mechanical network of wire, felt, cast iron, and wood. Bach's music and Gould's performance are both dependent on an instrument whose existence speaks to humanity's ability to create a machine capable of corresponding to the incredible nuances of the human hand. This

correspondence is impressed on us by the film's determined focus on the elaborate machinery of the piano in action. Although I have no intention of examining the mechanism that permits such a sensitive affinity between the human hand and the piano's action, we should at least be aware that it took over two hundred years of concentrated attention to develop.

We should also remind ourselves that Gould's status as a musician does not stem from his ability to compose music but from his ability to interpret it. In other words, Gould's reputation is directly linked to his being able to exploit the achievements of technology. In "CD 318," the piano and, by extension, technology become the site wherein human desire achieves fruition. As with classical music, complexity becomes synonymous with sophistication and intelligence. When we consider how the piano is the most important musical product of the Enlightenment, it is little wonder that Gould's ability to use the full resources of the instrument places him in such a distinguished position within the hierarchy of Western culture. The piano is no longer just the site wherein Bach and Gould come together; it is also the site at which human ingenuity and desire find expression through technology and where the privileged achievements of the past are reinforced in the present. The investment that modernism and dominant culture have in the piano is perhaps best understood if we posit yet another question: Would we ever have heard of Glenn Gould had he chosen to play the tuba, the accordian, or the harp?

Of course the focus of Girard's film is not classical music, even though we hear it throughout the film. Nor does Gould, the musician, claim a significant degree of our attention. It is Gould, the person, who holds centre stage, but not as a performer of music so much as a performer for the camera. After he withdrew from public view, his private life was a mystery to us. Girard's film is an attempt to interpret his absence and to transfer Gould's public grandeur into a similiar private grandeur. In fact, Girard's film does a remarkable job of positioning the viewer's attitude towards Gould within the very matrices of modernist ideology. Our sense of awe about his "genius" is very much constructed by the film's representation of his life. We are neither challenged nor encouraged to critique Gould: he is simply given to us fully inscribed with significance.

It seems peculiar that an individual who was so determined to keep his own tribe at a distance should be held in such high regard. However, this paradox is understandable when viewed from a modernist perspective. For many viewers, Gould's life is something to rejoice about because, as the film suggests, he is the manifestation of the autonomous, self-determining hero of the modernist era. What he represents to Western civilization is nothing short of the fulfilment of individualism. For the ninety-three minutes it takes to view the film we can luxuriate in our own desires for free agency. We may argue that the film is very conscious of itself as a biographical project and that it acknowledges how fact and fiction, art and life, cannot be kept apart; nevertheless, the film remains, whether intentionally or not, firmly committed to presenting Gould as the self-made hero of the Enlightenment project. Everything he involves himself in,

whether it be mathematics, dabbling in stocks, or writing newspaper advertisements, is seemingly worthy of our awe. He lives in his own world; his mind is free to follow its own course; he chooses whom he will interact with, and when such interactions will occur. In short, Gould has the freedom that we have all been encouraged to fantasize about, but, in truth, will never have. This notion of striving for the unobtainable is very much at the centre of modernism. By glorifying it in the film, the director causes the figure of Gould to become associated with a transcendental being.

Such a pleasurable illusion is innocent in itself; we all need to step into the fantastic now and then. However, we should at least be aware of the investment that modernism has in sustaining such a notion. We may choose to view modernity's "self-made man" as an affirmative doctrine granting every individual the right to succeed. This is certainly the view that Western ideology encourages us to have. However, it is not the only position worthy of consideration. Supporting the notion of free agency also validates the position of dominant culture, in that it can be claimed that the possibility for success is available to all people.

Popularized versions of modernity's hero are so heavily stressed in Western culture that we tend not to interpret how and why the terms governing their presentations came into being; we simply assume that what we are influenced by comes from some natural or given order. When we fail to consider how the many levels of dominant cultural discourse act upon us, we are unknowingly aligning ourselves with modernity's agenda. Perhaps the most obvious example of how the film valorizes individualism is in its vivacious presentation of Gould's private life. The film works very hard to deny that Gould suffered by being alone. There are, it is true, a number of vignettes — such as those that show the enormous number of pills he has in his bathroom and the interviewer who asks him if he is homosexual — which at least hint at some kind of anxiety; however, the film leaves no hard evidence to verify them.

The whole notion of his neurosis, not to mention his drug use, is virtually dismissed in the subsequent segment, in which a friend claims never to have seen him display any of the typical symptoms associated with either mental illness or chemical dependence. The question of his sexual orientation is similarly dismissed by the next sequence in which appears a love letter to some mysterious woman. Even the fact that he always wore a hat, scarf, gloves, and overcoat, regardless of the weather, is presented more as an artist's right to eccentricity, a sort of endearing trait, rather than as a deleterious obsession. In short, the film goes out of its way to keep Gould's character well within the "proper" and "civilized" norms of dominant culture. Gould may have turned his back on society, but we are encouraged to believe he still maintained the standards of the status quo.

The film also reveals itself as a modernist project by attempting to provide some form of imaginative evidence that Gould was a mystical channel to the unrepresentable vastness of the universe. If we believe, as Jean-François Lyotard suggests, that "modernity takes place in the withdrawal of the real and according to the sublime relation between the presentable and the conceivable," then it is no wonder we are left knowing little

more about Gould than when the film began. The imaginative evidence is distilled in the film by positioning classical music as a kind of meta-narrative of human emotion, the piano as the perfect synthesis of human ingenuity and sensitivity, and Gould as a mysterious and rarefied being whose inspiration and destiny lay beyond this earthly realm. If what we have been shown of Gould's life is shrouded in obscurity, it is because Girard's film has inscribed Gould with a sublime presence. In order to instill this feeling, the film forbids us from gaining knowledge of Gould that would leave us with a sense of incompleteness. By presenting thirty-two separate vignettes, Girard succeeds in achieving the kind of vagueness that is required to restrict our understanding of Gould's private nature. We are encouraged to imagine some transcendental quality in Gould, and at the same time to remain incapable of apprehending his mystifying presence.

To reiterate, it is important to recognize how the film glorifies technology (that is, the piano) and an elitist form of music as powerful centres of meaning. When an individual such as Gould exemplifies the necessary degrees of devotion and accuracy to fuse these two ideological centres, the results are hailed as evidence of modernity's success. The rules that define this ideological evidence are sustained by those who have the most to gain from them.

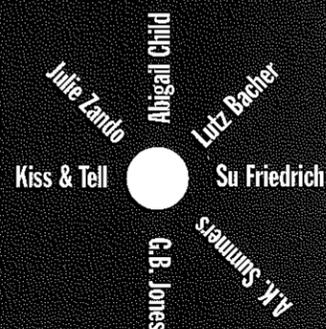
As the stark and brilliant landscape of the film's two framing scenes suggests, Gould has come to us from some transcendental and infinite realm, but not simply to dazzle and mystify us with news from the great beyond. He has also come to congratulate modernism on its achievement, and, finally, to tip his peculiar hat in the direction of dominant culture. Having turned everything he has touched into gold, he is now free to return — figuratively through the barren landscape of the final scene, and literally in the Voyager spacecraft, which firmly positions him as a figure of technology — to the infinite reaches of his true home.

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Girrlly Pictures

Girrlly Pictures is a series of five exhibitions curated by Shonagh Adelman and coordinated by Mercer Union.



by Shonagh Adelman



Kiss & Tell



Julie Zando



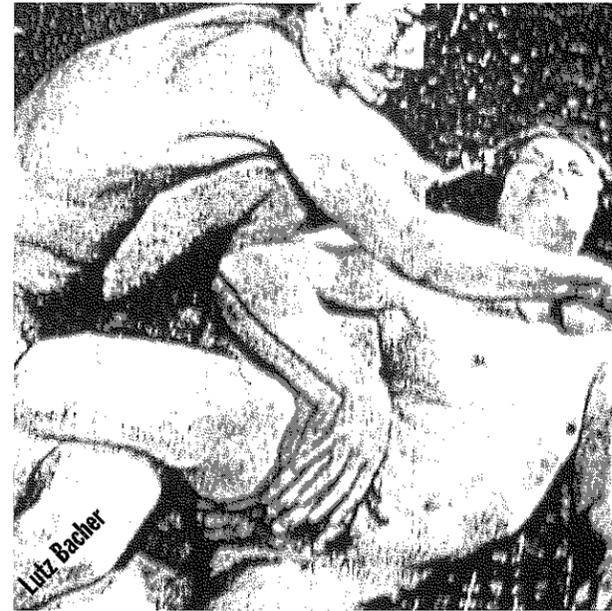
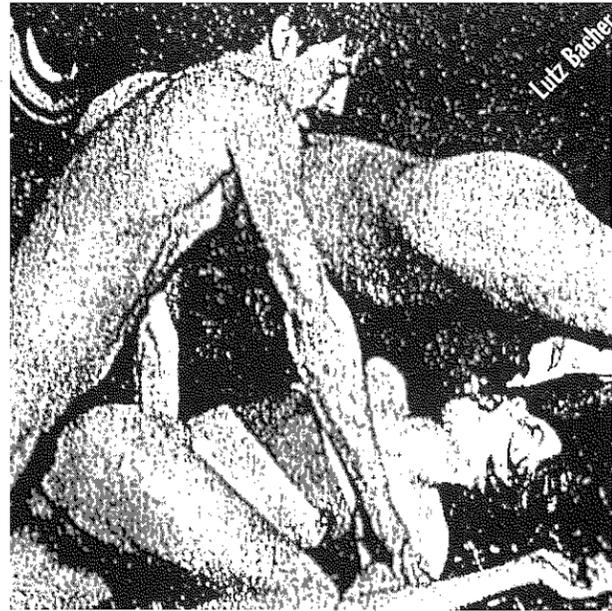
G.B. Jones



Abigail Child

Girrlly Pictures features an irreverent breed of feminist art practice fueled by twenty years of political activism and discourse. Within the current contradictory climate of simultaneous socio-political transformation and backlash, contemporary mainstream culture depicts dykes as chic and bad girls as good (or at least those who make good). Meanwhile, gay bashing is rampant and we are still eons away from the decriminalization of the sex trade industry. *Girrlly Pictures* came out of a desire to exhibit contemporary feminist work which isn't just in your face but sits on your face. A far cry from sugar and spice - disdainful of or indifferent to normative femininity and to the fear of turning men off, of being too bitchy - the aggressive tone of this work takes niceness out of the equation. These girls will be girls.

Left hand page: Julie Zando, *Uh Oh!*



publishing market, Hollywood and MTV, it has only recently gained some cachet within the hallowed halls of high art institutions – illustrated by the exhibitions, *Bad Girls/Bad Girls West* curated by Marcia Tucker and Marcia Tanner, mounted in 1994 at the New Museum and UCLA's Wight Art Gallery, and the ICA exhibition in London also called *Bad Girls*. Typically the term bad girl connotes sexual misbehaviour - sluts and whores, vamps and tramps. Occupying an active sexual role (whether for work or play) the bad girl appropriates power.

As Tucker explains in her catalogue essay, the American Bad Girls shows brought together a range of feminist art which uses humour and goes "too far." The controversial response to the exhibitions and particularly their titles points to the difficulty of using humour and hyperbole within a political context and of re-appropriating the term "bad girl." The exhibitions' title and humorous premise were viewed by some critics as a co-optation and trivialization of feminist art. Taking on a bad girl persona is a complex proposition now, since it is so quickly defanged and commodified. Bad is good as long as it can be confined (as it is in the sex trade industry) or assimilated (as it is in Hollywood depictions of sex trade workers) - as long as it is titillating and not too threatening: e.g., at the end of *Basic Instinct* Sharon Stone opts for heterosexuality and drops the ice pick. Ubiquitous colonization has effectively stripped the "bad girl" of irony and generally conjured up something along the lines of naughty but nice.

It comes as no surprise that a *real* bad girl like Eileen Wurnos, dubbed the first woman serial killer, is worth more (to the entertainment industry) dead than alive. While the demise of one bad girl is eagerly awaited by culture vultures, other bad girls are implicated in the incitement of violence against women including themselves. For instance, one of the (presumably male) respondents to Kiss N' Tell's earlier interactive photo series *Drawing the Line* wrote "I feel the need to rape some girls." Kiss N' Tell along

with the other artists in this series haven't balked at the prospect of prurient or more pernicious responses to their work. They start from a position which overrides any squeamishness around the depiction of explicit sex and power play.

The controversial conference at Barnard College in 1982, "Towards a Politics of Sexuality," marked an ideological split cast as the "sex wars" which hinged on a resistance to and rebellion against 1970's lesbian feminist orthodoxy. The ensuing debates revolved primarily around the question of whether S/M (and to a lesser extent butch/femme and lesbian porn) duplicates or plays with oppressive power inequities. Although the 'radical sex' camp made forceful arguments against its detractors based on the consensuality of sex/gender power play, these arguments have tended to fall into some of the overdetermined assumptions they purport to critique - for instance, that S/M offers a libertarian promise of transcendence from sexual repression. Sex radicals, backed up against the wall by political imperatives, may have felt impelled to legitimate their sexual desires on ontological grounds which assume a self-determining, autonomous sexual subject.

