

Is Toronto Burning? 1977|1978|1979

Three Years in the Making (and Unmaking)
of the Toronto Art Community

Note: The documents gathered here are “published” only for the purposes of consultation within the exhibition *Is Toronto Burning?* They are drawn from period magazines and publications in order to provide a view on the issues as seen at the time as well as to contextualize artists in the exhibition by what was written about them at the time. Most of the texts were written by artists, including many in the exhibition, and almost all the publications derived from Toronto, as well as being produced mainly by artists, again by many in the exhibition.

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A Karl Beveridge

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Exhibitions

The Last Conceptual Artist

TEXT/CONTEXT: JOSEPH KOSUTH / CARMEN LAMANNA GALLERY

Toronto, November 18 — December 7, 1978, reviewed by Karl Beveridge
(Reprinted from *Artists Review*, vol. 2, no. 6, Dec. 6, 1978.)

The casual passerby, used to looking through the window of the Carmen Lamanna Gallery at earnest examples of 'international' angst, is currently confronted by a notice in the window. Beyond this notice, which has been cleverly placed on a transparent backing, the gallery is empty. "Aha! Mr. Lamanna has finally been evicted." Then, with a suppressed smile, this passerby reads no less than 217 words explaining that this notice/text is presently not only being read (revealing in itself), but that it is 'framed' by the aforementioned gallery space, which in turn exists in a "social, cultural and political space." The particular social, cultural and political forces are not mentioned. Half-frozen and thoroughly disgusted, this hapless victim slushes off, convinced that this is simply another example of corporate amnesia.

More 'sophisticated' types might venture in to question the author/artist's intentions, (what socio-politics is he talking about?) only to find a figure lurking in the back rooms, who, if he hadn't got a chance to run downstairs, would grunt and smile hopelessly in response. The perpetrator of this 'revolutionary' statement, however,

photo courtesy 'Vanguard' / Carmen Lamanna Gallery

would be back in New York plotting even more devastating pronouncements to be hopefully (?) placed on our city's billboards and elsewhere: "If you look beyond this text you will see the sky. But the sky itself is framed by a social, cultural and political space; i.e., God!"

Mr. Kosuth, described in the current issue of *New York* magazine as the last conceptual artist (!), and a self-proclaimed feminist-anarchist (??) intends these statements to be searing critiques of the system he has so well serviced. But Joseph has simply utilized an already worn critique as a formal device which may have seemed interesting 10 years ago (had not Lawrence 'in/out' Wiener been around). Politics in this guise consists as a 'word' in the formal fabric of a questionable career. Politically the work reinforces the apologetics of capitalist aesthetics. Politics and therefore culture, to be effective have to do more than simply (and simplistically) nominate their context. In its social practice, as well as its production, it has to align itself with the social forces that seek its overthrow.

Karl Beveridge is an artist and former co-editor of *The Fox and Red Herring*. He lives in Toronto.

What is this before you? You could say that it is a text, words on a window. But already at this point this text begins to assume more, mean more, than simply what is said here. Even if this text would only want to talk about itself, it would still have to leave itself and have you look past it, into that gallery space beyond it which frames this text and gives it meaning. This text would like to see itself, but to do that it must see that larger social, cultural, and political space of which it is a part. Whether you see this text or beyond it, there is a discourse which connects this (as a sign, window, work) to you. It is part of that same act (now) of writing/reading which produces and re-produces that 'real world' of which this (text/gallery) becomes part. This (writing/reading, text/gallery) is a moment within a process of construction which includes you. For you to see this (discourse) you must see beyond this (text/gallery); for you to see this (text/gallery) you must see through this (discourse).

AUDIO GRAPHICS

NEW/OLD EXPLORATIONS IN SOUND & LANGUAGE ART

For their catalogue write:
New Wilderness Foundation
365 West End Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10024

Available from Underwhich
Editions, 100 Richmond St. E.,
Suite 323, Toronto M5C 1P1.
\$5.00.

SOUND POETRY
A CATALOGUE

edited by
Steve McCaffery
and bpNichol

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Bateson breaks down the thinking process into a combination of elements having an apparently linguistics-derived model. On the lowest level of mental organization are *atomies* which taken separately do not have mental characteristics. And, like the relationship of inanimate particles which through their combination create the quality we call life, a relationship between atomies gives us mental functioning.

His model for biological evolution is a stochastic one; and from this he derives a model for mental evolution. A stochastic process is one in which random elements are fed through a discrimination filter of some kind, which selects the useful ones and rejects the rest. In evolution, these random elements include, on the genetic level, both the mutations in the gene pool and their random selection through recombination; and on the somatic level, the unpredictable interaction between the available gene pool with its potentials for adaptive change, and the environment to which the organism must adapt. Natural selection comes from the adaptation of the soma to environmental factors in a way influenced by the genetic range of possibilities. "Between them, environment and physiology propose somatic change that may or may not be viable, and it is the current state of the organism as determined by genetics that determines the viability." (p. 178). The gene pool of the population is already heterogeneous enough that, as environmental changes occur, we don't need to wait for favourable mutations to take place in response to them; the mutations are already present in a dormant state as possibilities for somatic adaptation.

Bateson's most ambitious leap to date is to propose a model for mental behaviour which parallels the double stochastic process of biological evolution. He devotes his final two chapters to the attempt. This model takes a zigzag pattern, an escalating 'ladder of dialectic between form and process' and relates to his earlier writings on metacommunication (Whorf's term). It is removing oneself to a one step higher level of abstraction in order to perceive what one is communicating. In the broadest possible terms, talking about language: "We are trying to deal with an interlocking or interaction of digital (i.e. naming) and analogic steps. The process of naming is itself nameable, and this fact compels

us to substitute an alternation for the simple ladder of logical types . . . To get from the *name* to the *name of the name*, we must go through the *process of naming the name*. There must always be a generative process whereby the classes are created before they can be names." (p. 185).

It is impossible to distill Bateson's ideas enough to make them clear in a review; they are already distilled down to schematic level in this short book. He is not an easy writer to follow. Sometimes he will spend pages setting up a problem, as in a chapter called 'The Great Stochastic Processes', where he asks in great detail how an oval egg can be instructed to establish the asymmetry of internal organs properly 'every' time, and answers it merely by saying, "This requirement is satisfied most simply by some sort of *spiral of nonquantitative or vector relations*. Such a spiral will cut every meridian obliquely to make in every meridian the same difference between east and west." (p. 164). What the ---?

But in Bateson's methodology, the most important factor is knowing how to ask the right questions. His subject, though based on years of field research in genetics, psychology, anthropology, and animal behaviour, is

knowledge itself — how we organize our perceptions and how we organize the organization. His theoretical investigations are so far ahead of experimental data that he can only lay down guidelines for its conduct, he cannot often rely on the research of others to back him up. Attacking university teaching methods, in an appendix to the book, he says, "The presuppositions or premises or thought upon which all our teaching is based are ancient, and I assert, *obsolete*...such notions as: (a.) The Cartesian dualism separating 'mind' and matter'; (b.) The strange physicalism of the metaphors which we use to describe and explain mental phenomena: 'power', 'tension', 'energy', 'social forces', etc.; (c.) Our anti-aesthetic assumption, borrowed from the emphasis which Bacon, Locke and Newton long ago gave to the physical sciences, viz. that all phenomena (including the mental) can and shall be studied and evaluated in quantitative terms." As a great teacher, Bateson's final and transcendent effort is to leave us with the embryo of a new approach. We have the future to adapt this for ourselves. ■

Patricia Gruben, writer and filmmaker, lives in Toronto.

Sado-Anarchism?

SEMIOTEXT(E)

Published: 522 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, N.Y.C., N.Y. 10027.

Single copy \$2.50; subscriptions (3 issues) \$7.50.

reviewed by Karl Beveridge

Semiotext(e), a journal published in or around Columbia University in New York, is one of those obscure gems derived from one of the latest facets of French intellectual rigor. We can now expect, after having dodged 'amateur anthropologists', 'signified semiologists', 'nouveau riche philosophes', and assorted 'café terrorists', a wave of 'desiring machinists'. It's not that these various arguments are without some merit, but in each case what are often valid, if limited, insights are raised to the level of a program complete with membership buttons, secret vocabularies, and coupons for a do-it-yourself revolutionary kit. I don't pretend to know how these debates operate in France, but once they hit the shores of North America these exotic items become olives in

the martinis of left-leaning one-upmanship.

Semiotext(e), however, is a particularly suspect entry into this field. Taking their cue from Felix Guattari and Giles Deleuze, authors of *Anti-Oedipus*, it seems to offer little that is new, but provides pages of obscure and surprisingly turgid text for those who don't have cable TV to while away the late hours of early morning. Sylvère Lotringer, editor in chief of *Semiotext(e)*, is nothing more than a fadish dilettante, a self-proclaimed revolutionary freak pushing the bounds of his schizoid individuality in a classless New York artworld. (This I gleaned from an incredible interview of Lotringer by Eldon Garnet of *Impulse* magazine. The descriptive phrases I use do little to re-

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veal the bizarre statements in this interview.) If anybody takes this guy seriously they deserve a free lifetime subscription to *Semiotext(e)* and *Awake* and nothing more. Guattari and Deleuze, however, do need to be taken seriously, because they seem to make sense, to a point.

Starting with legitimate (and well known) criticisms of 'orthodox' communism and Freud, they arrive at their central concept, that of desiring machines. Now I have to admit that this concept left me a little mystified as to what exactly was meant. Apparently Marx made a false separation between men/women and tools in his formulation of the relation between the social relations of production and the development of the forces of production (poor old Marx had to make these inconvenient analytical distinctions). Guattari and Deleuze argue that men/women and tools are themselves components of a more encompassing machine, and these social bodies/machines are what they call desiring machines, that is, the unconscious sexual energy (energy equals machine) rooted in all activity that corresponds to the objective interests of economy politics etc. Add to this their critique of Freud, that neurosis is a product of economic/political repression, of which the family is a component, not a determinant, you come full circle to what? It all seems profound, especially when reading a text full of allusions to Kafka, Buster Keaton, Marcel Duchamp etc., and full of micro/macro snips at and praise for Marx, Nietzsche, Spinoza, Reich and so on. But I can't help thinking that I missed something. Is this saying that all human production is both subjectively (internal need) and objectively (external need) motivated, and that the subjective exists in some definite relation to the objective (they won't say dialectic because desire operates in mysterious ways.)

The practical consequence of this observation, as stated by Guattari and Deleuze, is a need for a non-repressive therapy to enter into revolutionary practice, or better, that true revolutionary practice is at once therapeutic as it is militant. Now this has, in various forms, been articulated before and stems, for the most part, from the attempt to explain the failures of Soviet socialism as well as the failures of the French C.P. in this particular case. The real problem, they

state (and this has been stated before) is how in the hell do you implement such a strategy, outside of subscribing to the 'spontaneous subjective liberation' delusion. Well as far as I can tell they come up with a big zero, but not quite.



This is where I find the whole Anti-oedipal/*Semiotext(e)* hype objectionable. It purposely avoids dealing with the concrete reality upon which such a project would be based, and allows for the likes of Lotringer to legitimate his fadish sado-anarchism. As soon as they admit the problem of implementing their ideas, they drop it, and reiterate vague recommendations. How can one, for instance, create an open and above board dialogue in the midst of an activity that is illegal and of necessity, secretive. It seems a dumb point, but a crucial one if you're talking about real organization, and one they fail to confront. The Leninist model of a revolutionary party is based on this aspect of illegality, that is, an organization that is at war. What is at stake here is the institution of a revolutionary vanguard as an instrument of historical change and its relation to a mass movement. It might seem that Guattari and Deleuze's argument is a variation of the anti-vanguard, anti-authoritarian type. At one point they say that the single party, and later the dictatorship of the proletariat is simply a variation of capitalist structure in another form. But at another point Guattari concedes the necessity of a party structure and the proletarian state. In fact their whole

argument is that class struggle is not the traditional one over the ownership of the means of production, but that this in itself is an aspect of the struggle against libidinal repression. The struggle of humankind is that against the repression of desire — the individual socially defined struggling against social definition. In the end it is the struggle of the poetic — the mad genius (the mad genius in us all, of course) rebelling against the repression of his/her madness. Hence we come again full circle. The true revolutionary is the schizophrenic, and enter again our schizo-revolutionary opportunist Lotringer.

Which brings me to the most interesting aspect of *Semiotext(e)*; its popularity in the art ghettos. Apart from the obvious appeal of elevating such luminaries as Tristan Tzara, Duchamp, Picabia, Tinguely *et al* to the level of revolutionary theorists/activists on the long march against the repression of desire, there is something else at work. In the issue 'Schizo-Culture' there are lumped together an amazing group of people, from Phil Glass (talking, once again, about the good old days of pre-Soho) to Ulriche Meinhof. *Semiotext(e)* provides a terrific open-ended rationale for the economically and politically pressed artist. Sufficiently anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional, with the right mix of psychoanalytic jargon and communist innuendos, a wide variety of topical interests, yet with an intellectual cultism attuned to obscure issues and names (there's nothing like re-discovering and eulogizing something everyone else only vaguely remembers — man of the year; Frederick Nietzsche), yet saucy and stylish. Everyone's answer to doing your own thing, and being politically hip as well (except I wonder about Phil Glass. Our friend Lotringer tried to get him to admit he was a 'machinist' — desiring machinist. Phil carefully ducked, suggesting Steve Reich was better qualified. You can't get Phil off the piano stool that easily.)