The investigation of sex and power in the pictorial realm is important because of its dialogical possibility. While there are certainly examples of images which are anchored within a didactic frame, the work in *Girly Pictures* makes no claims to "the truth about sexuality" and therefore evades a direct or prescriptive correlation between political and psycho-sexual imaginaries. Although not all of the artists in this series of exhibitions are explicitly or even remotely aligned with a 'radical sex' perspective, they all employ a discursive approach using various aesthetic means to dramatize the impact of technologies of power on sexuality.

Kiss & Tell's 1992 videotape *True Inversions* examines the way in which sexuality is mediated by personal histories and by political, moral and educational institutions. Sex scenes are intercepted by a range of captions which use key words - masturbation, unsafe sex and

range of captions which use key words - masturbation, unsafe sex and censorship - to signify a diversity of meanings and perspectives. For instance, the caption "censored," qualified by an addendum - the criminal code section, "unsafe sex" and "politically incorrect" - points to the regulation and complexity of the discursive field in which images of sex are made and looked at. The image is also periodically disrupted by keyed-in commentaries from the director and crew members who are identified by name and position. This device foregrounds a personal perspective which displaces the standard mode of anonymous, authoritative commentary. It also establishes the video production itself as an amalgamation of multiple points of view. In the same way that the crew's *inverted* appearance in front of the camera undermines the illusionistic form of linear narrative, fictional lovers are juxtaposed with real lovers who differ about the prospect of having sex in front of the camera. Keyed-into the scene, the director questions the assumed speciousness of sex between the long-term on-camera-only lovers in contrast to sex between the recently coupled real lovers. *True Inversions* uses Brechtian and video art strategies to situate sex and images of sex within a pleasurable and contesting field of vision.

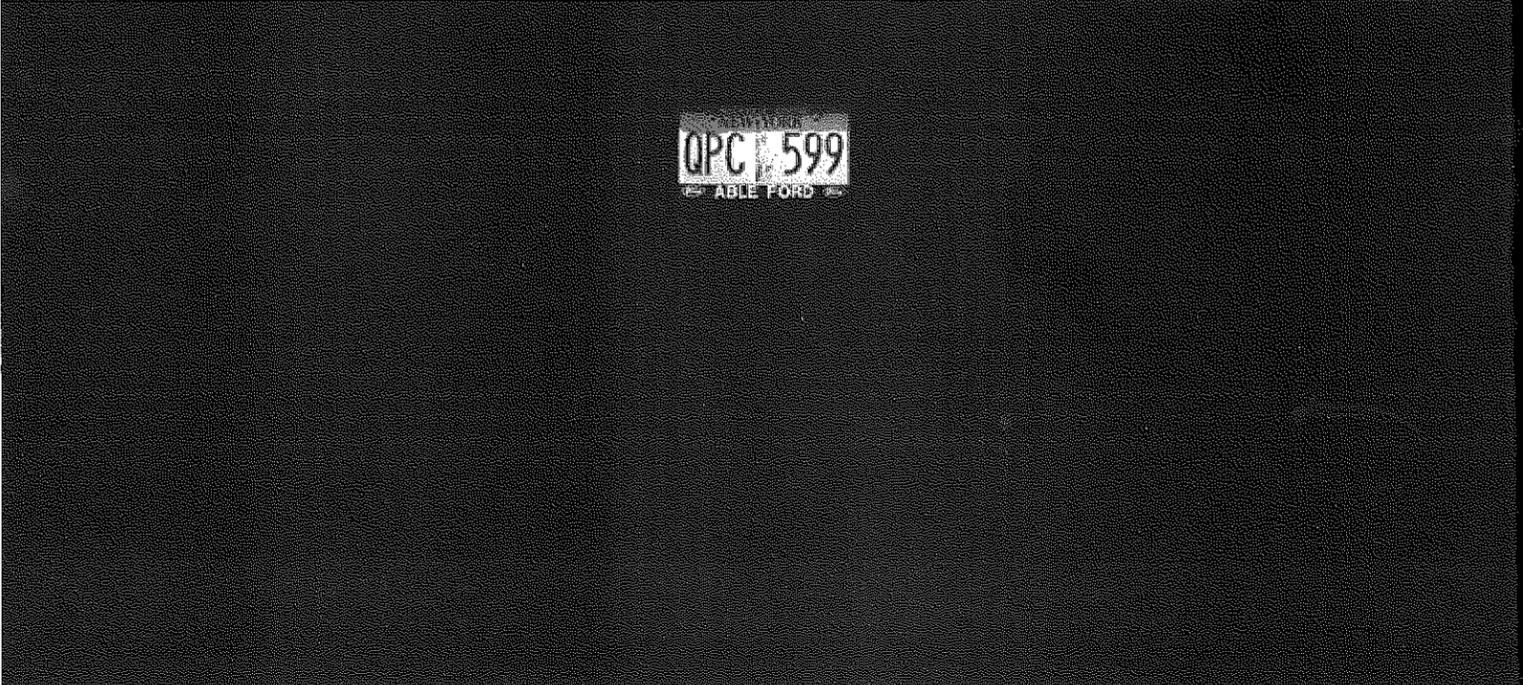
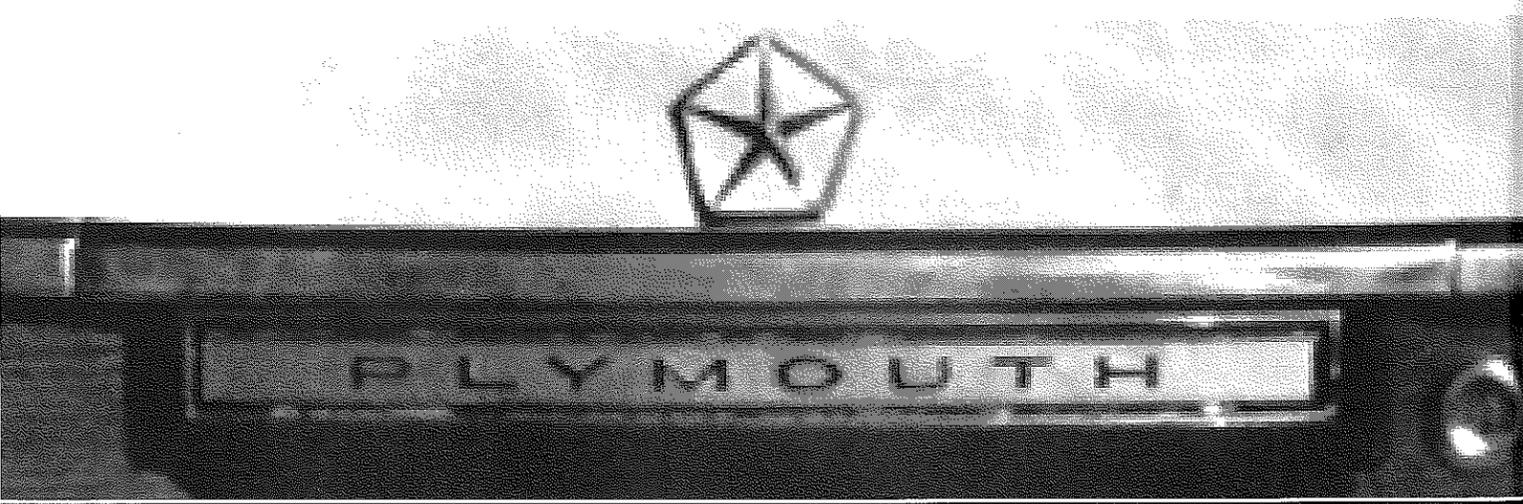
G.B. Jones' work, explicitly employing a 'radical sex' vernacular, represents sex/power play as an aspect of subcultural lifestyle. Jones' super 8 film, *The Yo Yo Gang* (1992), is an out-of-sync pot-pourri of hand-held camera shots, zooms and jump cuts organized around the activities of a girl-gang who play and make war with yo-yos. Drawing on a *West Side Story* parable of gang combat, Jones' campy home-movie-come-experimental-aesthetic collapses art and real life, fantasy and lifestyle. Similarly, her drawings, many of them directly modeled on those of Tom of Finland, display a "homocore" taxonomy of punk and S/M motifs - tattoos, leather, uniforms, chopper chicks and prison scenes. The home-brewed anarchism of Jones' aesthetic boosts the transgressive status of the content targeting conventions of art 'etiquette' as much as social and political decorum.

Likewise, sex toys, bondage and discipline scenes as well as

butch/femme role-playing populate A.K. Summers' black and white animation, *Topless, Dickless and Clueless* (1994). The association of power with masculinity is inverted in Summers' tape. Although the self-identified, bald-headed butch top Libra is in hot pursuit of a futuristic femme who continually eludes her, the femme is revealed as an undercover agent who eventually captures the protagonist, ties her up and tortures her by penetrating her pussy with extra long fingernails. Playing with a range of ironies, Summers' comic animation uses repetition and conventional cartoon sound motifs to spoof subcultural dyke life and satirize stereotypical dichotomies: butch/femme, clued-in/clueless, top/bottom (topped/topless).

Using narrated text from the classic pornographic novel, *The Story of O*, Julie Zando's videotape, *Uh, Oh!* (1994), similarly takes up the rubric of 'radical sex' recasting the narrative of sexual submission in butch/femme terms. Contrary to Summers' videotape, *Uh, Oh!* exaggerates the stereotypical correlation of butch/femme with conventional heterosexual power dynamics by retaining the names used in the original novel, casting O as a waitress in a roadside diner and Sir Stephen as a cowboy and using a man's voice for Sir Stephen's narration. Lesbian S/M dungeon scenes are intercut with airplane safety demonstrations invoking the importance of consent, suspense and trepidation in S/M practice. Like the title of the videotape, images of risk and peril - amusement park rides and O's account of a recurring dream in which she is in an airplane on the verge of crashing - metaphorically illustrate the pleasure accrued from danger in masochistic fantasy. As in *The Story of O*, the ego-loss associated with masochism is portrayed as a euphoric experience symbolized at the end of the videotape by the image of a roller-coaster ride shot from a subjective perspective accompanied by O's description of free-falling.

While Zando represents the dynamics of sexual domination and submission as "the ultimate expression of romantic love," Su Friedrich's film, *Rules of the Road* (1993) tells a classically romantic



Su Friedrich

tale of emotional obsession. In contrast to the trajectory of ego-loss in *Uh Oh, Rules of the Road* recounts the familiar experience of emotional loss prompted by the dissolution of a relationship. Longing is represented by the off-screen narrator's fixation on "a sensible family car" - a 1983 beige Oldsmobile Cutlass cruiser with a luggage rack and fake wood siding. The stark image of a pair of hands playing solitaire punctuates the camera's fetishistic perusal of the endless gamut of station wagons. Provoking ecological concerns, memories of family outings and reflections on instilled puritanical values, the station wagon becomes a Mobius strip of associations. Recalling the vehicle's genesis within the relationship, its absorption of cigarette smoke as well as good and bad memories, the solitary narrator muses over the car's symbolic association with a coupled past and future. The camera lingers over lurid detailing, while the narrator attests to the car's deceptive appearance, fondly itemizing its comfortable and efficient attributes. Glibly recollecting her disappointment with the car's homeliness she professes that she was "consoled by the thought that it was unique." And yet, the subjective gaze of the camera, mimicking her vision, is over-populated with '83 Oldsmobile wagons with fake wood siding. Anticipating the anguish of catching a glimpse of her ex-lover in the driver's seat, she resists looking but finds her nemesis unavoidable. Ironically, perpetually frozen in her tracks by the procession of sensible family cars, she is constantly on the alert for the signature license plate, just as O, chained to the door frame, waits in rapt agony for the return of her cowboy. The car, its simultaneous elusiveness and prevalence, personifies the fusion of pleasure and pain provoked by longing.

Abigail Child's two films, *Mayhem* (1987) and *Covert Action* (1984) dislodge and magnify undercurrents of seduction in social and cinematic narratives. Using found home-movie footage from the 50's of kissing, romping and various kinds of frenetic interaction, *Mayhem* restages "fragments of memory." Montage, repetition, abridged voice-over and cryptic silent movie-style intertitles create a disjunctive barrage of peripheral moments without the adhesive continuity of a story. As one of the intertitles professes, "My goal is to disarm my movies." Similarly, disarming both movie and spectator, *Covert Action* employs conventions of film noir to reveal and confound mechanisms of narrative pleasure and suspense. Recurring close-ups of women expressing apprehension, dread and panic, images of men walking/stalking and scenes of obviously staged sexual violence augmented by key lighting, dramatic sound and camera angles propel a familiar erotic and violent chain of events. The momentum of suspense is continually disrupted by match cuts, unexpected montage and auto-narrative sound bites. The gendered division of roles - female victim/male aggressor - is inverted near the end of the film with the introduction of a vintage Japanese porn clip of two women having sex. During their frolic, a spying thief is caught, held at gun point and forced to comply to their sexual demands. Although no doubt originally intended to cater to male fantasy, in this context, the scene explodes any singular or fixed meaning. Drawing analogies among the screen, the street and the bedroom, *Covert Action* manifests parallel and contradictory messages about sex and violence. Evolving a cinematic language based on repetition and metonymy, Child's work scrutinizing the paradoxical and repressed aspects of iconographic conventions.

Lutz Bacher's work, surveyed in the compilation videotape

which takes its title from Susan Sontag's text, "On Photography", investigates the latent connotations of notorious events circulated through printed or televised mass media (William Kennedy Smith's rape testimony, Jackie Onassis allegedly fleeing from paparazzo Ron Gallela, an interview with Lee Harvey Oswald, Jimi Hendrix destroying his guitar on-stage). Bacher's 1986 *Sex With Strangers*, drawing on a more obscure genre of circulated images, is a series of large scale black and white appropriations of simulated rape and oral sex imagery. The images are taken from a 1970's book which poses ambiguously as a sociology text. Though the images look like conventional porn, the original captions included in the appropriations situate them within a pseudo-pedagogical framework. While signaling that this framework provides a pretext for the circulation of "dirty pictures," Bacher's work also critically draws attention to the moral and cultural binding of sex with intimacy. Turning on the motif of estrangement, *Sex with Strangers* marks the axis of pleasure/danger both as end-points and as parallel conditions of possibility. Without the provision of ballast, the viewer is put in a position which mimics the condition of estrangement. Like the women in the images, the viewer becomes sexually involved with a stranger - the work.

All of the work in *Girly Pictures* operates in relation to a narrative structure, whether deconstructing or reconstructing familiar plot lines or working against the linearity or semiotic implications of conventional story-telling. The title, *Girly Pictures*, conjures the image of a pin-up and injects it with an aggressive and ironic nuance. It plays on the ambiguity around whether the girl *makes* the picture or the picture *makes* the girl. While the term girly picture typically conveys a soft-core pornographic image of a woman made for a heterosexual male gaze, the work in this series reframes the *picture* without denying the endemic effects of patriarchal and heterosexist power structures. Instead of dismissing or essentializing the dichotomy - male/subject/gaze: female/object/picture - this work recasts the eroticization of power as a political, aesthetic, dangerous and pleasurable venture. Confounding the dichotomy, women are aggressive, angry, obsessive, masochistic, sadistic, pining, seductive, apprehensive; they are also smutty subjects/objects of representation. Taking psycho-sexual dynamics within narrative as a point of departure, the work engages a mobility and interchange of subject positions. The diversity of perspectives and aesthetic practices illustrates a spectrum of approaches to the problem of integrating feminist theory and practice.



Abigail Child



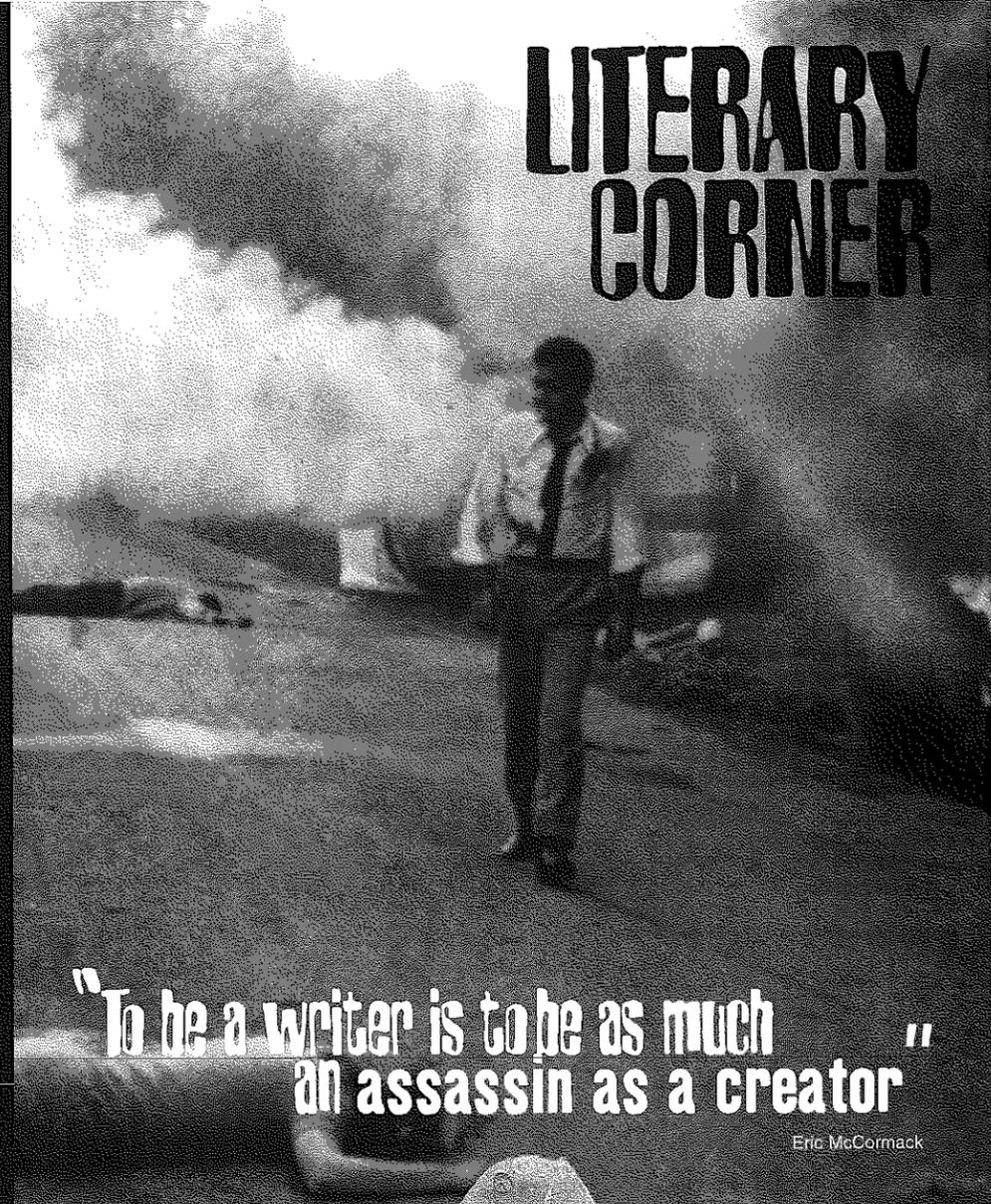
Abigail Child, *Covert Action*

Border/Lines
Introduces Its ...
Literary Corner

In this issue ...
the enigmatic
Eric McCormack
and the "orgiastic feminist,"
Raj Pannu. The author of the
collection of short stories,
Inspecting the Vaults,
and two novels,
The Paradise Motel
and *The Mysterium*,
McCormack writes teasers,
updates Borges.
Pannu recently completed
her first manuscript
of poems.

Also,
Shyam Selvadurai's
poignant comments
on *Funny Boy*.

LITERARY CORNER



**"To be a writer is to be as much
an assassin as a creator"**

Eric McCormack

CHARMED LIVES

By Eric McCormack

"To be a writer is to be as much
an assassin as a creator"

THEY'RE gathered around you, all ears. You choose your words carefully — you're trying to tell them something real, something that actually did happen. "It was a month ago," you say, "a Friday afternoon." You stick to the facts, the bare truth. You tell them how you were driving to the city. Jill was with you. David Thomas, one of your students, was in the car too. "It was around three o'clock," you say. "That was when the accident happened."

You tell them how your car was forced onto the shoulder of the highway, somersaulted and landed upright in the ditch.

You were not injured. Your passengers weren't injured. Everything should've been all right. THEY'RE listening sympathetically. They're relieved you weren't hurt.

"Yes," you say, "everything should've been all right." You've done your best not to talk about the people in the car as though they were characters in some book: the woman, Jill — fair, witty, her arm brushing your knee as she switches the radio endlessly from station to station in search of satisfactory music; the young man, David Thomas — ponytailed black hair and beard, nodding earnestly at everything you say; you, the narrator — greying hair, green eyes with wrinkles around them like mandalas.

You've omitted all that kind of stuff. You haven't talked about the kind of day it was — mid-October, the sun at a brilliant angle, the emaciated limbs of the trees showing through multicoloured

rags. You've omitted lyrical descriptions. You've kept quiet about your premonitions — how you first became aware of the approaching red car in the rear mirror, menacing with the glint of its darkened windshield, coming up fast. If you were going 120, it was going 180. You even said to the others, "Will you look at the speed of this guy?"

You might have mentioned how, out of the corner of your eye, at that very moment, you noticed the relic of another wrecked car by the roadside — a fender wrapped as daintily as a birthday ribbon half-way up a telephone pole. But you've omitted any kind of calculated, bizarre detail. You haven't unnecessarily dramatized the accident itself (you continue to call it an "accident"), how it happened where there was a long, leftward bend in the road; how the red sports car came alongside, deliberately veering towards you, metal tearing at metal; you pulling away to the right, ever further right, till you were ploughing into the gravel.

How, even when your car took off, launched up, up, up into the air, revolving slowly, the engine roaring, you were quite detached, objectively certain that it would turn through 360 degrees and land squarely on the flat bottom of the ditch. How in mid-flight, upside down, you called out, but in a calm voice, to the others, "Don't worry, we'll be all right!" And when the car landed on all fours on the grass with the wheels splayed out like Charlie Chaplin's boots, how you laughed to yourself, exhilarated; how you even tried to reassure police and medics who were suddenly around you. "I feel fine," you told them over and over again. "I lead a charmed life" — sitting there on the grass, the thick, damp grass — "I need to hire a car right away. We were on our way to the city." How the plump, anxious looking medic shook his head saying, very gently, "It wouldn't be wise for you to drive right now." You've omitted these kinds of heroics.

THEY'RE still listening with that look of people hearing the truth. You've told them simply how the car somersaulted and landed in the ditch. You've stuck to the facts. So far so good. They're waiting to hear the rest. They know there must be more. But how can you possibly tell them what happened next? Imagine

what they'd think if you came right out with it?

"It was like this. Sitting there on the grass, I forgot, momentarily, all about the person I love most in all the world. And when I remembered, the medic told me she and David were fine. I got to my feet, a bit wobbly, and went round to where they lay on plastic sheets at the passenger side of the car. She seemed so happy to see me and took my hand and held it to her cheek and said, 'I'm fine, honey. My neck's a bit sore, that's all.'

"I squeezed her hand and I loved her more than ever. Then I looked over to see how David was. But the man looking back at me from the other plastic sheet was someone I'd never seen before in my life. He certainly wasn't David Thomas. This stranger was clean-shaven and had a freckled face and his hair was short and light brown. And his eyes weren't David's eyes. He said, 'I'm all right too.' And his voice wasn't David's voice.

"I knew something was wrong. I knew everything was wrong."

THEY'RE listening, but what are you to say now? That at first you were bewildered; that you thought there'd been some incredible mix-up and that this unfamiliar young man must be the driver of the red car. That you looked around for David Thomas and asked where he was. That no one — not the medics, not the police, not Jill — seemed to have any idea what you were talking about. "But honey, *this* is David," Jill said, "right here beside me." And when you asked her about the red car that caused the accident, she said, "Red car? I don't remember any red car." And she got up on her elbow and looked over at him. "Did you see a red car, David?" And he looked first at her, then at me, and with a little smile, he shook his head — no, he hadn't seen it. And Jill was worried about you: "Are you sure you're all right honey? Why don't you lie down?"

THEY'RE listening, waiting politely. They don't realize how much you're keeping from them. What if, for example, you were to tell them about your life since the accident?

"That was a month ago. Since then, things aren't the same for me. I've had CAT scan after CAT scan; they show

nothing. The Valium doesn't help me sleep. As the days go by, Jill looks at me more and more strangely.

"I teach my classes as usual. Every Monday and Wednesday, this stranger sits in the lecture hall in the same seat where the real David Thomas used to sit. He watches me. I've accustomed myself to his presence and talk expertly, as though nothing has changed. Time passes, and the memory of the David Thomas I once knew passes, becomes flimsier.

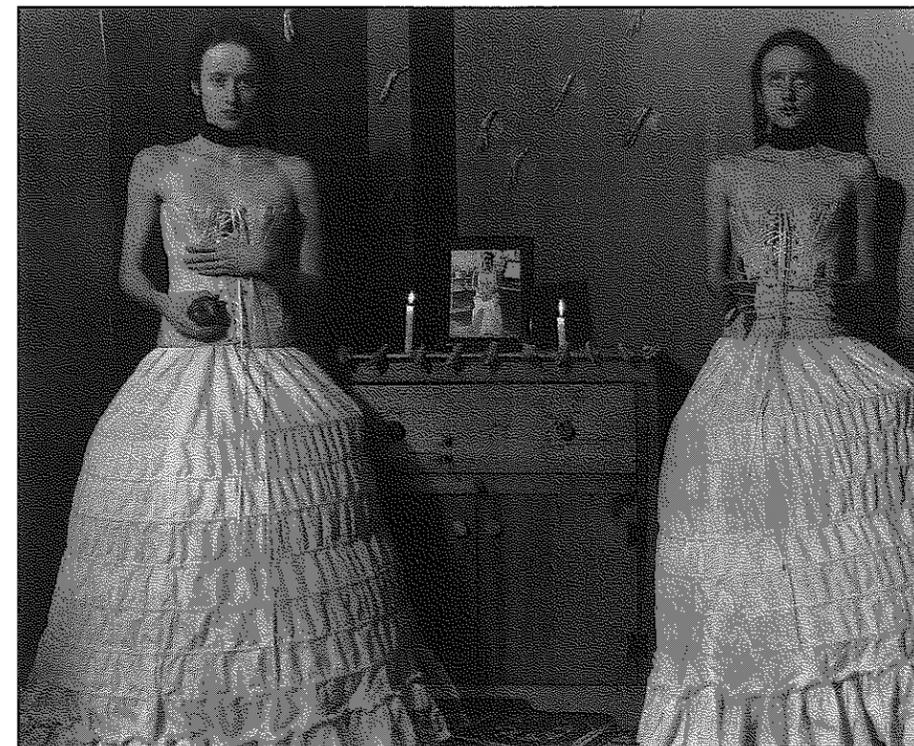
"Everything, in fact, seems somehow flimsier to me now. And why not? Even Jill seems capable of vanishing forever, at any moment, like someone loved hopelessly in a dream."