I'm sure we will see more of this fascinating inquiry into the schizo-inanities of revolutionary neurosis. Meanwhile Lotringer can be seen any Friday night dancing to the disco sounds of the International(e). ■

Karl Beveridge, Toronto, is an artist and associate editor of *Centerfold*.

B Susan Britton

- page 008 "Videoview 1: Susan Britton. Susan Britton talks with Peggy Gale," *Centerfold* 2:4 (April 1978), 14–15.
- page 010 Lisa Steele, "Susan Britton: New Tapes," *Centerfold* 3:3 (February/March 1979), 116–20.
- page 013 Susan Britton, "Poison Pen Attack Gang of Four/You Want Know About Hegemony?: Review of May issue of *Centerfold*," *Artist Review* 2:16 (May 1979), 13–14.
- page 017 Karl Beveridge, "Colonialist Chic or Radical Cheek," *Centerfold* 3:5 (June/July 1979), 271.

See also ...

- page 021 AA Bronson, "Automotons/Automorons," in *Performance by Artists*, eds. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979), 291–300.
- page 051 Colin Campbell, "David Buchan: Lamonte Del Monte and The Fruit Cocktails," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 29–32.
- page 172 "BZZZ BZZZ BZZZ," *FILE* 4:2 (Fall 1979), n.p.
- page 331 "Tele-performance," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), cover, 46–57.

Videoview 1.

Susan Britton

SUSAN BRITTON talks with Peggy Gale

P: Although *INTERFERENCE* is almost an hour long it's divided into three sections, Love, Loss, and War. How did you come to those titles for the sections, were they for their own sakes - like the idea of love, then of loss etc - or were they there as a format?

S: I think they were there as a format, and as an afterthought. I'd planned on sectioning it but wasn't sure how to do it, so it became a process of going through these various ideas. Love represented an idea of the optimist and the idealist, and Loss was that of breakdown. War was retaliation.

P: The sections were quite discrete one from the other. The Love section started off with a very strong image of your face, a tight shot, with you saying I-love-you. I think on the first I-love-you the audience thought "ah ... this is interesting", then you went on repeating for eight minutes, which was extremely disconcerting. It became not so much about loving as about media manipulation and cliches and so on. Are you interested in those ideas of cliché and manipulation?

S: Well, you know that from my other work. That phrase seems to be the ultimate banal phrase. Saying it over and over again felt very cynical and aggressive. I was really cringing when I was doing it.

P: When we talked earlier you called yourself Miss Mabelline in that context; it was perfect. You looked just the way an ad should look, all sparkly and soft. Finally you reduced a very strong phrase down to some ad slogan, so that all you could say was I-love-you, you couldn't add anything to it.

S: I said I love you hopelessly, I love you desperately, extenuating little flourishes, but it was an empty thing. The tape is really about this time period and the situation I'm in in Toronto. This city almost specifically, and the day to day problems. It's necessary to operate with idealism, while at the same time being sort of slick and putting up with cynical, almost bitter feelings. I think it's very late-seventies.

P: But it also looks back to the late sixties and the terrorist groups and notions from that time.

S: It tries to do that but even more it picks up on the hype about those ideas and images, the media coverage of them. That terrorist sequence was like *TIME* magazine. *TIME* gives you instructions, and even has photos of how people live when they're terrorists. I clipped an article that says, "Be alert, keep a low profile, don't talk to strangers"; this was for businessmen in 1977. There have been 4000 kidnappings in the last five years. The way I pick up on it is through the media, tv, magazines, and I think it's totally romanticised. I've been told that if I

showed the tape in Germany I'd be thrown out on the street, because it's all wrong, but quite honestly here in Canada terrorism is shown as glamorous. I know it's a wrong idea of politics and terrorism and what the PLO is about, but it seemed a natural thing to put in a tape. After my experience at NSCAD (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design), with Art and Language being there, The Fox being there, and talking for months about politics, and having the school divided into factions, it was a surprise to come to Toronto and find no one interested. I joined the CPCML (Communist Party of Canada Marxist Leninist). When I started this tape I was involved with CPCML and going on radical weekends to Montreal.



INTERFERENCE 1977 photos: Le-La.

P:
Did you find any answers there?
S:
No, they were too corny for words. They were quite sincere, but it was even more romanticised than my notion of politics; they were calling each other comrade. We had meetings at my house for a couple of months, then we went off to Montreal and there were all those things happening with the Eleventh Congress and the Teng Hsiao-Ping regime getting into power, they had to figure out where they stood on that move. It was just after that I gave up on it.
P:
One of the criticisms I've heard about the tape was that it treats politics as a question of fashion rather than a question of reality.
S:
Well there's a point at which you can be thinking of politics as reality and then trying to actualise it, but if you can't find any solid day-to-day basis, and you join some sort of subversive organisation, it's like a perverse sort of action, like something in the twenties, it's all wrong. It was ludicrous. I got less and less interested in establishing a base for that ... it was about disillusionment.
P:
I had the definite feeling that if there was a resolution in the tape it was a happy ending ... you'd escaped with the money, and your freedom, and there you were in Acapulco.
S:
Oh no, the ending was a real unhappy ending. We were gone, the money was all blowing away, the phone was ringing, you couldn't ever make the connection - that was a theme throughout the tape. The interference was the real part and the other stuff was just the hype part. It ended with not picking up the phone or the money, and then that kind of listless shuffle, Mondo Disco.
P:
How interesting. I felt it was very much a glamorous ending, and you felt the reverse ...
S:
Well, all the idealism is over, after the brainwashing, all those products - major credit cards, ocean-going yacht - it was like what's-the-use. It was all surrender-give-up. I was trying to talk about meaning too, and how everything is so overloaded with meaning. Politics is so overloaded with meaning, cause so much is inferred and evoked by one political gesture that it gets all confused with history and media and literature.
P:
The radios that were playing all that

static, what was that about? It was a very effective kind of energy-giver and aggression-giver.
S:
They were like the passive disseminators, like icons. I meant them to look real sinister, but real passive at the same time, and I kept showing the wires and the switch and the plugs. There were all these connectors, but the radios were tuned off station, so it was all wrong and they were just hissing and empty.
P:
One of the kinds of interference you were talking about was the electrical interference - you couldn't get a stable image or message - but I had the feeling there was a lot more included in that notion, that The Media was interfering between the message and the receiver.
S:
All the time, being too caught up in the garbage and the nerve endings, and the aura rather than the body. There seem to be so many layers of irony and parody, and dead images and used language coming out over and over again.. It's hard to break through it all.
P:
Did you feel there was an interference between you as a thinking person and you as a producing person? Or was it more between you as an integrated individual and the outside world?
S:
Oh yeah, I think that metaphor could be applied to the shouting out the window, that Celine bit, telling the world to fuck off generally, not being able to do anything else. Art and Language published an article called The French Pox where they talked about semiologists like Barthes, Foucault, Jacques Deleuze, and totally put them down. These people are talking about analysis and saying "we can tell what kind of person you are by the clothes you wear" and this is supposed to be very profound, so I was talking about "hammering together my rhetorical framework" like the French intellectual jargon they use. It seemed natural to say I'm going to make this analysis and all it amounts to is I-hate-you.
P:
Some of it seemed such an ironic and amused look at the world and at that kind of rhetoric, and yet there were segments that seemed to drop the irony altogether. Specifically the part where the woman captive is brought in, seemed quite raw. Is that an indication that there were aspects of these political associations that were more deeply felt for you?
S:
Yeah, it was real sincere too. When you've got someone tied up, and

you're brandishing knives, it can get ridiculous on one level, but the part where I'm talking with the knife in my teeth, those are direct quotes from what the CPCML people were into saying.
P:
Do you feel those kind of issues are daily issues in Canada?
S:
No, only on the news. They have nothing to do with what's going on, though maybe they will in ten years. Not right now, not for me at all. But they're certainly in everyone's mind and they're real powerful images.
P:
Do you find yourself aware of the television medium as the carrier of that information? Your photographs and wall works seem to consider magazine layouts and paper issues, so the fact that these are television issues strikes me as relevant.
S:
I try to use all those things. Like in the interview section, I tried to use all the clues, just enough to make it your out-and-out tv show, but always a little off. We looked just about right to be having an interview but it was off too - like a tv talk show but playing the edge ...
P:
That whole conversation was a little mystifying because the interviewer would ask a very simple question and then get all this stuff as an answer. She responded as if she understood exactly what you meant but as an audience member I thought: what IS this ...
S:
Sure.
P:
You mean she was asking questions and you were answering with rhetoric?
S:
Yeah. But at the beginning of that interview I was saying "the world is empty on every level because it's trying to transcend itself in order to survive." I don't think I'm too subtle for anybody; I throw all the other stuff in because it's about another level of getting into the tape, but that's what I was trying to say too.
P:
And what about the section where you were saying "don't give in, give up"?
S:
I wanted it to be sexually ambiguous as well as politically ambiguous. All this surrender stuff compounded with the I-love-you stuff was about sexuality, and related to don't-give-up-give-in and the same soft-focus, blurry images, faces close together filling the screen ... ■



photos: Susan Britton

Video

Susan Britton: New Tapes

"Bakunin meets British Vogue"

by LISA STEELE

"When I hear the word culture I reach for my gun." —Horst Johst

Late in December of 1978, Susan Britton completed a set of videotapes on the structure of political beliefs. Called collectively, *Tutti Quanti*, the piece is comprised of one 30 minute 3-monitor piece (*Tutti Quanti*) and one 60 minute single-monitor piece (*Light Bulb Goes Out*) to be shown in that order. Structurally and visually the two parts are quite distinct.

Tutti Quanti (part one)¹ presents a group of people (not so much characters as emblems) who each act out a phase of the belief structure. Their stories are intercut by editing. There are the 'Back-Up Singers' who are glamour in action. Dressed in identical "Speedo" t-shirts (product name as fashion), endlessly rehearsing their role in lip-synch, they function as 'sweetening agents' for a vocal line; here the line is the rhymed couplet of AM radio:

*Smiles have all turned to
tears,
But tears won't wash away
the years...*

They are the taste previous to digestion and it tastes good.

There are the 'Cultural Professors', lecturing on and on about the importance of order and history:

*The Chain, the sacred chain
of generations past... the
eternal, the imperishable
links in history.*

Slides flash on a screen in a darkened room: JUSTICE VICTORY HEROISM. Occasionally the slides are upside down. They are the established order and they're losing the thread. It's *Roots* for white folks; a story of 'long ago and in a far off land'. Our heritage.

There is the 'Suicide Couple', affirming our reason for stopping the train:

*... this planet sucks, right—
we're trapped.*

and then giving us an out from anything so drastic and definitive:

*Oh shit! I forgot to write a
note!*

They drive and drive, past houses, down picturesque tree-lined streets. They are disembodied Modern Love, arguing back and forth about whether or not to 'do it'. Finally as the car climbs to a higher elevation, the

city spreads out below them, he plays his final empirical ace-in-the-hole to convince her:

*Look, we're here. This is it,
This is it, there's no turning
back.*

Functional commitment of the seventies.

There is the 'Fashion Pundit', fingering her neck bow and outfitting the revolution:

*You're not dealing with things
pretending to be 'what they
are not. A belt, this year, is a
belt... and that's that!*

She gives new meaning to the concept of conformism. One by one, we step into line, wearing hats which are inexplicably 'returning' like bad pennies. If not exactly happy about it, we are at least 'excited'.

There is the 'Battered Woman', victim of some unspecified domestic violence. Caught in the crash of the Family, she's mad as hell and not gonna take it anymore. Watching tv, the flickering light reflecting off of her bruised face, she struggles to gain control over her own emotional exploitation. Against an audio background of tv news and AM radio, nervous and manic, she tells us, rather elliptically, of being wronged by the most private of support structures — personal friends. She's taking it personally and she's pissed off. She paces; she explodes. But in her explosion, the process of personal action is revealed as woefully inadequate:

¹The version of this tape I am discussing here is not the final one. Since I viewed "Tutti Quanti" (part one), Britton has re-edited some segments and made a few additions.



I said, who do you think is a bitch and who are you bloody well calling a bitch. . . behind my back and I mean. . . me, you know, I'm not that type of person. The thing is I had called Bob and I had spoke to him. . . I called him at work!

She called him, called him at work—an act of excruciating triviality until it is correlated with all the other hurts and calls, injuries both physical and psychological and then the ineffectualness of personal action seems more of a cultural inevitability than a symptom of individual weakness.

Finally there is the 'Anarchist'.² Unshaven, speaking seriously, looking chically dangerous, his words are intercut with all of the above possibilities for cultural order. The 'Fashion Pundit' spells it out:

You can indulge in your personal style, but you must have a few guidelines. . . and deviating from those in any radical way is spelling out a danger. . .