THEY'RE still waiting, listening, but their eyes are a little restless now. They're thinking of moving on. You could hold them if you wanted. You take a deep breath. What if you were to tell them everything, the whole truth? You notice Jill and the others standing together in a corner; you can't see their faces. You breathe deeply, and deeply again. If you'd any sense, you'd keep quiet. But it's hard, so hard to resist. You clear your throat. You hesitate again. You can tell they're disappointed. They think they've heard all that there is to hear. They're beginning to disperse. This is your last chance. Your heart thumps. If you're going to do it, you'll have to do it now. You take a final breath, and, without knowing what you'll say, you begin.

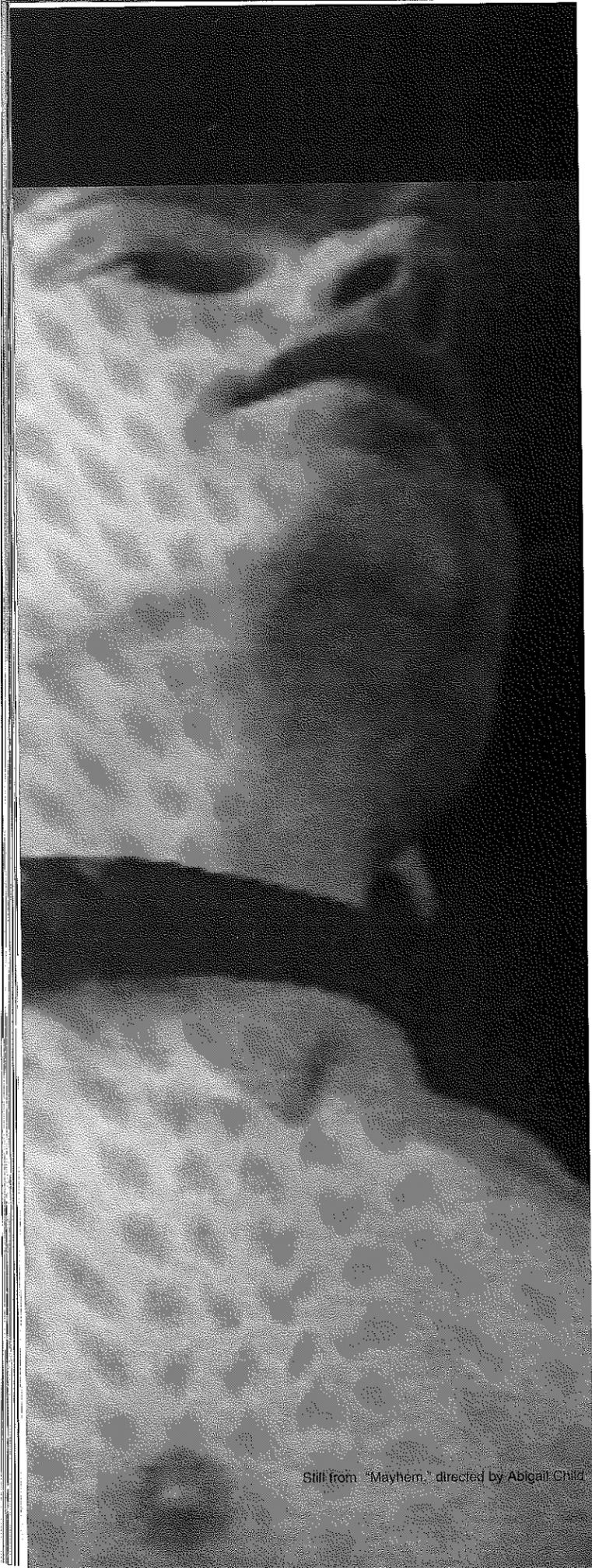
"Yes," you say, "everything should've been all right . . ." You're not sure they're listening anymore, but you tell it all. You're not sure they're listening any more, but it doesn't matter. You feel so happy again, so free, it doesn't make any difference at all.



Janieta Eyre, from "Incarnations," *Attis*, 1995 (courtesy of Garnet Press Gallery)



Janieta Eyre, from "Incarnations," *Cat's Cradle*, 1995 (courtesy of Garnet Press Gallery)



Still from "Mayhem," directed by Abigail Child.

Post-Modern Lover

by Raj Pannu

Let us deconstruct pedagogies
You and I
My post-modern lover

(The pornographic eye)
(The pornographic eye)
(Objectifying the objectified)

Go ahead post-modern stud
Go ahead and signify me
the significant Other
I, the sublimated eye,
a reification of your recursive need,
a construct of your phallic imperative.

And, (Oh baby!)
If you didn't insist upon ejaculating
your obscuranist abstractionisms
into my imploding subjectivity,
Why honey,
I'd be nothing more than a tragic exotic
haunting the periphery of discourse.

Come my darling, (literally and figuratively!)
Let us ardently theorize about our mutual positioning
within the canonical tradition of the Masque Grotesque.
And yet, unlike the masses,
(otherwise known as those ignorant, sorry bastards
who fuck, bonk, get their potatoes cooked, etc.),
We, the literate practitioners of a civilized heuristic,
will merely subvert the institutionalized hegemony
that is maintained by the Heterosexual Romantic Love
Paradigm.

Now, my angst-ridden genius,
what do you presuppose will be the end result
of our dialogic consensus?
Well, what else?

An aborted (id)entity.

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was named one
of the top 100 books of 1994.

(The London Free Press)

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presented

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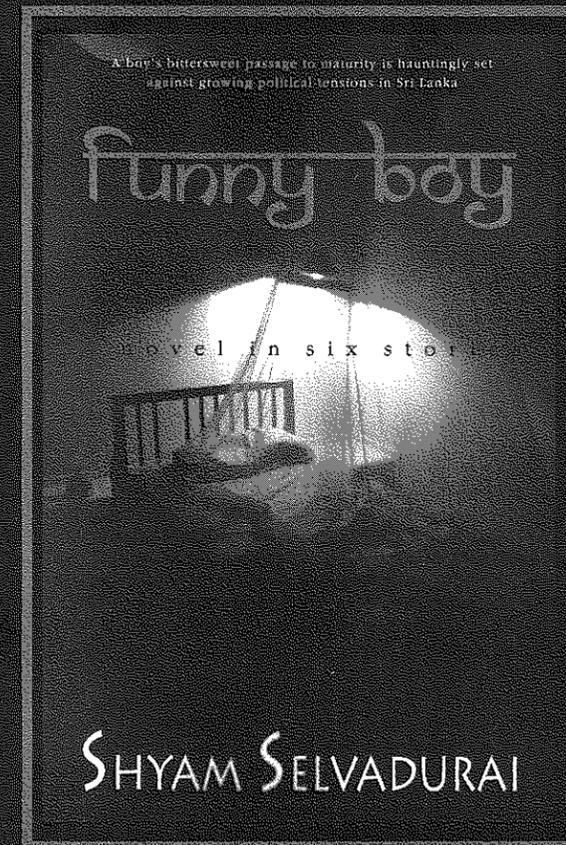
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In May 1995, Shyam
Selvadurai received the
Books In Canada/Smith Books
First Novel Prize for his novel,
Funny Boy, published in 1994.
Printed here are excerpts from his
acceptance speech.



SHYAM SELVADURAI

I have been out of the country for the last four months and it was nice to know that in my absence *Funny Boy* took on a new impetus, thanks to this award. The award has also helped to increase *Funny Boy's* visibility at a time in our country when the message of the book has become more important due to this new "landing fee" of \$975—what is commonly being called the new Canadian Head Tax—recently imposed by the federal government on future immigrants and refugees.

As you know, *Funny Boy* is about the violence in Sri Lanka that leads to a Tamil family losing everything—its house, its livelihood, and its psychic well-being. Yet the book has a bittersweet ending, the sweetness being that the family is granted a reprieve—the family members are to come to Canada and start life again. True, they will be poor and lonely, but they will get another opportunity.

Well, if I were to set *Funny Boy* in 1995, I would have to end the book differently. I would have to say that the family members do not get to come to Canada. They do not get a second chance at life. Forced to remain in Sri Lanka, they would probably spend their lives in refugee camps. The father would find it difficult to find work because of the racism against Tamils. Arjie, the narrator of *Funny Boy*, might end up the victim of a midnight raid, during which the police round up young Tamil boys, take them off to prison, and torture them. In other words, the ending would be simply bitter.

My family was lucky in that we did get a chance to start again. But I calculated how much it would have cost us if we were to apply for immigration now, and it works out to 150,000 rupees—half a year's salary for a doctor. I'm not sure that even we, an upper middle-class family, could have afforded to come here. So what will now be the plight of disadvantaged immigrants and especially refugees, who have lost everything?

I have always thought of being Canadian as a status conferred. I am sorry to have returned to this country to find that rather than a status conferred, it has become, in the words of the government, "a right that should be paid for." It is now a commodity to be sold; as some one in the government said, it is "only the cost of a colour TV."

LITERARY
CORNER

Can you imagine Jacques Lacan doing a double lutz? And other athletic manoeuvres...

by

Gary Genosko

THE TWO ELVISES

Leather and ice-skating are uneasy partners. Kurt Browning, one may recall, reached on occasion for his leather — but only a jacket. Elvis minor — the Canadian figure skater Elvis Stojko — however, appears in a body-hugging, sleeveless leather pantsuit, with dramatic — one wants to say fetishistic, with a clear nod to bondage rather than motorcycle chic — drawstrings on the pant legs. Stojko's outfit evokes Elvis Presley — Elvis major — circa 1968, neck-to-toe in leather for his comeback television special, cookin' with his small-combo — not to mention the famous photograph of him taken from *Jailhouse Rock*: the dancing, sneering, leather-clad prison rebel. Indeed, Elvis minor's Elvis Presley routine was not unveiled until after he had captured the World Championship in 1994. He had already started the European competition with a martial arts-based routine choreographed to the music of Bruce Lee's kung-fu films.

In *Dead Elvis* Greil Marcus contends that Elvis tends to be buried under cultural ephemera, explained away, figured as an absence, as white trash, as someone who could not have meant to do what he did, on the grounds that he was not a "con-

Nokia gives Elvis the edge.

...in the arena, Nokia gives him the edge because you like Elvis because you're not afraid to be an iconoclast. Leading the way with the development of the first digital cellular phones, with features like one-touch dialing, repeat numbers, one-touch access, user-friendly menus and dual-band capability. We're also a real artistic organization on the phone. As the phone that's been awarded numerous awards for innovation and design excellence as well.

Nokia Cellular For Elvis, no more than just a phone. It's the secret to keeping his act as simple as it looks as the star he performs on his stage.

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CONNECTING PEOPLE

scious cultural agent" (195). It is the impossibility of Elvis as such an agent that Marcus challenges with the claim that he was a conscious actor. There is something shaky about this possibility, something mysterious, and less than Cartesian.

How, then, does Elvis minor keep himself from being buried under heaps of

paraphernalia? How does he remain, as it were, "conscious"? To be manipulated by the symbol of the King — especially as a namesake and a favourite performer for one's parents — is a dangerous business, for the risk is that a few souvenirs will lead to an associative avalanche: all of sudden, the fat jokes appear, the junkie motif gets banded around, someone remembers the German rendezvous with fourteen-year-old Priscilla, the jelly donuts . . .

Sure, when you're the 1994 and 1995 World Figure Skating Champion, all of this seems unlikely. Elvis minor: always in basic black, a martial arts expert able to master the pain of his twisted ankle, never quick with a smile. He is already widely known as the king of figure skating. It was, after all, the young Elvis major — the King — who appeared by popular demand on the U.S. postage stamp. And it will be a young Elvis minor who sooner than later turns pro — possibly after the next Olympic competition — and replicates Elvis major on the entertainment circuit. Viva Las Vegas?

Analytic Escapade:

PSYCHO-SKATER

My colleague Todd Dufréne and I have recently completed an investigation into the figure skating exploits of the well-known British psychoanalyst, Ernest Jones. Jones's book, *The Elements of Figure Skating*, was published in 1931, and a much expanded edition appeared in 1952. Long out of print and forgotten by historians of skating and psychoanalysis, Jones's *Elements* is testimony to his extraordinary para-professional passion for the sport. Besides the detailed, technical descriptions of skating figures, Jones ventured a psychology of skating in which psychoanalytic categories mixed with an erotics of the figures.

As Jones's son Mervyn has confirmed, his father was a bit of a rink rat. He was a member of and skated at The Ice Club on Grosvenor Road (which folded in 1939) and at Golder's Green in London. The elder Jones skated a great deal in the two years before the first edition of *Elements* appeared. A reading of his date books, which are found in the archives of The British Psycho-Analytical Society in London, reveals the rigours of his schedule and his failures. What is remarkable about Jones's work on skating is his innovation in the area of mistakes. For instance, Jones invented the phrase "life-saving stamp" — bringing one's free foot down to prevent a fall — and

"a race of 'animals' can be treated as such — as victims or pets."

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

placed considerable emphasis on "the art of falling," that is, of "slithering" on ice. This interest without question reflects his own experiences. His date books record with astonishing exactitude his falls (their number and the injuries resulting from them) during his sessions. All of this practice, it should be said, was in preparation for the Third-Class National Skating Association Test. As he awaited the publication of his skating book, Jones, while complaining of "bad hips," took the test for the first time in June 1931. He scored 19 points. He took the test again on December 17, and scored only 19.5 points. *Elements* was published on December 23. What Jones did not mention was the fact that a score of 20 (of a possible 36) was a passing mark! Jones's love of the "ecstasy of motion" on ice outstripped, it is fair to say, his own mediocre technical skills. He was, however, by all accounts, an excellent judge.

Bestiary:

ATHLETES AS PETS

In *Landscapes of Modern Sport*, John Bale advances the provocative idea that "the sportscape or athlete to which we show affection is the athletic analogue of the garden or the pet." Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto, he points out, doesn't contain any shrubs, but it nonetheless remains a garden, if only euphemistically, as a sportscape aestheticized through horticultural and architectural imagery. This garden is full of "pets" — disciplined, functionalized, steroid-enhanced, and exhaustively trained to perform. These athletic pets are dominated so that they may best receive the affection of the spectators, their owners, their parents, etc.

Hockey net-minders often adopt animal motifs when having their masks painted. Toronto Maple Leaf goaltender Felix Potvin is nicknamed The Cat, for example. Like the use of animals in military contexts, a single attribute is abstracted from a given species,

exaggerated, and reconnected to a new thing or activity. Not all animal motifs are to be used positively.

In his "Sports Chatter," discussion of the ambiguous healthiness of sports, Umberto Eco maintained that one of the "first degenerations of the contest" involves "the raising of human beings dedicated to competition. The athlete is already a being who has hypertrophied one organ, who turns his body into the seat of an exclusive source of continuous play. The athlete is a monster." The dedication to "total instrumentalization" makes the athlete a monster or, better yet, to follow Bales, a pet. But pets, while often distorted through selective breeding, are also dearly loved, especially when they "perform" for their "caretakers." While Eco recognizes that the athlete is dedicated to sports training regimes, however brutal or unhealthy they may be, Bales elides the matter of dedication. Many people do, however, submit to exhaustive and repetitive training routines. By changing the register of the analogy ever so slightly, however, we are thrown back to the identification of black slaves with domesticated farm animals, and slaveholders with wild predators, poignantly employed in the classic of 1845, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written By Himself*. What this autobiographical narrative reveals is the prevailing nineteenth-century image of the black slave as a healthy animal, who, if needs be, will be broken through labour, tortured and/or murdered, and selectively bred. It is not very far from the racism of the Old South to contemporary stereotyped representations of black athletes, that is, from animalization to the "petishism" of focussing on the so-called naturally expressive black body. Indeed, consciousness, as we learned in the case of Ben Johnson after the debacle in Seoul, was denied to the sprinter insofar as he was figured as an animal-machine. Race (as well as gender oppression and economic exploitation) functions through animalization. As Patricia Hill Collins puts it in *Black Feminist Thought*, "a race of 'animals' can be treated as such — as victims or pets."



Ellen Flanders, from "Lacking Desire," *The Fall: Homosexual Awareness & Rejection*, 1995



Ellen Flanders, from "Lacking Desire," *The Fall: Homosexual Awareness & Rejection*, 1995

A Fundraising Letter to You From One of Our Subscribers

Dear Reader,

We have an opportunity to do a good deed and, at the same time, to give ourselves a useful and inspiring gift.

As you can well imagine, any enterprise in Ontario that has come to depend upon public subsidy feels threatened by the new provincial Conservative government. No enterprise feels more threatened than the small cultural-political-literary magazine. *Border/Lines* is especially vulnerable.

Border/Lines is a quarterly. It has published since 1984. The magazine is run by a collective of committed volunteers. Its entire annual operating budget totals only \$60,000.

Despite the frugal budget, *Border/Lines* will not be able to publish if, as is likely, the Ontario Arts Council is forced to cut back its grant. We would all be worse off as a result.

Border/Lines was the first magazine in Canada to focus specifically on issues relating to race, gender, and sexual orientation. It has published such lauded authors as M. Nourbese Philip, Michael Ignatieff, Harold Pinter and Terry Eagleton.

The results have been exemplary. *The Village Voice* has cited the magazine more than once. *The London Free Press* called *Border/Lines* "one of the top 10 alternative magazines" published in Canada. *Utne Reader* voted *Border/Lines* one of the top 10 cultural affairs magazines of 1994.

Our opportunity is to help *Border/Lines* now, when it is needed during this moment of crisis. If you support *Border/Lines* with a financial gift, you will be making a direct contribution toward the survival of one of Canada's most vital media for the expression of alternative voices.

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Sincerely,

David Rothberg

P.S. Again, donations are tax deductible! *Border/Lines* will issue you a receipt.

SAUL'S BITCHES:

A Masculine Philosophy of Capitalism

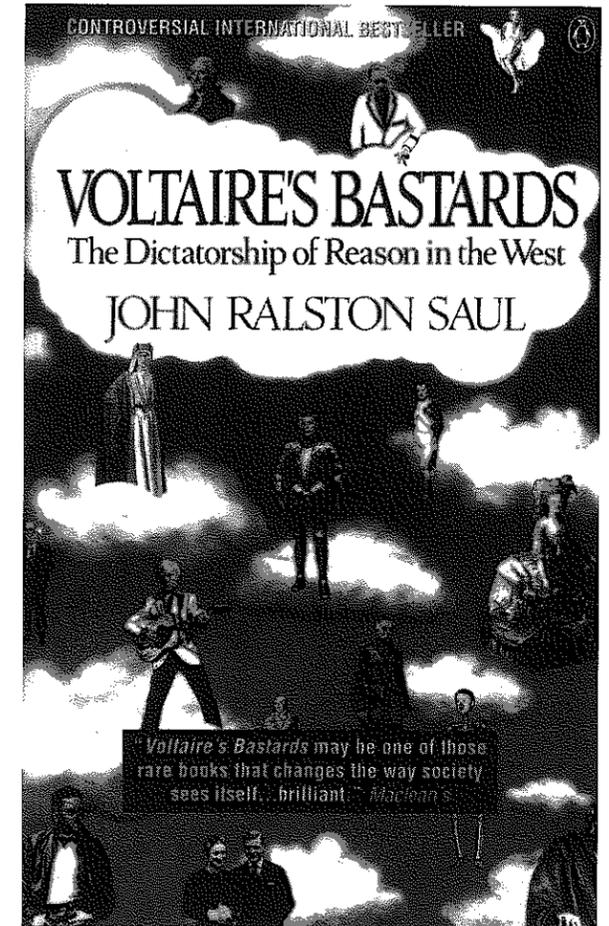
by Clint Burnham

How discriminating among mineral waters is supposed to save Western civilization.

John Ralston Saul had a great deal of positive media coverage last winter, when *The Doubter's Companion*, his executive summary of *Voltaire's Bastards*, was published by Viking. Profiles in leading media: *Books in Canada*; *The Globe and Mail*; and Toronto's yuppie tabloid, *eye*; an excerpt from the book in *The Toronto Star*. Reviews and praise from the international centres of intellectual and political power: London, New York, Washington. The kind of heavy-duty stroking intellectuals ache for: praise by Brian Fawcett, getting onto the *Utne Reader's* 100 smart guys list, lecturing at the University of Toronto and abroad.

I could go on at length here about how sloppy Saul's two philosophical works are — how they are full of sweeping generalizations; how they contain macho boy-scout ideas of the writer as Hemingwayesque man of action; how even the fairly good analyses (of the arms trade, oil industry, and right-wing fixations on debt and cutting social programs) are, in the end, subsumed by a sneering moralism. But I'd rather go at the global and moral issues in Saul's work. I'd rather critique it, also, in terms of such external factors as Saul's media image and his novels: In the greatest of ironies, Saul's work has been celebrated (and sometimes attacked) because of the very things against which he inveighs: the postmodern world of image and media.

So these media events and accolades feed into each other: Val Ross's profile in *The Globe* emphasizes the *Utne* list, for instance, and



shows Saul suavely discussing his Yorkville Red Toryisms in a New York bar. Such "external" benchmarks can reassure the Canadian literary journalist: Saul is respected elsewhere. This colonial cringing is at odds with Saul's own professed nationalism, but most discussion of Saul has little to do with his books themselves, or with their attempts at ideas.

This is just as well for Saul, because if there had been such discussion and scrutiny, critics might have noticed that his recent book is not really a humane criticism of overly rationalistic business and government policy-making. At any rate, when journalists discuss Saul they tend to genuflect, to submit to his taste in clothing, mineral water, or sherry. In *eye* magazine, Jason Anderson writes: "Over a recent lunch interview, I felt a distinct envy for the Toronto writer's past life as a Parisian businessman and for his general air of learned man of the world. I ate my chicken sandwich and felt like a college boy."

Journalists' masochistic fascination with Saul's lifestyle reinforces hierarchical notions of society — and this fascination is perhaps the only way a postmodern society can talk about ideas. Lifestyle myopia reaches such levels that Ross's article doesn't offer us a detailed discussion of how Saul's ideas were anticipated (in a more radical fashion) by the Frankfurt School or poststructuralists. Ross instead describes confronting Saul on his finicky taste for ice cubes in sherry: "In a *Books in Canada* profile, John Lownsbrough tells how in his PetroCanada days, Saul would refuse a glass of sherry if it came with more than the two ice cubes he'd specified. 'Oh well,' Saul laughs, 'I was 29 then.' But at age 47, he is known to refuse Perrier at dinner parties and to request more arcane mineral waters."

Saul is presented and marketed as a star, in a postmodern feat that promotes him by the very technique he loathes. But Saul's writing tends to be as superficial as a publicist's epistemology — his history of reason's dictatorship is little more than a string of character studies that link rationalistic thinking with personality pathologies. Ignatius Loyola, Richelieu, Robert MacNamara: these are all bad-boy technocrats/courtiers. In some way, Saul's texts critique a media society enthralled with personality; that enthrallment is used as a form of historiography; finally, Saul becomes a media star himself.

The cover of *Voltaire's Bastards*, for instance, shows a number of stars: J. F. Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe, Marshall McLuhan, Andy Warhol, posed on clouds, with their heads and bodies interchanged. Resembling nothing so much as a superannuated version of a *Sgt. Pepper* album cover, the design accurately demonstrates Saul's gossip-rag level of commentary. Similarly, the *Globe* profile features a cartoon by Anthony Jenkins: Saul, grinning and looking like Prince Charles, surrounded by pals of one kind or another such as Conrad Black and Voltaire. In Canada, where foreign-dominated media find it difficult to manufacture stars with the ease they do in the U.S., these visual signifiers play a disproportionate role. In *Reading Canadian Reading*, Frank Davey pointed out that the cover of a Macmillan anthology, which presented caricatures of Robertson Davies, Margaret Atwood, and others, reinforced a perception of Canadian writing as a game of personalities. The cartoons suture an unstable concept — the postmodern intellectual — to a fixed social semiotic, the celebrity world of lifestyles and global travel.

It's important, then, when discussing Saul's ideas, not to ignore this media-spectacle positioning of the man and his books. Saul portrays himself (and

Saul's critique is a form of capitalist brush-clearing: the managers who have run business and government have screwed up, so we need real capitalists to take charge.

is aided in this by journalists) as being a man of the world, at home both in a Parisian restaurant and in the company of Burmese guerrillas. Saul as Yorkville big forehead is also, curiously, anti-intellectual, given to dismissals of Nietzsche as lunatic and Warhol as pimp: "There really isn't much difference between Marie Antoinette's bon mot over bread and brioche and Warhol's soup cans. They are both expressions of clever artificiality, not of intelligent relevance" (*Voltaire's Bastards*, 464). Here Saul's cosmopolitan gourmet image seamlessly supports a dismissal of pop art with an ill-thought binary: it never occurs to Saul that Warhol's art could be artificial and relevant. Saul's relentlessly macho image is part of how he analyzes Western political philosophy and culture. Novelists are supposed to be "deep-penetration patrols, striking out where least expected" (*Voltaire's Bastards*, 38-9); the manager isn't a real man, a real capitalist, but "an employee in drag" (*Voltaire's Bastards*, 363), a eunuch, like a courtier — in a word: feminized.