Says the 'Anarchist':

It's a matter of confronting stupidity. It's a matter of confronting stagnation. I understand history — and didn't want things to slide any longer.

Looking for blood samples in an arm already drained, the 'Cultural Professor' drones:

We begin history, where reasonableness enters into it and this is sustained and eternal

apart from any change and disorder; it's deep down and it's gradually brought to light and things go on and . . . and on. . . and on.

Says the 'Anarchist':
I was led to take specific action. There was no alternative as far as I was concerned. Certain scientific studies informed me about the natural forces and their relations in history. I can say

to you. . . What is privilege? What is authority?

Weaving in on a point, the 'Battered Woman' says:

. . . she's got opinions. Every human has got opinions, if they're human they're bound to. As far as I'm concerned . . . but, let's get the facts straight, Adele. For once, let's just get the facts straight.

And the 'Anarchist' sounds more and more reasonable:

It's . . . insurrection removed from social responsibility. Psychopathic? No, I don't buy it.

The rest of them have all been probing the shallows, but this guy, he's into penetration, really deep:

Yours and everyone's definitions. . . authority. . . are a set up. I understand history. It's not alignment, and I'm not talking about suicide, I'm talking about murder. . . assassination.

Sound good? You bet.

And all the while, in spite of Adele and Speedo, the 17th century Greeks and rhinestones at night, the final character makes appearance after appearance, just outside the window. Blinking in the binary code, made to be viewed from the freeway, it's

*Panasonic Radios
Panasonic TVs
Panasonic Taperecorders
Panasonic Appliances
PANASONIC
PANASONIC*

The boys from Japan, crowding those airwaves with message after message and it all says BUY.

Re-enter the 'Back-Up Singers':
And then I knew oh then

*I knew,
That he won my heart. . .
And the end of part one.*

Light Bulb Goes Out opens with just that: a light bulb on screen for a few seconds casting a small circle of light and then, wham, it's hit with a hammer and we are swept into a modern post-multi-megaton nuclear devised Dark Ages. Knowledge and the possibility of survival seem pitifully fragile and tenuous when seen as a single incandescent bulb. The task of illuminating the chaos and darkness of power struggles set against a background of personal-ambition systems appears impossible in this tape. There is no hope if you read this piece literally.

The main section of *Light Bulb Goes Out*, after this short introduction, is a series of shots of three women in a small room. It is night. There is no action, other than constant cigarette smoking. The narrative is presented in a very complicated, multi-tracked voice-over. It is the story of the end of the world:

*2200 hours. . . January 3rd
. . . 1997. If you find this videotape, we cannot make radio contact. For two weeks no incoming video signal. If you find this videotape the central computer is cold. We cannot make contact.*

2200 hours. . . January 3rd. . . 1997. We have very little rations left. No radio contact. If you find this videotape destroy the Tower. Destroy the Tower. We believed in Actualism.³ We were loyal. No incoming video signal. The quantifying mutants are demolishing this planet from the Tower.

*Destroy the Tower.
Destroy the Tower.
Long live Actualism.*

Recited, broadcast-style, in a high pitched female voice and mixed with on-air static and seemingly random numeral recitations⁴, the soundtrack is sophisticated and effective. Britton is able to sustain the gratingly abusive tone of an underground (literally in this case) political broadcast and make it seem real. It is be-

²Britton herself portrays all of the above emblems, with the exception of the 'Anarchist'. For the role of the person whose response seems, ironically, the most orderly, she has chosen a man. I read this not as the traditional man-as-only-true-leader, but rather as a choice to present the other-than-self as a departing point for answers.

³The Actualism that Britton is referring to here is a movement of filmmakers in Russia in 1917, including Eisenstein.

Video



lievable because of the plot line: a complicated catalogue of alliances drawn and betrayed, actions undertaken and thwarted, victories (ideological and physical) just within reach and then cruelly snatched away by opposition. In other words a history of the political movements, mostly left-oriented, of the last century.

We see a political movement destroyed from without:

90 per cent of humanity perished in neutron wars of late 1980's. We continued to fight, allied with confrontationalists and matrix. In 1992 the quantifier mutants rallied. Our armies demolished in the dreaded Battle of Exxon.

and eroded from within:

In January 1995, he (our leader) was assassinated by a traitor but his work will never die. Long live Actualism.

We see idealism pushed to its end, and that end is annihilation as the words of liberation are incapable of effecting that liberation:

We believed in Actualism, in justice. We believed in an end to the oppression of interstellar imperialists. Everywhere ruins. We are the last survivors of this planet. No radio contact. We will not survive, but Actualism will never die. This planet will be liberated.

'Are we alone on this planet' is the lonely whimper of the dying race.

The sickening reality of this futurist vision is that the remaining 10 per cent of the earth's population is engaged in a lethal squabble over valium (here known as Megaton Valium):

To our bitter disappointment, we found black marketeering, drug addiction, barbaric terrorist power plays, gross ideo-

logical distortions and misrepresentation. . . demanded drastic alteration.

The supplier of this valium:

. . . a big fat guy. . . Party credentials in question. . . opportunist without future vision. . . had to be eliminated.

'Had to be eliminated.' And so the liberators turn murderers:

Fled mall. Contaminated air conditioning system with black market cyanide gas. Returned later to claim for a new Actualist Party. Our aims successful. . . destruction of unwanted elements on planet. That son of a bitch deserved a slow death.

The once-hated black market in the end supplies the death weapons for the liberators to use. A standard format capital punishment done with guerilla flourish and everyone is



compromised. The terrorists are in the pockets of the Mafia (or some such future incarnation) as are the addicts. The society feeds upon itself like an over-active mollusk with a cancerous digestive tract, until in the end, there is no more to feed on. And then it's all over.

This, in summary is the narrative line of *Light Bulb Goes Out*. I have quoted extensively because paraphrasing of the politicalese jargon does not give the effect of the words themselves. The narration is very dense, presenting information in standard propaganda format: that is, by repetition of concept and key phrases. JUSTICE HEROISM VICTORY. The words echo the dry recitations of the 'Cultural Professors' in *Tutti Quanti* (part one), as if history is reinhabited by the future over and over again, each successive mutation bringing us one step closer to destruction. The ordination of darkness. In the narration of this tape,

Britton has simulated the propaganda broadcast very well and exposed its weakness: that it is impossible *not* to be manipulated by the ideas with which we communicate. She has filed this critique to a point in the sound track and that is its effectiveness.

Visually, *Light Bulb Goes Out* is not so convincing because it is more ambivalent. Rather than exposing Revolution as Glamour, it flirts with the surface of Glamour itself. Here, I am not talking about the set, which has a very well-realized post-disaster newscast look to it: a stark room, bare mattress on the floor, piles of coats and blankets everywhere, uncurtained windows revealing the menacing night outside. Physically it is believable. Rather, it is what goes on within this set that is not so believable: the stance of presenting images veneered with glamour while ostensibly commenting on the effects of glamour on ideas, i.e. the packaging of revolutionary figures for a culture unused to the effects of actual revolution. Visually we are denied the progression of destruction presented in the soundtrack. Instead it is a static scene, from beginning to end. Creating striking special effects by upping the video level (I assume) on high contrast images, Britton presents a seductive vision of over-exposure to radiation. The light from candles, matches and bare light bulbs (any direct light source) flares out, creeping across the floor, literally eating away the features of faces and hands, but doing it beautifully. The three women, the survivors of the Actualist Party, look like they've come from a cocktail party. And they're the canapés. They are beautiful, strikingly so. They are glamorous. They look like creations of Guy Bourdin or Helmut Newton, ready for the latest Saks

photos: Robin Collier



⁴The numerals are not as random as they appear. As you hear the repetition you realize that they are all preceded with the letters NV, i.e. NV nine five zero, NV-P two three, NV nine five zero zero; this NV being none other than envy, that human sentiment most easily harnessed by those in power to convert genuine need into the calculating machine of destruction.

Video

catalogue fashion shooting — and I'm talking cameras not carbines. They are disturbingly Radical Chic. They may be running out of rations but they're not running out of make-up. Eyes smokey with shadow and liner black and definite, they look like young Colettes or Anais Nins. The more you look, the more convinced you are that the heaviest thing they've every lifted is a mascara wand. They leave a bad taste, like a stylized picture of Che Guevara on a spiral notebook cover. The creation of this glamorous facade is intentional on Britton's part, intended as irony. But the question remains: for how long and how dearly can you inhabit the shell before cohabitation becomes common-law?

In a way, these tapes, especially *Light Bulb Goes Out*, are Bakunin meets *British Vogue*. The winds have swept through the house of the humans (culture) and left Romanticism minus the Pleasure Principle. That is, the shell of the Romantic stands like a leather lean-to in the desert, dry and empty. Nothing is much fun anymore. And everybody knows it. Rationalism (Daddy's words) THEORIES PRACTICE MORALS VICTORY VICTORY echoes like high-heeled sandals in the underground parking garage, late



at night. Rape in progress. But who is sticking it to whom?

Says Britton about this work:

The notion of history as concept (without any literal counterpart) is constantly referred to in the tape, as is the plight of the individual trying to come to terms with the indefinable weight of history, admittedly loose metaphors. In any case, I tried to emphasize my anarchist response to these concerns (by way of conclusion within the

context of the tape) by formally designing a tape that is continually manic and agitated, that is difficult to listen to and to watch, and that constantly reflects upon and criticizes its own existence...⁵

But if the anarchist response is presented in these works, it is presented by implication. It is certainly not the classical anarchism of direct action. In fact, direct action is denied by the structure of the tapes themselves. In *Tutti Quanti* (part one) none of the people/players actually perform any action. Possibilities for action are discussed but there is no outcome. Both the



'Anarchist' and the 'Battered Woman' refer to things which they did (the 'Battered Woman' being the only touch of vulnerability; her bruised face jarring evidence of physical force when it collides with the frail flesh); the others just move the air around with theories and justifications. In *Light Bulb Goes Out* the strong narrative traces a history of action and counteraction, but it has come to nothing ultimately. The Survivors are weakened by over-exposure (to communication? to ideas?) and radiation sickness. They are passing out of the material world. There is no action possible now. They doze and huddle around tiny fires, like classy bums in back alleys. And when the end finally comes (visually an homage to Michael Snow's *Wavelength* with light rising outside 3 rectangular windows at the end of a hallway) there is one final ominous shot: a male face in profile, the same facial distortion caused by high light level, looking out of a window as if he is above whatever he is looking at. Who is this guy? Another survivor about to dematerialize in the chemical storms? A quantifier mutant? The Boss? Some new hor-



ror story waiting in the wings to commandeer the limping planet to new depths of exploitation? It isn't resolved within the context of the tape. But the forecast is pretty bleak.

As Britton has identified her motivation, it is an anarchist response. It is also a nihilist response (not that the two are mutually exclusive, but they do swing like a 2-way door when it comes to labels of right or left). As a critic of any organized political action, she is direct and not optimistic. Once any collective action is undertaken (she seems to imply), the spiral leads inevitably down to co-option, degradation and ultimately destruction — but destruction on a massive scale. Revolutionary action, she seems to say, is just another consumer-oriented creation Glamourized images guaranteed to kill off the best and brightest first and leave the others to eat each other — slowly; leaving only enough energy to reproduce another generation of fodder and start the cycle over again. Only eventually the stakes will be high enough that the end will really be the end. And so the whimper as we fade. We are born to die. That's the truth.

But the interim is what we deal with. It is the time span of human action. And this particular piece of human action, the subject of this article, in the physical form of a videotape is effective. It is engaging. It is a tightly written, well-produced piece of criticism about the futility of political action. Viewing the surface, especially of *Light Bulb Goes Out*, Britton seems suspiciously close to using what she is also criticizing, i.e. glamour and the glamour image, for her own purposes. That is, for seduction and exploitation. Any implication of anarchistic response or action to the generalized mess

⁵Susan Britton, personal communication, 1979.

Video



that is delineated in these tapes is just that — implied. It has to be drawn from some source other than the content of the tapes themselves, which are a closed system of pessimism. It is the aesthetic of Classical Punk. But it does make you question. And you can draw it out, in spite of (to me) the visual ambivalence.

In a way it's the problem of the Punk stance: if you spend a lot of time up on the 'bandstand' telling those kids how shitty everything is, how totally fucked this planet and all its creepy inhabitants are; if you tell them well enough and you set it to 'music', before you know it, all those kids are gonna be starting their own 'bands'. And that's action. This action, the strongest implied source of response within the new work of Susan Britton, is contained in the act itself of making the videotape. By that, I mean inspiration. Good writing inspires more good writing; good tapes inspire more good tapes. Britton has illustrated very well that a videotape can convey a great complexity of aural and visual material in its signal. She is critical of the process of electronic communication and yet she uses it very directly. But advocating the anarchist response (for the legal arguments of what constitutes "advocacy of action" see *The Body Politic on Trial*, this magazine) should not become just another fashionable stance.



Photos: Robin Collier

Lisa Steele, video artist, lives in Toronto. She works at Interval House, a women's shelter, and is an editor of *Centerfold*.



Video Installation by John Watt

恭發春節特別節目週歡迎光臨
禧財春節特別節目週迎臨

January 28 to February 14
HAPPY NEW YEAR

"Robyn and Nadine," by Elizabeth MacKenzie, is a seemingly simple video piece documenting the conversation of two friends as they discuss the summer they spent travelling on the prairies. However, the two "talking heads" are superimposed to create a single image which dissolves and solidifies as the two women gesticulate and shift in their places. By fading fragments of their conversation in and out of black, MacKenzie creates vignettes or snapshots grounded solidly in real experience but still elusive and often humorous.

The only performance of the evening began several times as a tensing audience watched Katherine Thornley move forward smoothly, fingers snapping, body swivelling in time to a recited text only to be interrupted by a cable or chair in her path. It took a few minutes to realize that Thornley knew exactly where those obstacles were and was using that hesitation to captivate her audience. Her staccato text building from "I think this is out of habit" to "this habit is out of control," she danced her way through the audience. Thornley's ability to stretch her minimal choreography and text to the breaking point, combined with control of the tension she created, made her performance one of the highlights of the evening.

Jorge Lozano's video-tape dealt with an internal narrative which set up tension between three male archetypes. This role-playing was enacted with determination and ferocity. The caricatures, moving in separate territories in an enclosed space related only through interference. Lozano's aggressive playback format, using loud and often indistinguishable sound, was aptly suited to the stance of the work.

Pat Wilson's short sound tape, "Nownunden-Now," based on the rhythms and intonations of North American Indian war chants, is a tight, powerful but uncomplicated piece. It invites the listener to trust it and relax into the strong rhythms that build gradually. As the initial voice becomes a chorus, the skeletal beats hit harder and the echoes lengthen elusively amongst them.

"Me/In My Structural Surroundings," Joanne Deane's video-tape, consists of pans of bare interiors with glimpses of a female figure holding mannerist gestures and stances. A drumming noise works with and against visual rhythm creating a tension which is broken by a woman's voice asserting her presence on the tape and in the room she strives to occupy. Deane counters the potential chilliness of the medium with her simplicity and sincerity.

Robin Cass's untitled video work presents bleak, still shots of wood planks entering and crossing the picture plane. A play occurs between the flatness of the actual video image and what the image suggests, through the use of Renaissance perspective. The optical effect is heightened by lingering afterimages on planes of pure colour. At times the viewer's visual assumptions combine with the various tones of electronic static on the sound track, to create a near-vertigo feeling of in-depth involvement. The overall effect is a sort of high-tech, minimal elegance.

YYZ hopes to have this series organized on a bi-weekly basis soon and welcomes suggestions and proposals.

D. Four

D. Four can be contacted at YYZ gallery

POISON PEN ATTACK GANG OF FOUR/YOU WANT
KNOW ABOUT HEGEMONY?
Review of the May Issue of Centrefold

"Ideology" as a catchword is abstruse, but forgiveable, a problem with speaking in the English language and possibly an explanation of lefty writing style, i.e. years of reading poor translations. Nevertheless, running through the editorial section and a number of the major articles written by the editors is a harangue in the name of ideology that is didactic and self-righteous, etc. etc. etc.

The editorial page bears the caption "An Artists Magazine." Clearly, the stance in relation to artists is a pedantic one. Consider this editorial (written by Tom Sherman); a briefing on infanticide, and then patronizing advice to "struggle to read 'all the news'" and not be taken in by sensationalism. Saussure, the frenchie, started all this talk and there seems to be no end to the discussion of the obvious. This is followed by self-congratulations for the moralizing liberal stance taken re: the Body Politic trial and references to the larger imminent battle. The next paragraph opens with a call to a special audience, "the Artist of sound mind." This delineation seemingly gives licence to slander bohemia. The editors of Centerfold claim that those of the relentless myth are hanging them up in their efforts to, as Sherman states, "work directly with the media and methodologies best suited to formulate and distribute our developing ideology." Evidently, they see themselves as upright citizens and are very straight forward about their somewhat dubious goals, wanting control and disparaging of those who would rather

take the money and run. The editorial goes on the ask, "If you are an artist," (unclear whether those of sound mind or otherwise are being addressed) "how ineffectual is your art? Honestly, does your art produce the intended or expected results?" A negative response must mean we are elitist bohemians or simply crazy. Affirmative, i.e., if the artist is making the only kind of art that could be "effective," "that is based in either new media or the new methodologies, let alone the developing ideology" then, sad story, this artist will never, ever, every get a grant. The sky is falling.

The editors of Centerfold (Clive Robertson, Liza Steele, Tom Sherman and contributing editor Kenneth Coutts-Smith) are extremely well meaning, one could even say philanthropic. In fact, they imagine they have a mission. They see themselves as virtuous and moral. The class analysis presented is neither dialectical materialism or an evolution of same, it is sentimental humanism. They see themselves as competent; mindful of rights and issues, media dangers and sensationalism, eager for control, contemptuous of bohemia and the romance they claim it contains, and they are convinced of an absolute equation existing vis a vis government funding and all and any art endeavours. In short, the editorial position of Centerfold is; we are right, art needs to be authorized, we want to authorize it.

Developing the editorial voice is a pompous article by Ken Coutts Smith entitled Political Content in Art. The flowery circumlocution of the entirely predictable Euro-politico-intelligentsia style is confused. Coutts-Smith presents a familiar diatribe. He complains that art is political, the problem being that artists don't know this. He repeatedly derides the notion of the individualist as artist, with accusations of myths and postures and a "sacramental role" while exposing the sinister imperialist nature of internationalist modernism (something which he obviously subscribes to), concluding that art has never changed life he nevertheless urges artists to work collectively toward "an art practice committed frankly to social and political change" and culminates his essay with the ridiculous remark that this is to be done in "a world that is fast becoming intolerable." Plague time. No restraint. Opportunism is rampant.

The Clive Robertson article Remplacement or Alternative deals with the near ideological change amongst "cultural ideologists" in the country. He points out that in Canada artist-run organizations are stronger than in the States and Britain but nothing much has really changed because of the reactionary

nature of the artists themselves. He maintains, in fact, that the artists are almost blowing it completely by wanting to "become public, to be verified, be validated, not within their own artists systems but back into the museums, the art magazines and prestigious overseas showplaces." On the otherhand he often states a dislike of the romantic artist, the hermetic rebel/hero. It is ironic that Robertson disapproves so haughtily of artists' attempts to reach larger audiences, make money and initiate response to their works considering Centerfold is essentially Clive Robertson's magazine, and it boasts a circulation of 15,000 in over 12 countries.

Centerfold wants "content," hence the cover story. Unfortunately, Liza Steel's piece comes across like an undergraduate social worker's term paper. Perhaps it is more worthy of attention than the maladroit "ideological" directives from Robertson, Sherman and Coutts-Smith because it does deal with a specific researched issue rather than speculation. However, the article tends toward bleeding heart liberalism and it is wrongheaded on both counts, i.e. the art signals just aren't there and from a political viewpoint it must be seen as reactionary, appealing for social reform on moral and humanist grounds.

Naturally, I always read Centerfold. I find it enjoyable and stimulating. In fact, I could say a great many good things about it, but I won't say them here.

S. Britton

PAUL SLOGGETT
Klondaridis, Inc
April 21 - May 11

Tracing back Paul Sloggett's biography, I was amazed to come across a catalogue Canada X Ten (Edmonton, January 1974), where in her introduction, Karen Wilkin aptly paraphrases Clement Greenberg's interest in Matisse. Mr. Greenberg, Wilkin writes, speaks of Matisse's radical re-thinking of how a picture is pre-conceived. By attaching equal importance and significance to each part of the surface and by drawing the eye to the peripheries of the canvas, Matisse totally eliminated any lingering remains of traditional ideas of pictorial space: the painting is no longer composed as an accumulation of more or less three dimensional forms grouped within a given, confined area, but is an autonomous surface which seems to extend toward the edges of the support. Recent artists have seized upon the ideas of flatness, autonomy, spread, and the decorative and claimed it for abstraction.

Performance

soirée. Ideas and experiences are the main value of Marek Konieczny's art. In Konieczny's art, experience is of a very specific kind. He moves in the unknown as if he knows everything. Under the cover of his rationalism lies craziness. The idea is *Craziness* itself.

"Think Crazy" is not unlike the majority of Marek Konieczny's artworks. Some titles of his other works include "Self Portrait 1672-1974", "24012008", "Concert for a Dog", "Orion's Sickle", and "Dialogue with a Pyramid".

Two weeks after the first 'meeting' of "Think Crazy", the artist proposed a continuance of the opening evening. The elongated golden pyramid hung in the space by itself for two

weeks. The performance that had taken place two weeks before was reproduced, this time backwards from the end — from *Craziness* through the concentration of *Thought* to the peacefulness of *Stability*. It was as if it was a video playback of the performance reversed, but watched by us live. The attributes remained the same, but the artist's activity was different.

"Think Crazy" affects the imagination, making the audience more flexible, their thinking less restrained. As Konieczny sees it, crazy thought gives us a chance for self-realization. Man gets an opportunity to free himself from the patterns to which he has grown accustomed. The psychological field for experimentation is in the

artist himself. The experiments come from the inside as well as they question the inside. The activity results from self-manipulation and deep speculation. He supplies the audience with impulse, expanding their consciousness or even creating it by acting unusually. It is important here to cite the artist himself. Konieczny said, "it is not important to submit to all levels of craziness or insanity, but it should be possible to expand our reasoning by becoming aware of the uncontrolled regions of our mind, thus involving the whole sphere of our reasoning and enriching ourselves by doing so." Marek Konieczny invites us to all "Think Crazy". ■

Monika Szwejewska is a writer and critic living in Warsaw, Poland.

Video

Colonialist Chic or Radical Cheek?

ME\$\$AGE TO CHINA

A videotape by Susan Britton, 22 minutes, colour, 1979

A Western Front Production

reviewed by Karl Beveridge

Political art is becoming fashionable, and so it should. Curiously, any art that has something to say is now considered 'political', which only attests to the perversity of our social dialogue. Of course there's politics and there's politics.

Susan Britton makes 'political art'. I recently saw one of her video tapes, *Me\$\$age to China* (1979). We begin with Britton made-up traditional Chinese-like, toying with a fan, and a sound track of her voice stumbling through a contemporary Chinese political slogan. Past and present, a woman oppressed, no subtlety here. Both alien, both authoritarian. Nothing changes. The second to last shot is that of Teng Hsiao-Ping looking mildly disgusted while a punk band tuning-up is heard on the sound track. No aspiring punk rockers in China. This sequence is clinched with the one liner, "The dialectic moves in mysterious ways, China has invaded Vietnam." The inscrutable East, nothing changes. In between are various sequences; advertizing (cosmetics), cameos of terrorists, Teng in Washington (with Nixon), the theme song "Hello China" played as a beer commercial, etc. etc...

One thing for sure is that Britton is disillusioned. Her idealism got rack-

ed up somewhere along the line. But the idealism that once informed a political involvement is the same that now informs her anti-political hysteria. The image is that of a bright, lively, middle-class woman unable to distinguish between the meaning of 'the working class must organize itself' on the one hand, and 'magnum ale is a new taste experience' on the other. That both are structurally similar statements tells us little. To say that advertizing trivializes everyday life, and that political dogma trivializes real oppression would have been more to the point, but less poetic. After all, any statement of commitment is propaganda (thus authority). 'Real' poetry is the refusal of history.

The issue of authority is a real one. But without recognizing the determining role of economic organization on social relations, that is the alignment of social classes (which serious anarchism does recognize). Authority is reduced to a question of psychological perversion or 'power'. (The relative ideological impact, for example, of a heavily funded advertizing industry, and an impoverished, marginal left terrorism is of little concern to Britton, as is the media consumption of terrorism itself. As for

the Chinese, Britton presents nothing of the context from which her statements originate. In fact, her relation to this material smacks of a colonialist attitude — the 'mysterious orient'). Most 'anti-authoritarians' consider themselves 'humanists'. Clearly it is more human to see people as performing socially conditioned roles, than as social/psychological deviants. Fascism, rather than being a specific form of political-economic organization, is seen as a natural condition of life. (The conclusion of which is the inevitable destruction of life itself — see a review of Britton's 'Tutti Quanti' in *Centerfold*, Feb./March 1979.) Interestingly, this rejection of any social-economic organization is seen as a poetic description of the 'human dilemma'. In reality it is the romantic individualist's rejection of the collective nature of existence. Ironically, this romantic individualism, a product of middle class idealism, when pushed against the wall forms the ideological basis for that which is ostensibly opposes, fascism. *The punk sensibility treads a very thin line.*

Susan Britton's confusions would be of little concern were they not formally wrapped in political phraseology. As such they need to be answered politically. What could constitute an informed analysis of political language and practice becomes an adolescent rejection of rational thought. But of more importance is the question of who these tapes are made for. I mean, who would be delighted to hear we're all pseudo-fascists at heart? Not the Chinese anyway. ■

C AA Bronson

- page 021 AA Bronson, "Automotons/Automorons," in *Performance by Artists*, eds. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979), 291–300.

See also ...