In novels such as *The Paradise Eater* and *The Next Best Thing* Saul presents the Far East as a drug-corrupted, soft, vicious, feminine, Oriental cave. Here Westerners ramble like sodden descendants of characters from Greene or Conrad, viciously exploiting Asian men and women for the reader's titillation or uttering feudal moral codes for literary pretension. This venerable tradition in Western letters has been analyzed by Edward Said in terms of "Orientalism," or the freezing of the complexities of the East into a feminized and vaguely mercenary Other. Saul's novels can be read as even more grotesque than that, as they exact a symbolic punishment of "Oriental" women; in them we learn of the "importance" of child prostitution for the sexual development of bar girls and of "the miraculous ejection of razor blades from private parts" (*The Paradise Eater*, 121-22). Saul's characters coldly analyze "Oriental" women in terms of their genitals, or rescue them in an even more heroic mode; thus, readers are afforded both vicarious thrills and a feeling of moral superiority. This is not merely local racism, but rather the pathological effect of global capitalism.

Saul, of course, doesn't see his work this way; he therefore misses how post-modern late capitalism determines cultural forms like the genre novel he is attempting. Saul is a former broker and the poet laureate of that class, the bard of Nick Leeson, if you will.

I'm not saying that Saul himself is some racist monster. But this is the attitude fostered by his novels at a thematic level and by his philosophical texts at a structural level. Saul, because of his activism (president of PEN Canada, critic of NAFTA, etc.), is seen by liberals as a political revolutionary. But — and this

is why he is being praised by the capitalist class (with the exception of Conrad Black) as well — Saul is in favour of capitalism: he just envisages a kinder, more regulated capitalism, not one as mercenary as the present system (which he blames on employees, not capitalism). Saul's critique is a form of capitalist brush-clearing: the managers who have run business and government have screwed up, so we need real capitalists to take charge. In a chapter of *Voltaire's Bastards*, "The Hijacking of Capitalism," the environmental and other excesses of international capital are blamed on the managerial class, who aren't true capitalists but abject substitutes. Also, discussing food contamination by agribusiness chemicals, Saul writes, "Nothing is neater than to blame human greed. However, most of the corporations involved are run by managers, not owners" (*Voltaire's Bastards*, 313). If owners ran things, Saul argues, capitalism would be great.

Saul extends his critique of technocrats and managers to modern (or postmodern) trends like pop art, mass media, and sexual freedom. Here he almost sounds like a conservative critic in the 1960s, say Daniel Bell, with a Zen fetish thrown in: "There can be no doubt that the road which Zen Buddhism offers out of the prison of reason is far superior to alternatives such as self-actualization, bioenergetics, colour therapy, getting in touch with your anima, massage to release emotional trauma" (*Voltaire's Bastards*, 495). All contemporary attempts to rethink subjectivity are then given the same label of "silly," and associated with fads such as colour therapy. Saul hates both governmental-business stupidity and postmodern culture — for postmodernism is usually a code word for leftist theory and critique. By claiming to have no ideology, to be neither left nor right — the classic stance of the liberal — Saul marginalizes Marxist and postmodern theories because they entail a critique of his capitalist individualism. Indeed, he lumps Marxists in with other postmodern courtiers like Harvard business geeks and military officers.

Read in this way, Saul's rants and desperate gestures seem less macho and more like a textual form of self-protection. Saul has it in for critics, especially those who might be critical of his position. Critics, he says, "worst of all, review for money. Reviewing is paid less than Third World factory labour and any reliance on it for income may unbalance the mind" (*The Doubter's Companion*, 82). Saul equates rhetoric with whoredom; he castigates "sophists" and other such sellers of rhetoric as intellectual prostitutes. But his thinking is so abstract and generalist that he overlooks and continually discounts any form of opposition — particularly left opposition — to the general rule of reason he detects.

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Saul's philosophical rants are little more than a liberal form of capitalism thinking out loud. His philosophy is liberal in that it rejects the absolute standard of the market in determining human interaction and supports some form of government regulation — although he is exactly backwards when he sees the market as a reflection of reason, instead of the other way around. That is, Saul's history is as linear and idealist as it gets: its sharp edge comes merely from the confused dishonour of a class realizing how it has screwed up the system. For Saul is eminently of the class — the technocrats — he criticizes. Born into the officer corps, Saul studied as an academic in London, worked as a stockbroker in Paris, was a senior official with PetroCanada in Calgary, and now advises the Canadian government on cultural policy. These are all paradigmatic occupations for the technocrat today, and while Saul repeatedly throws in his own experiences as justification for his philosophy, nowhere does he outline precisely how he's not part of the problem.

Saul's insistence on a clear and instrumental writing style is linked to his overall rationalistic mindset. For clear and direct expression as an aesthetic replicates the capitalist desire for efficiency. (He really is naive — he hasn't even caught up to the MTV-style language now favoured by corporate philosophy.) Saul repeatedly attacks what he sees as the obfuscation of postmodernism, deconstruction, and theory. Rhetoric is their ultimate tool, the sneaky cunning of speechwriters working for evil politicians: "Either we wish discussion and doubt or rhetoric and reassurance" (*The Doubter's Companion*, 271). Saul traces rhetoric's history in a potted survey in *Voltaire's Bastard* (115-18), where it is seen as the evil weapon of Jesuits and bureaucrats; his own rhetoric — sarcasm, hyperbole, truncated sentence fragments — remains unexamined.

Much of what Saul put forward in *Voltaire's Bastards* is neither original nor radical: it is the anti-modern ranting of an irascible humanist, dismayed to find that his concept of truth was a chimera. The executive summary style of *The Doubter's Companion* results in a rearrangement of Saul's slicker bits of liberal philosophy and economics. His philosophizing may be superficial and his novels may be offensive, but Saul is hot property for his service to the class he pretends to criticize.

Saul's philosophical rants are little more than a liberal form of capitalism thinking out loud.



...the manager isn't a real man, a real capitalist, but "an employee in drag," a eunuch, like a courtier — in a word: feminized.

John Fekete, *Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising*. Toronto: Robert Davies Publishing, 1994.

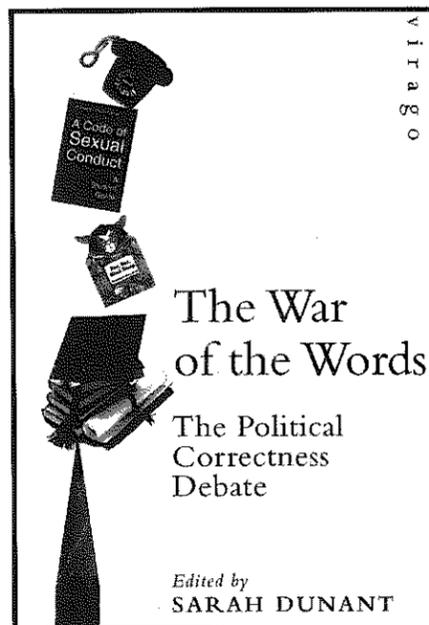
Sarah Dunant (ed.), *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*. London: Virago Press, 1994.

BY Valerie Scatamburlo

JOHN FEKETE
MORAL PANIC
Biopolitics rising



ROBERT DAVIES PUBLISHING food for thought



CRITIC

Approximately four years ago, the public could not escape the deluge of articles and editorials warning that a new plague was spreading across university campuses in North America. With dire tales about the hobgoblin of *political correctness*, conservative spokespersons and media cognoscenti managed to paint a picture of campus life resembling Hieronymus Bosch's vision of Hell. Indeed, even casual attention to the mainstream media was enough to discover that our institutions of higher learning had been "taken over" and transformed into hotbeds of radicalism by a sordid alliance of academic dragoons seeking to impose the edicts of political correctness on pliant faculty and students.

Once a phrase used with an ironic subtext by the Left as a form of self-mockery in the late 1980s and early 1990s, p.c. was appropriated by the conservative Right and turned on its proverbial head. In the process, p.c. was denuded of its historical specificity and subsequently assumed an entourage of defining characteristics, not least of which was an alleged disdain for free expression. In a paradoxical shift, it was claimed that those "radicals" who had once marched for the right to free speech were now vigorously cultivating Orwellian armies of thought police whose mini "ministries of truth" were springing up like noxious weeds on campuses and choking out the flowers of free expression.

"P.c." has by now found a comfortable home in popular parlance, but many of the issues foregrounded during the media brouhaha continue to ferment on university campuses. Indeed, those who feel "threatened" continue to invoke p.c. as a term of derision for all things which could loosely be described as multicultural or feminist, and organizations such as the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship have recently launched a vigorous assault on the alleged hegemony of p.c. "forces." The current spate of books and articles drawing attention to pedagogical issues, canon revision, and multiculturalism are further indication that the campus "culture wars" are far from over.

One soldier is John Fekete, whose book *Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising* has itself caused a panic of sorts. It has been denounced by some and heralded by others. If nothing else, Fekete obviously intended to cause a stir with his publica-

tion — his preface claims that he felt a "calling" to challenge ruling cultural and academic discourses. Despite this proclamation, the pages of Fekete's book are rife with the buzzwords and stock phrases invoked by cultural conservatives south of the border who have, in their "intellectual" forays, used the charge of "political correctness" as a reactionary bludgeon to stifle the voices of critique and dissent.

"The casual sneer at *political correctness*" is, for Fekete, misguided since the academy in particular and Canadian society in general are, he feels, undergoing fundamental transformations due to pressure from various movements. He admonishes that "there is nothing marginal about it." The source of this pressure emanates from the latest affliction allegedly gripping the nation — "biopolitics" — a regressive "anti-politics" defined by Fekete as a form of "primitivism which promotes self-identification through groups defined by categories like race or sex" (22). Arguing that biopolitics is "fast becoming deeply integrated into the central practices of public policy and administration" (25), Fekete claims that this tendency has endangered the very cornerstones of liberal democracy — namely freedom of expression and due process. But this assertion is nothing more than a clever tactic used by Fekete to convince his readers that "biopolitical" warfare is as pervasive as he would have us believe. Furthermore, it conveniently ignores the actual existing hierarchical relations of power and privilege in the academy. Presenting those who have had decades of uninterrupted control over the academy as the "silenced" and the "policed" enables Fekete to disguise their virtual stranglehold on institutionalized power. He fails to grasp the complex character of contemporary contestations over pedagogical initiatives, canon revision, and campus politics; instead, Fekete presents them in typical binary fashion as simple struggles between fair-minded, pro-free speech scholars and censorship-crazed "Stalinist" warriors.

In his first chapter, Fekete begins by surfing through a variety of issues including affirmative action initiatives and the Ontario Ministry of Education Document on "Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards" which he refers to as an "ominous directive." The bulk of his

indignant screed, though, is reserved for "biofeminism" and what he calls the "violence-against-women industry." Hence, almost half of *Moral Panic* is dedicated to debunking the statistics which have been produced about the frequency of violence against women in this country. Fekete's cannon is aimed particularly at *Changing the Landscape: Achieving Equality — Ending Violence* (the Final Report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women) and Walter DeKeseredy and Katherine Kelly's 1993 campus abuse study. Fekete contends that these and other similar surveys have generated inflated statistics due to biased categories, political peccadillos, and the "myth" of patriarchal oppression. This, in turn, has created an environment of "moral panic," heightened women's anxiety, and "demonized" men.

While one may be inclined to credit Fekete for pointing to the folly of some studies that place leering and rape under the same rubric, what makes *Moral Panic* difficult to digest is its callous trivialization of violence against women. According to Fekete, it is not *actual* violence that has increased in the last decade, only the "rhetoric of violence against women" (147). This however is not intended to suggest that society is without victims, for the crux of Fekete's argument is that the ascendancy of biofeminism has created a "whole new class of male victims" (27). This rhetoric of male victimization is part of another panic wave currently sweeping North America: white male paranoia.

Having set the ominous context of male victimization, Fekete proceeds to provide a survey of fourteen professors who have been "put on trial" by the coterie of thought police currently headquartered in Canadian universities. Among these "victims" of biopolitical fanaticism reported by Fekete, two in particular stand out for their infamy.

One is Philippe Rushton who, as Fekete reminds us, has received many awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, and has penned countless articles and books, including his latest, *Race, Evolution, and Behaviour*, which drew the lead review in *The New York Times Book Review*. (I should add that the eugenicist arguments put forth in Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve* also received that same "honour.") Fekete's defence of Rushton rests on two premises:

academic freedom and the suggestion that the merit of Rushton's work can only be judged by "intensive and rigorous scientific scrutiny" (214). This claim lends a scientific aura of credibility to Rushton's work. Fekete then proceeds to chastise those who have sought to "censor" Rushton's "scientific" findings. What Fekete conveniently neglects to mention, however, is that Rushton has received

that North American women suffer less from rape than women in "traditional" countries where loss of virginity often spells disqualification from marriage. Victims of date rape, therefore, should demand no more than monetary damages for the "discomfort" they may have felt from unwanted sex. (This view, of course, is strikingly similar to that of Madonna wannabe Camille Paglia, whose message

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monetary support from the right-wing Pioneer Fund — a New York-based organization founded in 1937 — which prides itself on financing research into the dilemmas of "race" betterment and whose directors maintain that black people are "genetically deficient." In his summary of Rushton's plight, he almost exclusively relies on an article defending Rushton's academic freedom written by City College of New York philosophy professor, Barry Gross, the author and editor of such gems as *Discrimination in Reverse* (1978) and *Reverse Discrimination* (1977) — both indictments of affirmative action and equity policies. Gross is also the treasurer of the National Association of Scholars (NAS), an American group largely funded by right-wing think tanks, which has generated most of the anti-p.c. jeremiads in the American academy. Hence, in the name of defending Rushton's academic freedom, Fekete fails to address Rushton's links to right-wing organizations whose agendas are explicitly political and far removed from any commitment to the liberal democratic principles Fekete claims to valorize.