- page 056 *Modern Fashions* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979).
- page 143 **Section J**
- page 152 AA Bronson, "Pogo Dancing in the British Aisles," *FILE* 3:4 (Fall 1977), 16–17.
- page 155 Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker and General Idea, "General Idea: Towards an Audience Vocabulary," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 13–18.
- page 254 Clive Robertson, "The Story Behind Organized Art," *Fuse* 4:6 (November 1980), 318–25.
- page 347 AA Bronson, "Hurricane Hazel, Marien Lewis, & Other Natural Catastrophes," *Only Paper Today* 2:4 (January 1975), 1.
- page 350 AA Bronson, "Imagine A Space as Karen Ann Quinlan ...," *Centerfold* 2:6 (September 1978), 104–09.
- page 356 Clive Robertson, "And in the blue corner from Toronto, Canada." *Centerfold* 2:6 (September 1978), 110–11.
- page 358 Victor Coleman, "The Palace Coup: An Editorial," *Only Paper Today* 5:7 (Fall 1978), 1.
- page 359 Victor Coleman, "Imagine AA Space as Nancy Spungen or Leon Spinks or the Boston Red Sox," *Only Paper Today* 5:9 (November 1978), 2.
- page 360 AA Bronson, "Letters: A Space's Many Spaces," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 2–3.
- page 360 AA Bronson, "Letters: A Space's Many Spaces," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 2–3.
- page 362 Victor Coleman, "Letters: ... incestual practices," *Centerfold* 3:3 (February/March 1979), 75.
- page 365 Vic d'Or, "New Directions (?) at A Space," *Only Paper Today* 6:4/5 (May/June 1979), 2.

AUTOMATONS/AUTOMORONS

AA Bronson

HERE IN TORONTO, surrounded by the signs of an affluent, middleclass and self-satisfied culture, fed by the enlightened, if contested, patronage of the Canada Council, our artists wander, cultural zombies in the land of the living dead. Touched by the fever of perverted eroticism, inverted rationale (called 'sensibility') and the sibilant persistence of social relevance, they careen through the bohemian-machine of Toronto's artist-run institutions, meeting expectations like modern kids must with oedipal parents: schizophrenically. Experiencing culture in Canada has always implied the voyeuristic. We experience through the media what the rest of the world takes for granted as reality. Through the applied eye of our television sets we see music, art, film, current events as a succession of fictional events, silent-movie classics impersonating reality. Or is it the other way around? Are we the silent movie masses performing to the instructions of an invisible Cecil B. DeMille, the United States itself?

As artists, as individuals, our sense of reality is unfixed, decentred, eccentric. One thing could just as easily be true as another. Thus we are the suggestible zombies of which I write in this article, ambisexual, ambimoral, catholic in our experience of life: it is important that we meet all value systems set by the outside world, or that we *think* the outside world might set. Hence we are socialistic, yet capitalistic, humorous, yet serious, big hearted, but practical, intellectual, glamorous, and nice-as-pie. We are zombies. We have moved beyond beat

alienation and hip pseudo-involvement to exist quite happily, thankyou, in the land of the creatively comatose.

In the last few years writers have been discussing autobiography and narcissism in contemporary art, and now they are writing about eroticism. Each of these themes is but an aspect: the artist is interested neither in story-telling nor confession, but rather in a slow transmutation of the artist himself into an animated object, a machinic conjunction (hence disjunction) of sounds/limbs/histories meant to be observed. This year eroticism too will provide tangential access to the trance-like state of the contemporary artist, onto the *surface* of his desire.

As the micro-politics of our capitalist lifestyle forces each of us, each part of our bodies, into productive, co-ordinated machines, then there is a natural byproduct. The flip side of the Ford fantasy (computerized or not) is the desiring machine automaton/auto-moron.

Perhaps it is our generation's experience of reality through the television set that has set in close union performance and video. With the support of the Canada Council and a long history of performance involvement, it has been possible to act out the theories about which artists in other countries could only speculate.

Canadian artists leapt into the video/performance conjunction as early as the mid-sixties: Intermedia, in Vancouver and Inter-systems in Toronto were both artists' groups exploring group-cooperation and technology/performance conjunctions as

distinct relevant workingstyles/lifestyles. Such early groups have long since transformed into the sophisticated schizophrenia of Canada's hyperactive performance/video scene, a scene which focuses particularly at the Western Front and Pumps in Vancouver, and in the Queen Street West area of Toronto.

This article is a commentary on the work of five Toronto artists: Colin Campbell, Lisa Steele, Elizabeth Chitty, David Buchan, and Susan Britton. The comments are not intended as a thorough critique of their work, but rather as an initial definition of a specific genre of activity.

COLIN CAMPBELL

Colin Campbell is not a performance artist. Nevertheless, his videotapes, like those of many Toronto artists, involve eccentric personal performances in apparently narrative structure. In fact, Colin Campbell's last 8 tapes feature himself as the 'star' (sometimes only) performer.

The emphasis on alienated, detached behaviour, which in the earlier 'New York' series reached almost expressionistic heights, has now developed into a more complex form.

In the *Woman From Malibu* series of 1977, Colin Campbell plays the part of a caricatured middle-aged woman from California. Almost all the tapes follow the same visual format: head and shoulders conventional framing, in which the woman from Malibu looks out upon us, as if into a mirror. Her obsessive monologues juxtapose eccentric detail in lengthy series, not so much to describe either her character or a plot, as to map out the culture surrounding her, as if to see her in negative relief. And with each word spoken, phrase after phrase assembled with acute deliberation, the portrait that is painted is an almost Martian

construct of femininity: the insistence upon, for example, salads in which one finds a strict mathematical (but verbal) order of natural elements in almost Japanese artificiality: one cherry tomato, two squares of green pepper, three green onions, and so on. The salad and the woman from Malibu each consist of a linear assemblage of natural elements added in time . . . a strictly limited vocabulary of gestures and objects: the wig, the lipstick, the false eyelashes like quotation marks, all on the traditional modernist background of white walls and white make-up. Cultural details provide the spots of colour on this flat ground; the Mojave Desert, pony skeletons, leisure suits and Farrah Fawcett-Majors are dropped into the monologue in nasty little anecdotes actually taken from California newspapers.

In the last tape in the series, Colin Campbell is revealed at the dressing table, putting on his feminine guise as he talks. Beside him sits a video monitor showing the desert highway from a moving car window. The artist is not so much revealed as a drag queen, a man in disguise, as he is revealed as a video artist. In the final scene, he walks out into the desert and disappears into the horizon, a scene which signified more romanticism than it actually contains, thus setting the tone for all that precedes it.

Colin Campbell cross-dressing is not a drag queen. He doesn't try to become, or even impersonate, a woman. Rather, he wears the clothes and gestures as individual significations, each article of clothing, each gesture, each intonation a discrete element in a perverse collage. He never attempts illusion, acting, but rather places in disjunction male and female elements. The result is, on the one hand, humour; on the other, the inhuman, the macabre.

In his most recent videotape *Modern Love*, Colin Campbell appears as Robin, a

Colin Campbell as Robin in *Modern Love*.

much more subtle form of androgeny: note the bisexual name. The make-up too is more subtle, as are the gestures. But everything signifies innocent femininity while in fact portraying nothing of the kind. Colin's true age and sex are all too visible behind the transparent mask... no, not mask, but behind the sparse vocabulary of gestures and visuals which signify his alteration. It is this conflict between image and signification that creates the skeleton upon which the story hangs.

Robin is a 'punkette'. She works a xerox machine by day and hangs out at the Beverley Tavern at night, listening to *Martha and the Muffins*, a local punk band. Now in fact Colin Campbell works at a stockbrokerage, and his work involves operating a xerox machine; and he does occasionally hang out at the Beverley Tavern, a Toronto locale, especially when *Martha & the Muffins* are playing. (As an aside, it's interesting to note that Martha herself is an art student working in video). It is here that Robin/Colin meets La Monte del Monte, a broadly-painted show-biz hustler, who sweeps Robin off her feet and empties her of money, food and sex before abandoning her in the name of 'Modern Love' an hour and a half of video later. La Monte del Monte is a character created by and played by David Buchan, in fact a recurring character in his own work, as we shall see later.

The soap opera scenes, very drily played, are interrupted sporadically by odd-ball love scenes between two sexual clichés: the German blond bombshell, played by Rodney Werden, and the saucy French playboy, played by Susan Britton. These two dally on screen in a constant struggle to find a common language for their love, quite literally, too, as she speaks pidgin German while he speaks pidgin French. Like cuckoo clock characters, they can never come together.



Both Rodney Werden and Susan Britton are video artists themselves, and both have incorporated elements of performance into their own work. Through cross-dressing, Colin removes them from the context of their own work, while heightening the violent struggle between actuality and signification: Heidi wears a man's watch, Pierre's mustache is patently attached, and neither of them can speak a word in their supposed mother tongues. Nonetheless, their performances are brilliant. The terse articulation of cultural signifiers is framed and accented by the lack of atmospheric or ambient detail.

While Heidi and Pierre can find no words for their love, Robin and Monte can do nothing but talk. The bloated rhetoric of love and sex transactions builds through the main body of the tape, and ends in a rapid fizzle, in which the rhetoric unwinds itself into damp little strings of platitudes. It is this attention to the signifiers and conventions of sex and love in our society that keep the tape from veering into pure camp.

LISA STEELE

Lisa Steele's early explorations of her own past, physicality and psyche have developed, in the newer performance and videotapes, into a complex enactment of her eccentric characters.

Lisa is consciously passive in her tapes. Her tapes act upon her; her performance quality derives from *not* acting, from being acted upon. The characters she chooses to put on, like old clothes for housecleaning, are precisely characters one knows from *observation*. These are not characters that dominate us, that we see, but rather characters that draw us into the vacuum of their presence, of their all-too-vocal non-presence, characters *that are seen by us*. Hence characters upon whom we must pass judgment of a certain kind (as the girlfriend does in the recent videotape '*Makin' Strange*': "oh, how nice for you, etc. . .") We are requested, by the lack of qualitative comment, to fill that gap with our approving comments.

Like Colin, Lisa manages to avoid campiness as her characters struggle in this backwards quest for attention, although, God knows, sometimes campiness would appear comfortably *natural* against this strain of non-being. While in the earlier Scientist tapes, Lisa composes an image perfectly vacuous, hence modern, *Makin' Strange* features Lisa as a welfare mother who imagines her similarity to Howard Hughes (and she's right) . . . an image more graphically vacuous, moderately factual, in fact more matter-of-factly modern.

Passivity was more demonstrative in her early tapes, like *A Very Personal Story*, where she tells the story of finding her mother dead, or in *Birthday Suit*, a listing of scars from her past, all of which *chose to leave their mark upon her*. Here

death visits the body in marks, marking entry points on her body. The story is a story of 'accidents' (again, Lisa is passive), but the sub-text is a perverse sexuality in which death visits the body in a series of kisses, moments rather than meanings, metaphorical hickies. Each mark sexually thrills the viewer (the voyeur), interrupting the story before continuing the autobiographical narrative.

Similarly, her miscarriage (actual) leaves its mark upon her, and is displayed, in *Damages*, like a sexual lobotomy that has left her sexually ageless. In this tape she plays a character who vacillates in age from an apparent twelve to thirty-five. This is the first developed appearance of the auto-moron, the eccentric dismembered activity which climaxes her most recent work.

This work depends primarily on performance quality, and the exceptional quality of that performance depends on a certain disjointedness combined with infallible timing. The inability to keep her limbs coordinated becomes a conscious manipulation of the body. The slackness of the mouth, the droopiness of the eyelids, all demand a mental concentration to *help her keep things together*, to help her keep her face all in one place.

In *Damages*, developed through a series of tableaux, Lisa gives her face the sculptural potential of silly-putty. In the precise timing of this tape one senses the animal idling beneath the complacent surface, waiting for the lobotomized flesh to yield forth its inner survivor. It is this animal — not lurking, but waiting — which gives the tape its superb tension, I am tempted to say its *narrative* tension, but in fact *Damages* is barely narrative at all. The narrative is set in motion by a series of presented moments, moments when no-one is watching (we are watching no-one wat-

ching, knowing we are watching no-one watching) which set the character into its tunnel perspective as one who is seen, one who is framed and formed, the character unwittingly molded into the negative space of her environment. In this sense, we can call this a 'feminist' statement.

In her most recent videotape *Makin' Strange*, Lisa's narrative is more conventionally structured, dealing with a single mother on welfare who is being arrested, apparently because she is housing, and sleeping with, another welfare recipient Wayne (played by rock star Stephen Davey). They are not married. In her relation to others, specifically her girlfriend (and this marks another exceptional appearance by artist Susan Britton) Lisa gives her character a certain looniness. This is the normality of this character: a rambling chain of ill-fitting rationalizations, defences and platitudes. And of course her boyfriend is a *poet*, the passive observer, whose most picturesque quality is his inability to *do*, in fact the fact of *being* a poet. For that is enough. She must be observed to exist.

Lisa Steele works in a women's crisis centre, and has for several years. Many of the observations, attitudes that constitute this schizophrenic, collage-character come from direct interaction with the women at that centre.

Perhaps the finest and most unique performance by Lisa portrayed this character in a performance context. At the Body Politic Rally in Toronto, January, 1979, many artists presented works in support of the Body Politic, a gay newspaper charged with sending immoral material through the mails. Although the issue for the readers of the newspaper was primarily one of sexual freedom, the issue for the artists was considerably larger: the right to exhibit (and not only exhibit but investigate and develop)



"perverse" behaviour. For in the performance and video work which most of these artists produce, behaviour provides the axis along which they can escape (and reveal) today's definitions of reality.

Lisa wandered on stage in her pajamas, no props, no set, no action. Her rambling monologue was not acted but reenacted. The story unwound itself like a series of social questions printed on toilet paper. The constantly branching sequence of thoughts (and 'she' was never sure which branch to take) was not so much descriptive as symptomatic. The story of a woman who finds her pregnant daughter dead in the bathtub, the narrative provokes the character into a series of double binds, into non-action, while clearly illustrating the social conditions of a type. This perhaps makes the performance sound more direct than it is. It is the constant hiatus, fragmentation of thoughts, interruption of gesture which speaks so clearly in this performance. Like a voodoo witchdoctor, Lisa is possessed by the voice of her character. The energy of this transaction short-circuits the body in a sequence of intentions become spasms. She doesn't know whether she is telling her story or seeing it for the first time. She intercuts the reactive gestures of recognition with the purposeful gestures of story-telling to create the schizo flicker of a new phenomenon: social drop-out from high capitalism.

DAVID BUCHAN

The lip-synch device, so essential to the Clichettes' formal strategy, was first used by David Buchan in his performance *Geek Chic*, a fashion show combining fashion show and variety show formats to display a carefully manipulated series of non-fashions. David calls himself a wardrobe artist and he is: clichés of the unfashionable were deftly manipulated into highly stylized costumes that were as much sculptural as they were ironic.

All of David Buchan's performances may be seen as enactments of desiring-machine effects. Constructed within the familiar but loosely knit formats of television variety shows and disco hours, they assemble costumes and music through the medium of (auto)biographical narrative. The chief character is David's alter-ego La Monte del Monte, who also appears in Colin Campbell's *Modern Love*.

La Monte del Monte has a long history of Canadian cliché pasts: he has been metamorphosed from model-car builder to bible school convert to bowling enthusiast to hippy to glitter queen to high-fashion fascist and so on. This is not a story but an excuse for the lip-synch choreography and sculptural clothing which *are the real motives for the exercise*.

Like a drag queen, David Buchan lip-synchs popular songs, usually with a yearning sub-theme, adding heavily-designed movement based on mass media vocabularies. The effect is mechanical: as demonic as a wind-up toy. Lip-synch initiates the mechanical pacing: the moving lips matching music matching mo-town movements (in which the arms and legs especially become detached signifiers with their own vocabulary) combine with the added costumes (assembled semantic per-

sonalities) to create a meshing of separated parts.

Only the smart-alec campiness of some of the pieces prevents them from transmuting into startrekian other-worldliness, into a juxtaposition of awkwardnesses and uglinesses become, as in Edith Sitwell, the grammar of fascination.

My mention of *Startrek* is not accidental. Contemporary involvement with the media has altered our relation to death. Through police shows/westerns/hospital drama/*Startrek* — but especially *Startrek* — death has been distanced to a gesture, rarified in *Startrek* into a rapid vapid evaporation of the body into dust.

So, too, David Buchan's characters are animated by ulterior motives and alien tongues. They are decorative corpses inhabited by a program of action. The choice of clothing, from bowling shirts to punk bondage gear, all possessed of a semantic value, collages together a monologue of many voices which in the end forms no single image but the image of death disguised in many cute costumes.

In his performance *Fruit Cocktails* at the Fifth Network Video Conference, 1978, the reaction of the audience was particularly revealing. The performance was divided into a variety-show format series of choreographed movements lip-synched to popular music. Each scene involved local personalities from the new art/new music Toronto scene acting out the significations of Television stars. The audience was right on cue. It was not performance they applauded, but rather the recognizable cues of when to applaud. It was not the personalities they applauded, but rather the signification of applaudable personalities. The audience was aware of the irony of this, but enjoyed joining in the method of the performance to complete the work of art.



ELIZABETH CHITTY

A more intellectualized form of this modern mannerism may be found in the video and performances of Elizabeth Chitty. A dancer by background, Elizabeth's work has incorporated her own body/personality, and video, in all but one choreographed work.

In *Demo Model*, a performance presented at the Fifth Network Video Conference, Toronto, in 1978, she combined the actual machinery of modern communications technology with such specific vocabularies as deaf and dumb language, or semaphore.

In a series of distinct movements, she essentially played the part of the 'Demo Model', that female figure on TV who so effectively displays consumer products on quiz shows; or the airline hostess who demonstrates emergency oxygen masks. In this sense her performance was specifically feminist. Each segment juxtaposed a technology or communications mode, and a part of the body into a working 'machine'. For example: her head becomes disembodied over the light (death-blue) of the xerox machine, mechanically passing, which is reproducing the polaroid photos of a previous segment of the performance, photos we cannot see. It is not the copier that is the machine here, but the entire structure of head, photographs, copier, moving light.

There is a sort of sexual tremor to this work, as Elizabeth disconnects parts of her body and plugs them into 'machines'. Her hand, fingers mechanically tapping, becomes the focus for a TV camera in another segment. Her other hand operates the camera as she sits watching the image of her tapping hand on television. This closed system negates the presence of her own body except as hand and eyes.

There is no expression in this work, but only intention. Sensibility is co-opted by the mechanical workings of her desiring-machines, each occupying a different part of her body.

Elizabeth is also one of the original members of the Clichettes, a four-girl team posing as a singing team, but through lip-synching and choreography actually performing a dance-work in disguise. The use of costume, lip-synch, gestures of suffering and of love and of suffering love, combine with themes of women in cultural bondage to create a complex visual/audio code which is as ironic as it is compelling. The machinic conjunction of cultural images drawn from the mass media creates a neurotic obsessive combine. The Clichettes' most popular piece is the actual number one hit: *You Don't Own Me*.

Elizabeth Chitty's incorporation of information and languages from the popular media is described in her own words in an interview with Peggy Gale in the Performance issue of *Centerfold*, December, 1978:

"The 'briefing' tape in DEMO MODEL, 'assemble data, define the policy' — about two-thirds of the phrases were lifted out of newscasts, with the content removed. There is a whole language in television news and newspaper news. The story about the massacres in Africa was taken right out of the paper with no changes at all. It's all so manipulative, words like 'bludgeoned with rifles', words with such a strong emotional reaction. And yet there's the irony of the removal into print at the same time, we are brought close to the information but kept away from the true reality. But it was also happening on a pure emotional level as well. While this was being read, I was doing endurance poses, which was the most metaphorical the movements ever got. Listening to this horrible story, which if you bring yourself emotionally close to it . . . And the voice-over was saying 'stop', 'no, don't go on', and of course the voice continued on.

The pure movement parts of DEMO MODEL came directly from a perception of dance in semiotic terms.



The Clichettes premiere in David Buchan's *Fruit Cocktails*: (left to right) Elizabeth Chitty, Janice Hladki, Louise Garfield, Johanna Householder.

Elizabeth Chitty in *Demo Model*.



Even before I was familiar with the academic terminology of semiotics, I was aware that I was looking at dance from the point of view of what the movements expressed, and looking at traditional dance vocabulary as a clichéd method of language. This is specifically in modern dance; gestures represent emotions. In this piece, and in the earlier work *Extreme Skin*, I reduced the movement to blatant sign systems, such as the deaf mute, and semaphore, and the poses also representing simplified but particular feelings.

In *Demo Model* there is a more elaborate sense of theme. I started out at the beginning knowing that the piece would be about information, and how information is relayed. Information is very different as image or movement or words, and information is relayed differently by moving images as opposed to still images. I would say that *Demo Model* is the most content-oriented work that I've done.

It's full of messages for me; it's practically a catalogue of languages. There's the video language, both live and pre-recorded. Then there were the polaroids (on-the-spot recording) and the pre-recorded photographs that were also looked at by the video camera. There was semaphore, xerox, sign language, the maps . . .

Actually that backdrop was a xeroxed collection of various things, again on a theme of language. There were a few sheets of playing cards, because of the way pattern relates to language, and diagrams from dance technique manuals. There were also some newspaper stories, including one about NBC being sued by a girl who felt she had been raped as a direct consequence of a TV programme about such things. There was also the newspaper story there about the MPs being sued for libel. The political sense was very much there, and comes from a perception of the kind of right-wing politics that's coming forward now."

SUSAN BRITTON

Because I like her work and because she combines so easily the fight between the intellectual who does not trust the intuitive and the intuitive who does not trust the intellectual, I feel compelled to add Susan Britton to this essay at the last minute. After recently viewing her new tapes at Art Metropole, specifically *Tutti Quanti* and *Message*

From China, I am struck by the video patois she speaks, in which anarchy, marxism, high fashion, the cult of the personality, and punk join hands to form a language.

Sometimes watching Susan Britton's tapes one has the impression she doesn't know what she is talking about. But then you realize that you are confusing her content with her vocabulary. Just as the woman who drives a car need not be a mechanic, Susan is not a theoretician but a conversationalist.

In *Tutti Quanti*, a three-monitor video presentation lasting an hour and a half Susan juxtaposes personalities on the centre monitor, all played by herself, with atmospheric video-related images on either side (the same image on each side, forming an environmental trilogy). The characters which appear are alternately a fashion figure ('on top of the head is the hat'), a welfare mother ('who are you calling a bitch?'). For the last 45 minutes of the tape, both side monitors are blacked out, the environment is turned off, for a high-contrast message from the end of the world. This is a tape recorded onto a capsule by the last survivors of the human race. The lighting becomes high contrast, the voices loud and grating with lots of static. In fact, every possible device is used to make the image and the sound as difficult to watch and as difficult to hear as possible. Susan's anarchist/punk message is loud and clear:

Destroy the tower! Destroy the tower! And the tower is control and destruction at once, the death impulse in this political/stylistic amalgam. Thus the many faces of Susan Britton, which appear individually in many of her tapes and are finally set against each other here, dissolve into the chaotic amalgam of flickering light, flickering sound which cries out its single line against control.

D David Buchan

- page 035 David Buchan, "Geek/Chic," *FILE* 3:3 (Spring 1977), n.p.
- page 040 David Buchan, "Artists in Residence: Women's Performance Art in Toronto," *Vie des Arts* 21:86 (1977), 88.
- page 046 David Buchan, "Fashion Burn," *FILE* 3:4 (Fall 1977), n.p.
- page 048 Elke Steltner, "Elke Steltner talks to David Buchan: Geek/Chic," *Only Paper Today* 4:5 (July 1977), 8–9.
- page 050 Douglas Ord, "Greek Chic or All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Go," *Only Paper Today* 4:5 (July 1977), 10.
- page 051 Colin Campbell, "David Buchan: Lamonte Del Monte and The Fruit Cocktails," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 29–32.
- page 056 *Modern Fashions* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979).
- page 072 "Roots: Lamonte del Monte's Family Tree," ~1979.
- page 078 Clive Robertson, "Casual But Continuous: David Buchan Modern Fashions," *Fuse* 4:3 (March 1980), 169–70.

See also ...

- page 021 AA Bronson, "Automotons/Automorons," in *Performance by Artists*, eds. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979), 291–300.
- page 082 Tim Guest, "Modern Love: The Recent Videotapes of Colin Campbell," *Centerfold* 3:4 (April 1979), 196–97.
- page 102 Elizabeth Chitty, "You Can't Rock The Boat With Cold Feet," *Fuse* 4:2 (January 1980), 117, 128.
- page 131 Victor Coleman, "Rumour," *Centerfold* 3:5 (June/July 1979), 279.
- page 155 Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker and General Idea, "General Idea: Towards an Audience Vocabulary," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 13–18.
- page 172 "BZZZ BZZZ BZZZ," *FILE* 4:2 (Fall 1979), n.p.

FASHION



GEEK/CHIC

DAVID BUCHAN

Photographed by Michael Robertson



TIPS FROM THE PROS.

Spare time. How to fill it? What does the fashion industry have to learn from him? Even as a child he had good coordination. He sets them up, and knocks them down. Everything goes together. The shoes go with the pants, which go with the sweater/jacket, which goes with the shirt, which goes with the balls. Which goes without saying. A striking ensemble.



IT'S A CLASSIC.

Blue boy redefined. The best of both worlds. The elegance of evening wear and the convenience of casual attire. Midnight blues harmonize in this symphony of synthetics. A new vision. A structural solution to the problems of contemporary aesthetics. A model man. Perfectly posed, immaculately conceived. Very Geek, very chic.



VESTED INTERESTS

Mr. Modern Shopper is the ideal consumer. More cash than dash, for sure. Everything has a price and he's always taking stock. Buying and selling. Bargain hunting. Generally shopping around. Inspirational shots are a dime a dozen. The only Midnight Madness he ever experienced was at Plumbing World. A Bargain at twice the price. Let's make a deal.



DRESSING FOR TURKEYS.