Another well-known and contentious case reviewed is that of beleaguered University of New Brunswick mathematics professor, Matin Yaqzan, who was thrust into the national (and international) spotlight for comments published in the student newspaper *The Brunswickian*. Yaqzan had stated that date rape is often a manifestation of young men's natural and uncontrollable sexual urges and suggested

to rape victims is to just "go with it girl.")

Fekete argues that Yaqzan's position is not too far afield from feminists who maintain that men are inherently aggressive. The main difference between them, according to Fekete, is that Yaqzan refuses to be outraged about date rape and hence clashes at the "deepest levels" with the Orwellian program of biofeminism. While he concedes that Yaqzan's opinion is "not a perfect viewpoint," Fekete claims that it is not "outside the orbit of human understanding" (251).

In his defence of Rushton, Yaqzan, and others, Fekete grounds his argument on the sacred tenet of free speech — a principle which, as Stanley Fish reminds us (in *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech . . . and It's a Good Thing Too* [1994]), is never an absolute, but rather a political prize, a name given to verbal

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behaviour that serves particular agendas at particular moments in history. Fekete however, fails to acknowledge this and thus falls prey to a now-common trap: forgetting that if the freedom of speech of the Rushtons and Yaqzans is to be defended, so too must the voices of their critics. Much of what Fekete calls "censorship" is actually protest and dissent. It is the "free speech" of those people whom Fekete and company do not want to hear. Nonetheless, given the contemporary social and cultural climate, characterized as it is by a backlash mentality, Fekete and his comrades can position themselves as paragons of liberty and defenders of free speech against the intrusive, barbaric forces of the "other," as George Bush did in his infamous anti-p.c. tirade delivered at the University of Michigan in 1991.

Another case, less publicized, is that of Jacques Collin, a University of Manitoba professor, disciplined and punished for using sexist and racist language and slapping a student "whom he was trying to stimulate to brighter attention" (221). Fekete justifies Collin's behaviour by referring to his pedagogical style as "flamboyant" and "theatrical" and, it seems, because the 66-year-old scholar and teaching award nominee had given "30 years' service" to the academy. In fact, making reference to "years of service" as if he were discussing embattled war heroes is a recurring theme in Fekete's assessments. Indeed, Fekete's outrage at the alleged injustices suffered by various professors, when not appealing to freedom of speech, rest largely on an unstated premise that, perhaps inadvertently, suggests that such upstanding, "tenured" faculty are beyond reproach.

The latter portion of *Moral Panic* is reserved for three cases, which were unresolved at the time of publication. The most striking aspect of this section is not so much the circumstances of the cases but rather the way in which Fekete frames them. Repeatedly, the male "victims" in question are referred to with glowing epithets and described as outstanding educators, brilliant scholars, and defenders of freedom and liberty, while the biofeminists are depicted as snivelling, imma-

ture, intellectually deficient "warriors." As any astute critic knows, the effort to construct an enemy within always necessitates demonizing the dissidents first, and demonizing is Fekete's forte. After readers are provided with a description of University of Victoria professor Warren Magnusson's "sterling credentials" and "flawless reputation," we are informed that he too had become a target of "biofeminist fundamentalism." The source of contestation between Magnusson and the biofeminists was the circulation of Magnusson's document *Feminism, McCarthyism and Sexual Fundamentalism*. Without elaborating the details and circumstances of the case which Fekete describes, one could easily argue that the very title of Magnusson's document is disingenuous and misleading, but this issue remains unaddressed in Fekete's analysis. One cannot deny that there have been some foolish and obdurate demands for "politically correct" language and behaviour in recent years, but only a serious bout of historical amnesia would enable one to equate the current situation on campuses with the McCarthyite tactics of a previous generation. Despite Fekete's reputation as a "Leftist," and aside from his avowed concern for the future of the academy, *Moral Panic*, rather than constructively contributing to ongoing debates and issues, merely fuels the fire of the "backlash" already burning on campuses and in Canadian culture at large.

The collection of essays that constitute *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, offers a much more balanced overview than *Moral Panic* of contemporary contestations about gender, race, sexual politics and canon revision. For those already familiar with the onslaught of recently published books on political correctness, the contributions in this volume, with the possible exception of Stuart Hall's treatise on the topic, offer little that is novel in the interpretation of issues raised by political correctness. For the uninitiated, however, *The War of the Words* provides an adequate introduction to a range of views that both laud and critique p.c. politics.

Despite the fact that the collection was published in Britain, many of the essays address the current state of affairs on American campuses. This is perhaps why many of the essays exhibit glaring limitations. John Annette's "The Culture War and the Politics of Higher Education in America" and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's "The Great Backlash" both rightly point out that the media and conservative pundits have drastically overstated their case by exaggerating the extent to which the Left had "taken over" U.S. campuses. They also expose the fact that the stupefying use of McCarthyite rhetoric has distorted the account which most citizens have received about campus relations. Indeed, today's opponents of the "new McCarthyism" often claim that the 1950s situation has been turned on its head — that today "tenured radicals" quash dissent by campus conservatives. However, the alleged p.c. McCarthyites wield nowhere near the institutional clout that conservative critics charge.

The problem with Annette's account, however, is the suggestion that the anti-p.c. campaign suddenly burst onto the scene in the late '80s and early '90s in response to Leftist overtures in college classrooms. In addition, he wrongly claims that the anti-p.c. sounding board the National Association of Scholars (which, incidentally, has chapters in Canada) was established in 1987. While it is true that the NAS membership grew by leaps and bounds in the early 1990s, the origin of the NAS dates back to 1982, when it was called the Campus Coalition for Democracy. In fact, the groundwork for the right-wing backlash was being laid in the late '70s and early '80s by a number of corporate-funded think tanks and foundations. Thus, the attack on p.c. was not a spontaneous insurrection, but rather part of a long-term, well-financed plan by the new Right. The early 1990s simply provided the most opportune time to push the anti-p.c. rhetoric into mainstream popular consciousness, given that most Americans were still strangling themselves with yellow ribbons, revelling in patriotic self-congratulations for the "victory" in the Gulf and drowning in a sea of new world order jingoism.

While political correctness has mainly been a target of the Right, it has also raised the ire of some Leftist intellectuals, many of whom have argued that p.c. represents a discursive withdrawal from politics. More concerned with esoteric changes to language than with substantive shifts in power relations, these Leftists have accused p.c. advocates of retreating into an endless array of language games. In her essay, sociolinguist Deborah Cameron seeks to challenge this assertion by focussing on the "power of language." She argues that the various discursive changes engendered by p.c. politics are welcome and necessary developments.

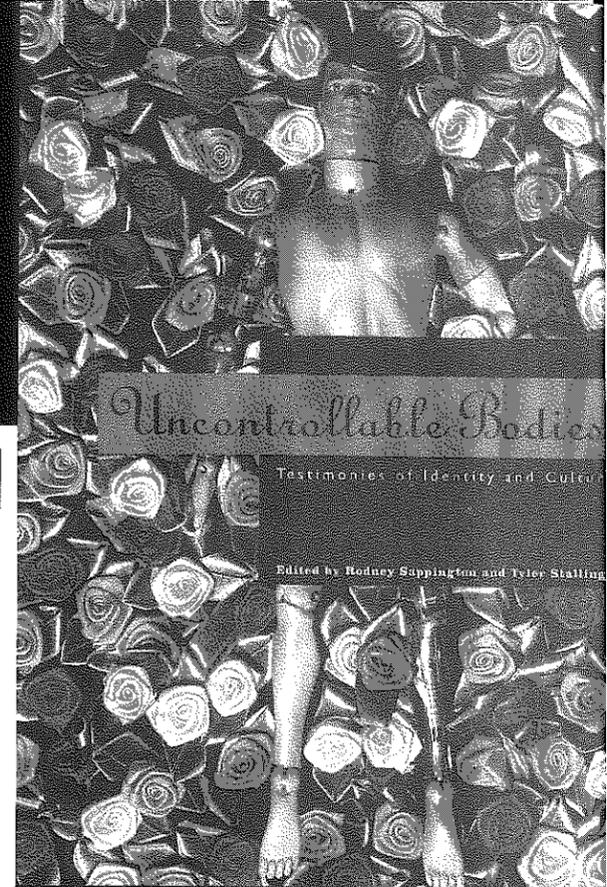
In the concluding essay, Stuart Hall argues that p.c. reflects the fragmentation of the political landscape and the breakup of social constituencies that no longer adhere to collective master narratives such as those built upon class and/or labour. In this regard, Hall views p.c. as the inevitable result of the rise of identity politics. Hall also points out that the discursive and individualist notions encapsulated in p.c. politics are symptomatic of a larger intellectual culture that has undergone "the linguistic turn." Without discounting the political relevance of language, Hall maintains that many champions of discursive change are guilty of clinging the "belief that if things are called by a different name they will cease to exist" (186). Therefore, against the claims of some who view alterations in language as progressive in and of themselves, Hall argues that such positions are decidedly limited in their ability to address broader social relations of power, exclusion, and marginalization. In the attempt to suggest some "politically incorrect" pathways through the maze of p.c. politics, Hall states that unless p.c. is coupled with a strategy which is democratic — in the sense that it genuinely addresses the real fears, confusions, and anxieties as well as the pleasures of ordinary people, tries to educate them to new conceptions of life, to win them over and thus to constitute majorities where there are now only fragmented minorities — it is destined to fail in the long run, whatever its little local successes (177).

Rodney Sappington and Tyler Stallings (eds.), *Uncontrollable Bodies: Testimonies of Identity and Culture*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1994.

BY Gordon Brent Ingram

These are the times when we are increasingly expected to have healthy, perfect bodies, even as we resist the imaging they produce. This contradiction, between the body as armour and commodity and the growing discomfort that many feel about this, is the subject of *Uncontrollable Bodies*. Lesbian-owned Bay Press of Seattle has produced yet another disturbing anthology in a series that engages topics such as AIDS activism ("AIDS demo graphics"), violence against women, and terrorism. Editors Sappington and Stallings introduce "testimonies" with the vision of the body as "a site of physical and psychological trauma, institutional control, and enforced sexual norms and practices" (11). These, however, are not stodgy discourses on sexual politics; they are personal narratives where the boundaries between story and interpretation break down.

These sixteen testimonies to personal, emotional, and erotic anxiety are impactful. Most are more than a bit disturbing. The authors obviously get off on making themselves into what Stallings calls "spectacle." There are sudden vascillations in most of the pieces between postmodern psycho-babble and raunchy rap. But *Uncontrollable Bodies* is not about gratuitous dirty talk (though when it does occur it often creates oases of directness in murky monologues). Robert Flynt's homoerotic photographs of men together, seemingly underwater, set the stage for the collection's miasmas and dreams. New York-based AIDS activist and video artist Gregg Bordowitz, who recently showed his work and gave a workshop at Vancouver's Video In, tells a powerful story about his willingness to engage in unsafe sex: "I wanted him to fuck me without a condom. I received his cum as a gift. I wished for a legacy that I could receive in



I can remember thinking that my father's having his penis on the outside of his body was another sign of his vulnerability, his fragility

Lynne (age eight or nine): Aren't you afraid you're going to break it?

Daddy: What?

Lynne: Your penis . . .

Daddy collapses on the couch, laughing.

Moral Panic... fuels the fire of the "backlash" already burning on campuses....

ROUTLEDGE

Cultural Studies & Beyond

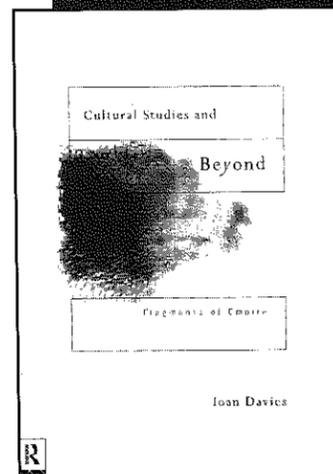
Fragments of Empire

Ioan Davies

"This book displays an impressive historical range and geographical scope in seeking to trace the emergence, development and various transformations of cultural studies..."

— Jim McGuigan, University of Coventry

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shows how the fantasies of being "supersolid" (108) may be more about coping with a gnawing vulnerability than about simple narcissism, sexual aesthetics, or wanting to be "hard."

The second half of Uncontrollable Bodies spins out beyond the realm of mild nausea to depression and unresolved questions about pregnancy, sex work, and male sexual hysteria. Sadly, Dennis Cooper's poems on drug dependence, hustlers, and violence are just too predictable. Editor Stallings shares his own sexual fantasies — to be a "Vulcan sex slave" (194) — through Star Trek imagery and his unresolved desires for Jean-Luc Picard. Queer Chicano performance artist Luis Alfaro ruminates on language, drag, and the demise of the Quebecois porn star Alan Lambert, "a cute if not overly eager bottom." Lambert's major reason for his suicide at age twenty-six was "his fear of getting older. He stated that this body was at peak physical condition and that he could not see himself in any other way. This from a man who wasn't even HIV-positive" (231).