Honk if you love Jesus. Some Geeks go to church. Then they go to heaven. If they're good. He's real good. Holier than thou too. Ex-president of Youth for Christ. Plays the accordion. Collects stamps. Subscribes to National Geographic. A large slice of Mom and Apple Piety. Please. Hold the ice cream. Thank-you. 100% GEEK.



HIGH STYLE MEETS LOW LIFE.

The no-man's land between good taste and bad taste. No taste. The domain of GEEK/CHIC. He shops in local church staffed boutiques. Arizona Sportswear. Frequents neighbourhood salons. Has dinner on tap. Borrows a bit of bag-lady consciousness. Believes in the Power of Positive Drinking. Fashions for the future. Get Down Rosedale. Get Downtown. •

Femmes artistes artistes artistes : invitées célébration rituelle

Artistes à l'intérieur d'un rôle.
Artistes occupant un territoire conquis.
Artistes chez elles, travaillant sur un schéma.
Artistes invitées.

Ces quelques phrases décrivent les spectacles produits par des femmes artistes travaillant à Toronto. Les rites culturels des défilés de mode, du patinage de fantasia, des mariages, des spectacles de cabaret ou bien les intrigues de romans à dix sous fournissent la matière première de ces spectacles. En écrivant le rôle de leurs personnages, en les costumant, en concevant leurs déplacements sur scène, ces artistes mettent virtuellement leur personne au service de leurs idées, dans le but de produire une œuvre qui témoigne de leurs vues personnelles. Globalement, l'œuvre tend à devenir conceptuelle, à la suite de larges emprunts aux conventions théâtrales, et le style ordinaire des émissions d'information se voit doté d'un contenu nouveau ou modifié.

La représentation de la pièce est d'ailleurs chargée d'allusions aux intentions de l'œuvre, allusions qui sont généralement voilées dans une parodie des intentions propres au genre lui-même. La mythologie contemporaine demeure la première source d'inspiration. Estrades, piédestaux, podiums servent à isoler l'auditoire du message de l'œuvre et, en même temps, pour s'assurer qu'il le comprenne. Compte tenu du lieu et de sa configuration, la représentation prend une allure très rituelle en modifiant l'espace pour lui donner un air d'église et en élever la représentation au niveau d'un rite; même les places aux balcons appartiennent à l'espace sacré. Sur le plan politique, l'œuvre recherche l'actualité et l'efficacité qui sont le plus souvent obtenues par l'utilisation de sujets populaires dans les médias. Les deux buts sont atteints: transcender l'intention et rendre l'œuvre accessible. C'est le rapport entre ces forces antagonistes qui caractérise le ton de ces pièces: la distanciation de l'interprétation vis-à-vis la trivialité du sujet abordé. Tout en demeurant à un niveau familial, la représentation théâtrale et l'observance d'un rite offrent à l'artiste la rare occasion de travailler à deux niveaux, celui, métaphorique, d'une cérémonie religieuse et celui, plus familier et terre à terre, du sujet choisi — parade de mode, numéros de cabaret, romans roses — qu'il se trouve en fait

DAVID BUCHAN



à reproduire. Souvent hantées par leurs propres souvenirs, en tant que femmes, les comédiennes font appel à leur propre expérience pour exorciser les énergies non libérées lors de ces événements à incidence sociale.

Dans *Queen of the Silver Blades — A Salute to the Vertical Smile*, la poésie de Susan Swann, les projections de photographies de Mary Canary et la chorégraphie de la comédienne-danseuse Margaret Dragu s'unissent pour écarter la possibilité du sourire sardonique, version *Playboy*, ou l'éternel sourire de la célèbre patineuse de fantasia Barbara Ann Scott. Lors d'une représentation pluridisciplinaire au St. Paul's Centre, les 26 et 27 juin 1975, et, plus tard, au Cinéma Lumière, en octobre-novembre de la même année, poème, danse et diapositives sont mises à concours pour combler la distance entre la femme réelle et son image. D'une forme résolument théâtrale, ce spectacle sert de point de référence pour les autres productions de nos comédiennes.

À l'approche de l'été, Marien Lewis et ses aides envahissent deux chambres de l'hôte Edgewater et, à l'aide de la vidéo et des comédiennes, préparent une thérapie préventive dans les cas de mariage imminent. Le traitement et l'atmosphère de *Soap Dance* son aussi très rituels et recréent les préparatifs d'usage dans les mariages nord-américains: d'aujourd'hui. Elle utilise l'application de maquillage (le masque), des chansons et des pas sages extraits de revues destinées à la future mariée (l'incantation), la robe (les objets fétiches), tout cela pour évoquer l'esprit entourant cette autre réalité qu'est la noce. Sans broncher, Marien reçoit un traitement facial, des conseils pour le maquillage et la coiffure; elle retire les bigoudis de ses cheveux et ricane nerveusement de plaisir; ensuite, elle revêt sa robe au grand complet avec le voile et la traîne, et, suivie de sa dame d'honneur et de plusieurs dames de compagnie, se porte à la rencontre des parents et amis dans la pièce voisine. Marien se marie! L'époux, lui, reste singulièrement absent; il ne compte pour rien; il n'a rien à faire là. Ce qui compte, ce sont les préparatifs

1. *Love-Letter*,
(Phot. Rodney Werden)

2. *Glamazon*.

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et l'importance que leur accordent les femmes qui vont se marier. Présentée à l'automne de 1973, c'est l'une des premières pièces montées à Toronto par le Women's Performance Art; et elle a contribué à familiariser les spectateurs avec ce genre.

Glamazon, un défilé de mode en trois actes, conçu et réalisé par Dawn Eagle et Granada Gazelle, reconstitue une présentation de vêtements pour véhiculer son message. L'emploi de patrons de couture comme *plans des temps anciens* démontre comment les femmes se percevaient et étaient vues. Durant l'heure que durait la représentation donnée, les 14 et 15 décembre 1975, au St. Paul's Centre, on voyait défilier quarante robes, costumes, vêtements sports et du soir présentés par six charmantes personnes. Les mannequins Jane Buyers, Leslie Patten, Anna XXX, Judy Holm, Dianne Lawrence et Isobel Harry portaient les vêtements avec beaucoup de grâce et de sensibilité. On les voit dans diverses situations: se mariant, travaillant dans la cuisine, devenue enceinte, divorcée, *nouvelle en ville*, à la plage, à l'université et amoureuse. Certaines sont habillées pour tuer et d'autres pour être tuées. Les mannequins, deux sont des professionnelles et les autres des amateurs, font preuve de leur connaissance du métier de manière troublante ainsi que des gestes requis pour *vendre* un vêtement et vous convaincre. Ils est facile de voir que c'est là une seconde nature chez elles. Il semble que l'entraînement reçu depuis l'enfance ait porté ses fruits. On dirait des porte-vêtements animés et dotés de tous les accessoires d'époque: coiffure, maquillage, sac à main, chaussures et autres colifichets. L'impression générale est renforcée à l'aide d'un montage musical de Carole Pope, du genre *Rough Trade*, et du scénario des créateurs de *Glamazon*, lu par Suzette Couture. Certaines libertés prises avec le commentaire accompagnant le défilé ajoutent une note anthropologique en soulignant qui porte quoi, quand elle le porte, et souvent pourquoi elle le porte. Jusqu'à un certain point, le spectacle montre comment l'industrie de la mode a pu passer à travers certaines phases difficiles de l'histoire comme la crise, la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, le mouvement de libération des femmes, les transformations morales et les changements de mode de vie. C'est le scénario qui nous dit comment lire *Glamazon*. Au fait, comment le voir.

Prenons pour exemple cet échantillon du commentaire afin de voir comment on réagit à la mode d'aujourd'hui. Isobel Harry fait son entrée. Elle est une artiste de Toronto au style très particulier, possédant une culture et une conscience esthétique toutes personnelles et pleines de références au Far West, disons une salle de quilles située rues Queen et Coxwell. (Un quartier populaire de Toronto. *Note du trad.*)

Midi arrive avant même qu'elle s'en rende compte. Elle travaille dans la maison et surveille l'émission *Concentration*, vêtue de jeans

noirs Carhart et d'un tricot d'orlon vert foncé. On est au début des années soixante, et le vêtement se fait beaucoup plus décontracté. Heureusement, son mari, Bert, lui a laissé la voiture familiale pour l'après-midi et Iso en profite pour faire quelques courses. Elle enfle ses sandales de vinyle vert et prend son sac de couleur assortie. Oh! j'allais oublier son manteau court. Il est en cuir beige, traité pour avoir l'air d'une cuvette. Épaules raglan jusqu'au coude et rejoignant une manche qui va s'amincissant. (Elle agite les clefs de la voiture.) Tu vas à la quincaillerie, Isobel?

Cet hommage aux tissus et aux phrases synthétiques est fondé sur la couleur, la ligne, la symétrie, les proportions et le style — quelque peu formels en eux-mêmes. Il témoigne de l'inspiration et de la compétence technique de ses créateurs. Quarante de ces vêtements, d'apparence diverse, tous des sculptures portables et des objets trouvés, sont susceptibles, par eux-mêmes, d'évoquer une atmosphère. Ils trouvent leur achèvement dans la personne du mannequin, le scénario, la bande sonore et les autres détails du spectacle. Ce sont les modes de vie qui sont commandés par les vêtements, et non le contraire. En tant que documents historiques, ils sont ramenés à la vie et portés. Le choix des types féminins a été fait parmi les deux cents que les comédiennes avaient soumis; il s'agit d'une sélection de rôles assignés aux femmes: la ménagère, l'étudiante, la jeune première, la professionnelle, le joujou sensuel, et, parfois, les beautés fanées et fatiguées. Elles sont réanimées grâce aux rappels d'une esthétique surannée et avec le concours des objets-fétiches correspondant.

Torch Showcase fut annoncé comme une soirée de «chansons arrangées», organisé par Robert Handforth, le directeur de la Galerie A Space, où le spectacle fut présenté le 25 juillet 1975. Dans les rôles de chanteuses, Brenda Donahue, Dianne Lawrence, Carole Pope et Suzette Couture interprètent quatorze chansons, trois chacune, plus un chœur, au début et à la fin. Elles sont toutes des comédiennes accomplies qui ont toutes tenu des rôles au théâtre, hormis Mlle Pope qui, en tant que chanteuse du groupe *Rough Trade* pour lequel elle a écrit des paroles, s'est créé un personnage pour la scène, fondé sur sa vie et ses amours imaginaires. Dans *Torch Showcase*, il émane des chansons choisies une dimension ironique à cause des modifications à double tranchant pratiquées dans les chansons et de l'interprétation qui en est donnée. Entre le traitement strictement théâtral du sens des chansons et leurs réactions instinctives à la musique, qui canalisaient les énergies intérieures du comportement collectif féminin, il s'étend une certaine zone, celle-là même qui venait d'être occupée. Il s'agit d'un équilibre atteint entre une fille perchée sur un piano dans un bar enfumé et l'application qu'une comédienne met à camper le personnage. Il convient de souligner la grande maîtrise de Brenda Donahue, à demi possédée

par l'esprit de Tammy Wynette, Dolly Parton et Loretta Lynn, et la simulation méthodiquement contrôlée des personnages. Intérieurement, une réaction émotionnelle naturelle, et, extérieurement, une connaissance intellectuelle de la culture qui a été acquise.

Torch Showcase s'ouvre sur une version mi-parlée, mi-chantée de *C'est magnifique* qui oscille entre les blues des femmes noires des années trente et les suppliques musicales d'aujourd'hui, du genre Mersey Beat. Music-hall anglais. Western américain. Le temps et le lieu varient d'une chanson à l'autre mais l'arrière-plan demeure inchangé: c'est le côté cœur eseuilé. *Help Me Make It Through the Night* (Brenda), *I Can't Give You Anything But Love* (Dianne), *The Man I Love* (Suzette), *You're My World, You're Everything* (Carole). Voix sirupeuses, parfois brisées, implorant la tendresse ou le pardon, soupirant après l'amour, brûlantes de passion! Dans l'unique chanson écrite pour ce spectacle, Carole Pope nous présente le drame d'une fille dont l'amour n'est pas payé de retour. Comparable à l'interprétation de *Surabaya Johnny* (Brecht-Weill) donnée par Lotte Lenya, elle se fouette pour se punir de son incapacité à répondre aux exigences du désir et de la passion. «*Lorsque vous me regardez, c'est comme dans les films de deuxième ordre, je ne marche pas*»; mais elle doit quitter la scène de force, humiliée, fondant en larmes. De la représentation de ces chansons d'auto-punition et de masochisme au nom de l'amour romantique, il découle un effet purificateur parce que leur contenu mythique est mis en évidence. Il ne faut pas non plus oublier le cadre de la galerie, et une fois de plus nous cherchons le décodage des signes. Il s'agit d'une distance prise avec le sujet et d'un commentaire à son sujet. Très peu et très peu souvent les actrices reconnaissent que leur art tient de la simulation. Dans le cas présent, c'est au directeur de la Galerie que revient le mérite d'avoir créé le cadre de référence pour l'œuvre et les citations culturelles qui délimitent le spectacle et son contexte. Finalement, ce qui importe ce n'est pas le corps ni ce dont il est revêtu, mais la distance qui est entre eux.