The power in Uncontrollable Bodies is not in finding solutions to the discomfort of living through these times of new disasters, epidemics, and "mastering" by medical science, but rather in giving voice to chronic aches and pains that, once upon a time, might have been considered trivial. Most of us will feel soiled and confused, but more conscious of our own psychic pains, by the time we finish this book.

James C. Robertson, The Casablanca Man: The Cinema of Michael Curtiz. London: Routledge, 1993.

In The Casablanca Man, Robertson makes a scholarly attempt to rescue the life work of Hungarian-born film director Michael Curtiz (1882–1962), emphasizing that "Curtiz was a director of outstanding cinematic merits." Robertson's book has got an ironic title: it shows that Curtiz's cult film, Casablanca (1942), has overwhelmed his oeuvre. For Robertson, Casablanca isn't even Curtiz's major achievement. He emphasizes that it is in Europe that any panoramic survey of Curtiz's work must begin because, arriving in Hollywood at thirty-seven years of age, the director had "some sixty films behind him." Moreover, Robertson repudiates the critical views that Curtiz's European work was "a mere prelude to a Hollywood career pinnacle" and that "the American influence upon him was greater than vice-versa." However, it is Curtiz himself who is to be blamed for the mixed views about his work. His own films were of little interest to him; he was even surprised when reminded about sequences from them.

Soon after I finished The Casablanca Man, I turned on the TV and saw an image I immediately identified as a photograph from Robertson's book. It was from Curtiz's The Breaking Point (1950). It showed the glimmering water displaced by a boat front, which is shot from the bottom. I savoured the atmosphere of menace and was prepared for the impending threat to domestic life depicted in the film. / A. E. de O.

B. Girard (ed.), A Passion for Radio: Radio Waves and Community. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1993.

A Passion for Radio is a collection of essays, examinations, memoirs, and personal accounts of what has loosely been called, in North America at least, "community radio." Twenty-one radio producers, scholars, journalists, and programmers from Senegal, Quebec, Sandy Lake (Ontario), Vancouver, Springfield (Illinois), Moscow, Martinique, and elsewhere, contributed to the book. The work ranges from analyses of one station's cooperative structures to interviews with another station's audience members to personal accounts of life at different community stations. The broad and varied collection is comforting, engaging, and powerful.

A few of the more distinctive writings come from the most marginalized people. Sandy Lake, a Cree village in northern Ontario for example, is one

of forty villages that make up the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Thirty of these have (or had, before 1990 government cut-backs) a community station linked to others by Wawatay Radio Network. Lavina Mohr provides background research and numerous interview fragments that attest to the history and value this locally based radio network has for geographically isolated communities. José Ignacio Lopez presents, in stop/start whirlwind prose, a brief version of the history of Radio Venceremos, the official voice of the FMLN of El Salvador; the full version is collected in a newly translated edition published by Curbstone Press. The essay is a narrative of spliced-together interviews and passages from political and personal narratives. It attains a momentum like nothing else in the book. Numerous other stories and analyses describe situations closer to home: Radio Centre-Ville in Montreal and Cooperative Radio in Vancouver are examined, as are Pacifica Radio in California and Zoom Black Magic Liberation Radio in Springfield, Illinois (now

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the form of a gift — the love and approval of a father" (30). Years later, he announced at a meeting of ACT UP New York, "I got infected because I have a drinking and drug problem that has prevented me from being able to negotiate and insist on having safe sex" (31).

Lynne Tillman's "An Impossible Man" contains girlhood recollections of her father, including the first realizations of his penis. In contrast to many incest survivors, she loves him. I can remember thinking that my father's having his penis on the outside of his body was another sign of his vulnerability, his fragility

Lynne (age eight or nine): Aren't you afraid you're going to break it?

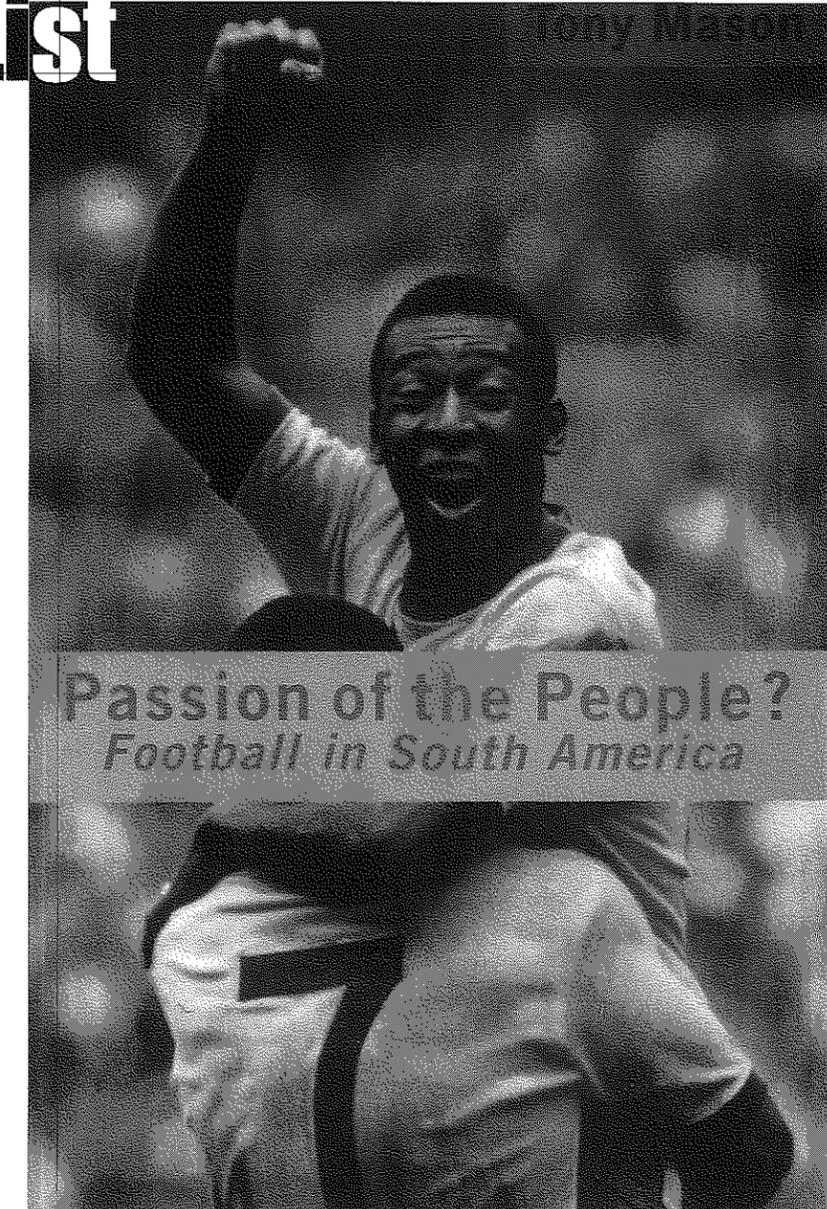
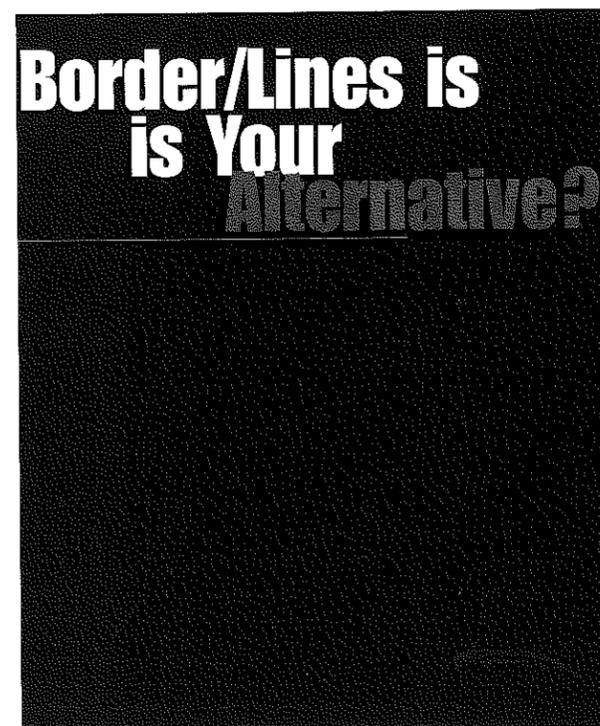
Daddy: What?

Lynne: Your penis . . .

Daddy collapses on the couch, laughing. (46)

By the time the book moves to film critic Vivian Sobchack's essay on the dread of aging, conveyed in a low-budget horror film, there is a strong sense that all of us are trapped in our bodies — or will be. As a prelude to discussing her own aging, survival of cancer, and limb amputation, she deconstructs the 1960 B-movie horror, The Leech Woman.

The piece that I like the most is by Scott Bukatman, "X-Bodies (the Torment of the Mutant Superhero)," on 'zine culture and the cult of bodybuilding. Given the simplistic put-downs of gay "gym rat" culture and the "hypermuscle body" (106) that have become so fashionable, this article is a must. Bukatman



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the most famous pirate operation in the United States, thanks to the Federal Communications Commission).

While a survey essay starts the books by providing some context, I wish it had taken the opportunity to examine why so many grassroots organizations are getting into radio in this supposed "Age of Information." *A Passion for Radio*, nevertheless, stands as testament to a reality that has been taken for granted or brushed aside for far too long. / **C. F.**

Tony Mason, *Passion of the People?: Football in South America*. London: Verso, 1995.

Thousands play it. Millions watch it. What is it about soccer that moves peoples and nations? Mason's social history of soccer in the Southern Cone brings a critical perspective to what is too often left to the superficial glosses of sports journalists. Tracing soccer's emergence as an offshoot of British imperialism, through its local appropriation into a more creative, artistic game, to the current threat of globalization and homogenization of the sport, Mason intersperses critical commentary with entertaining game accounts. Unfortunately, while Mason astutely analyzes the role of soccer in the public sphere, he neglects to comment on the enactment of masculinities in soccer by players and fans. / **M. H.**

Roman de la Campa, E. Ann Kaplan, and Michael Sprinker (eds.), *Late Imperial Culture*. London: Verso, 1995.

Aijaz Ahmad states, in the first piece of this volume, that the meaning of the word colonialism has been dispersed "so widely that we can no longer speak of determinate histories of determinate structures." This leaves us with problems such as deciding how the concept of postcoloniality "functions in the United States and in Vietnam, both colonies of Europe at one time or another." Sprinker argues that the corrective "late imperial culture" in the book's title underscores that "the culture of imperialism is not a thing of the past," but while this collection features some sparkling and provocative examples of postcolonial criticism, it also reproduces the kind of eclecticism that a too-loosely construed theory of postcolonialism is open to. / **M. H.**

David Trend, *The Crisis of Meaning in Culture and Education*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Just when you thought that meaning had been "posted" out of existence, Trend has written a meaningful tract about contemporary cultural politics in the U.S. Talk of crisis and culture wars is well-traversed terrain, but Trend's project is not just to comment on the nature of ideological struggle, but also to pro-

pose pedagogical means for organizing towards social change. For a Canadian audience, however, tired of U.S. intellectuals presenting their struggles as universal, this book has significant limitations. / **M. H.**

Camille Paglia, *Vamps and Tramps: New Essays*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

I get a kick reading Paglia's latest collection of essays. Her machine-gun prose seems appealing for the wrong reasons: she is provocative (which is more than I can say about many other writers with intellectual pretensions) and, in her unapologetic forwardness, she sometimes hits the nail right on the head.

I recommend reading *Vamps and Tramps*, despite its limitations, for Paglia's acute observations about this macho craze we have going on in North American popular culture. She says that for a gay man, "Masculinity is something beautiful but 'out there'; it is not in him, and he knows he is feigning it." At the risk of generalizing, she adds, "The effeminacy of gay men — which emerges as soon as the macho masks drop — is really their artistic sensitivity and rich, vulnerable emotionalism." Is this stereotyping? Who knows, but do you think Quentin Crisp would have had such an interesting life if he had been into being butch himself? Desire is a bonfire "out there" and we want to play with it, even at the risk of being burnt. Don't you? / **F. I.**

Marc Cooper, *Roll Over, Che Guevara*. New York: Verso, 1994.

Cooper has to be every stay-at-home socialist's favourite writer. He, himself, produced "travel" writing only because the American-inspired coup against Salvador Allende's democratically elected government in Chile hung a "vacancy" sign on the office Cooper occupied as one of Allende's translators. On the road (in Cuba, Russia, and Nicaragua, or Los Angeles and Las Vegas) he writes the continuing epitaph of that bombing. Witty and engagé, his prose, alas, is a testament to what I take is the dust-jacket's typo. Sans comma *Roll Over, Che Guevara* becomes *Roll Over Che Guevara*, a tromping on the freedoms of, among others, Cuban youth, "illegal" American immigrants and Brazilian street kids. The book also contests the actions of, among others, L.A. cops, American fundamentalists and diverse dictators. Although many of the pieces are dated in terms of specific political global events, they still contain timely aperçus about human, ecological, and financial exploitation. Cooper may be "only" a journalist, but it is work such as his that T.B.T.G. (The Big Theory Glut) should take as its point of departure. / **S. F.**

Reviews by Charles Fairchild, Stanley Fogel, Michael Hoehsmann, Francisco Ibañez and Antonio Eduardo de Oliveira.