Love-letter, de Susan Harrison, présenté, le 15 janvier 1976, à la Galerie A Space, est une lecture accompagnée de diapositives qui nous restitue les épisodes d'une autre de ces histoires d'amour entre une fille nommée Nellie et un garçon répondant au nom de Al. De leur première rencontre jusqu'au dénouement plutôt obscur, où le destin de Nellie est entre les mains d'un homme qui «*l'aime beaucoup trop*», nous les voyons vivre dans une suite de scènes mises en diapositives par l'artiste et photographe torontois Rodney Werden. Le texte de A. S. A. Harrison est lu par Judy Holm et Whitney Smith. Presque à chaque ligne, on y fait appel à des clichés pour décrire des lieux communs. La vérité contenue dans les clichés devient toutefois assez évidente ici. Il n'en faut pas plus.

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3. *Torch Show-case*.
(Phot. Rodney Werden)

ces spectacles, avec l'intention de confirmer la vacuité de ces mythes et leur prétendue profondeur, uniquement parce que des générations de femmes les ont reproduits dans leur pensée et leur comportement. Leur adaptation à ces modèles est aisée à détecter; on en devient conscient par l'expérience qu'on en a fait soi-même et par leur rejet subséquent. La reconnaissance de leur unidimensionalité aussi bien que de leur complexité existe toujours. Les subtils arrangements dans ce genre de spectacles, la capacité de les percevoir en tant que composants sociaux, riches de contenu culturel, s'ajoutent au besoin intérieur, quasi physique, d'interpréter ces personnages. Les femmes qui ont, devant un public, reconstitué ces contraintes qui les environnent — celles qu'elles ont édifiées elles-mêmes et celles élevées par les autres — ces femmes ont conquis une certaine part de liberté. Par procuration, il s'y adjoint le plaisir de revivre des situations où elles étaient candidement ignorantes de la dimension politique liée au sexe, des attitudes convenues et de l'acculturation. Face à un auditoire, cela devient une mise à nu psychologique et un geste thérapeutique. Le double point de vue du regardeur et du regardé décrit assez bien ce genre de spectacle. La destruction des événements de la culture populaire fournit la forme, alors que le contenu est ajouté par l'interprétation et l'information. S'il semble que le résultat produit est celui venant du mariage de la conscience féminine de la fin des années soixante et de l'art contemporain, alors il est probablement le produit de cette politique de fortune, bricolée avec les ressources disponibles. L'information technique est toujours la dernière de nos priorités. Néanmoins, on fait grand cas des coutures, et le produit fini est un collage culturel. La ligne de démarcation entre les comédiennes et leur sujet d'inspiration est souvent imperceptible. Il y a beaucoup à attendre de ces spectacles dans l'avenir. L'attitude qui fait réfléchir. Dans les jeux télévisés, les hôtesse ouvrant la porte d'un réfrigérateur avec style et sensualité. Les hôtesse de l'air mimant l'utilisation des masques à oxygène. Beautés sculpturales décorant le gâteau de la vie moderne. Interprétation par des comédiennes, des non-comédiennes et des comédiennes improvisées. Toutes les trois le font encore:

«Le faire encore,
Comme une actrice dans une pièce au collège,
Le faire encore,
Comme une pute en vacances...»¹

1. Droits réservés — *Dream On Music*, chanson de Carole Pope.

(Traduction de Gilles Rioux)

English Original Text, p. 86

Nellie: «Si tu veux vraiment partir, alors je veux que tu partes.»

Al: «Mais je veux savoir ce que vraiment tu désires.»

Nellie: «Je veux seulement te rendre heureux.»

La scène n'est pas terminée qu'ils se querellent, et les voilà encore dans une situation péniblement familière. Et ça continue au long de vingt scènes, chacune étant illustrée par une diapositive nous présentant un texte écrit qu'il faut lire comme étant le film des pensées de Nellie, projeté à l'intérieur de sa pauvre tête fiévreuse d'amour. Dans une série de projections fixes nous voyons vivre Nellie, mais selon l'angle où elle se voit. «Une grande fille, et amoureuse!»... dans une gare, dans les bars, dans sa chambre, dans la cuisine, dans la rue. Partout en ville. Al et Cupidon viennent se heurter à cette poupée amoureuse, et Nellie saisit ce qu'elle peut à la volée. Les textes sur les murs, ou plus exactement sur l'écran, se lisent comme des confidences de journal; ils fournissent aux spectateurs une vue d'ensemble et lui rappellent que l'auteur-interprète-Nellie maîtrise la situation. Quelques exemples de ces phrases prises à la fin d'une scène:

«Je cesse de t'aimer mais je le voudrai toujours

«Je me fous de notre amitié.»

«Je ne veux pas ce que je désire, je veux seulement le désirer.»

Love-letter illustre les mythes de la passivité, de la faiblesse et de la sujétion, mais distingue en eux des leviers pour renverser l'ordre politique. L'illusion de leur existence constitue une assise suffisante pour établir une forme de pouvoir, et Nellie apporte la preuve de son idée: «Vous obtenez toujours ce que vous voulez». En même temps qu'elle joue la victime de l'amour, c'est elle qui domine la situation et la dirige. En se transformant en petite mare d'eau aux pieds de Al, elle lui fournit un miroir qui lui renvoie sa propre image, et il paie le prix de sa vanité. Comme située dans un lieu abstrait, la toile dressée sur le chevalet, entre l'artiste et son sujet, devient la surface sur laquelle il faut lire *Love-letter*. Comme les ficelles reliant les marionnettes au manipulateur, ce que nous voyons finalement, c'est une bipolarité faite d'activité et de passivité, un mouvement de va-et-vient entre l'attitude détachée et la passion; l'amour et la haine finissent par s'équilibrer. Même chose pour Mlle Harrison et son personnage, qui atteint son but et sa raison d'être.

Si leur jeunesse était pauvre en héroïnes romantiques, par contre la saccharine ne manquait pas; nos comédiennes sont entourées de valeurs désuètes, de carrières avortées, de lambeaux de vie épars à leurs pieds. Lâchées pour compte des écoles de charme, à peine des chanteuses de genre, starlettes, mariées, patineuses de fantaisie, mannequins: autant de reines de beauté jamais couronnées. Les limites inhérentes à tous ces genres de vie étaient plus qu'évidentes pour les femmes qui ont créé

rience and the frightening intuition of personal danger and mortality that followed it. Once again we appreciate Campbell's exquisite visual sense. Windows, flowing curtains, reflected trees and bodies combine in elegant and evocative images, spare yet eloquent. Grainy and translucent greys give a painterly texture to the whole. However, the quality of the writing in this newest work does not match the very positive formal aspects of the tapes.

Sexuality is a constant for each of these artists, often very specifically.

Rodney Werden is frankly fascinated by it, and uses video to probe into motive and effect in several of his works. A relative new-comer to the medium, Werden nevertheless shows a natural sophistication in his tapes. *Pauli Schell*, some 70 minutes long, is simply an interview with a young woman. We hear questions every so often (apparently from the unseen cameraman) and watch her sitting comfortably on a sofa as she talks about herself, and about her interest in and practice of sado-masochism, her childhood experiences, her laconic comparisons of various types of whips, leather cords, her personal fantasies. Casually matter-of-fact, Pauli Schell reveals herself as an aware, complex personality. The entire piece was shot in an afternoon, and is virtually unedited; Werden's control of the situation was such that previous run-throughs on audiotape made the final video session smooth and compact, fully arranged and presentable in just one take.

His newest tape, *Typist* (Summer 1976), seems quite a shift. The 18-minute piece is very amusing, Werden sitting down to "perform" at his typewriter with accompanying singer-guitarist: the typed text overlays this scene to tell us "It all began the last day of grade 8..." In fact this piece is another autobiography, lightly running through Werden's own hit-and-miss career typing for customs brokers, cartage companies, the list goes on and on. "Now I have my own business C... O... D... Typesetting. This is not pure typing but is the closest compromise I could find for day-to-day exercise. I am also available for pure typing performances at a nominal fee..." All of this is only partly tongue-in-cheek; one could easily replace "typist" with "artist" for an all-too-common story of making-do at one's career, finding compromises which make a survival possible.

Rodney Werden's message seems less urgent than that of Steele or Campbell; his presentation is more "media", a kind of mock-network approach, and aims not to reveal too much of what goes on inside. But it's all there, a loosely-brushed self-portrait.

This use of broadcast-television formats leads us directly to a consideration of the work of General Idea. Video began for them as one means among many, but became increasingly important as a way to record (and package) their large-scale performance pieces. General Idea hardly fits directly into the personal/autobiographical context of the other artists considered here. Yet the "glamour" stance assumed by G.I. is clever camouflage for operating behind the lines: "We wanted to be famous, glamorous and rich. That is to say we wanted to be artists and we knew that if we were famous and glamorous we could say we were artists and we would be... We knew we had to keep a foot in the door of art and we were conscious of the importance of berets and paint brushes. We made public appearances in painters' smocks."²

The recent videotapes are confected masterpieces. *Going Thru The Motions* (1975-76, 53 minutes) presents a rehearsal of the audience for the 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant. The

tape is a reworking of a major performance of the same name at the Art Gallery of Ontario in September 1975, where those in attendance were informed that this was a television studio and that they, the audience, were all extras in the show. Entrances, exits, standing ovations, "May I Have The Envelope Please", all were rehearsed. The applause was thunderous, the evening was a success.³

A recent performance (August 1976), by comparison, was almost entirely private. Carmen Lamanna, owner of the Carmen Lamanna Gallery and General Idea's representative in the commercial world, plays the part of Foreman Lamanna as he is interviewed in front of a jigsaw-puzzle backdrop: the plywood construction hoarding for the Site of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion. This hoarding fragment is a concrete metaphor; as Foreman Lamanna, manager of the construction site, notes: "Just as the Hoarding defines the limits of the site and the project in general, we have also attempted to use the media to the same end. We have expended just as much energy erecting the Hoarding for the media as we have in erecting it on real estate. It has to be real before they will report it, but it is not really real until they do..."

General Idea always operates concurrently on several levels, and for all its punning wit, G.I. is deadly serious about what it is doing. The art world, with its well-worn rôles, its highly-developed language, its rewards to the winners, may be likened to a beauty pageant, and General Idea is acting out this whole construct with its pageants and performances. But this is also a battleground: "As artists we intend to survive. We intend to survive in a no man's land between content and context, our brushes and palettes our only weapon, Glamour's our only defence... We are obsessed with available form. We manoeuvre hungrily, conquering the uncontested territory of culture's forgotten shells — beauty pageants, pavilions, picture magazines and other contemporary corpses. Like parasites we animate these dead bodies and speak in alien tongues."⁴ General Idea is carrying out a structural investigation of the phenomenon of culture, through deconstructing it, piece by piece. They have made this process part of their lives, and all of their poses and pronouncements, their real concerns, move towards the completion of one grand scheme: the construction of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant Pavilion.

Each of these artists is different. Steele and Campbell express a deeply-felt existential sense of loss, of searching after an as-yet-unknown personal truth. Rodney Werden investigates histories, an observer fascinated by the details of an "ordinary" life. General Idea shows us an elaborate metaphorical construct, where media participates naturally (culturally) in the performance. Each has a reality formed by particular experience, objectified through narration or the addition of symbolic or myth-filled details. Narrative sequencing, the naming of feelings and ideas, the structuring into story format, all these remove the final tapes further from their intimate sources. And all of this is video.

1. See Peggy Gale, *Colin Campbell: Windows and Mirrors in Video by Artists*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1976, for a discussion of the early work.

2. General Idea, *Glamour in File*, Autumn, 1975.

3. See Peggy Gale, *Video Art in Canada: Four Worlds in Studio International*, May/June 1976, for a fuller description and script excerpts from the tape.

4. General Idea, *Glamour in File*, Autumn, 1975.

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE: WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE ART IN TORONTO

David BUCHAN

Artists inhabiting rôles.
Artists occupying conquered territory.
Artists at home, manipulating formats.
Artists in residence.

The preceding phrases describe the performance art being done by women artists working in Toronto. The preformed cultural phenomena of fashion shows, ice follies, wedding ceremonies, cabaret entertainments or dime-store-novel plots determines the shape the events take, the raw material out of which the fabric of the work is made. The artists, writing words for their characters to speak, creating clothing for them to wear, choreographing their movement, virtually take over their bodies to mobilize their own ideas, with the intention of creating finished works that bear witness to their personal visions. Drawing heavily upon theatrical convention, the overall quality of the work tends to be conceptual in nature, using established styles of information presentation to house newly designed and reshaped content.

The actual performing of the pieces is laden with reference to the intention of the work, but usually cloaked behind an ironic translation of the original intention of the genre. Contemporary mythologies are the prime source of inspiration. Platforms, pedestals and runways are used to separate the audience from the meaning and ensure that they get it at the same time. Providing the external shape, or form, the performance takes on highly ritualized overtones, turning the spaces they exist in into church-like environments, elevating the acts to the level of rites; reconfirmation of the existence of galleries as sacred. On a political level, the work strives to create an immediacy, a relevance, the opportunity more than possible with the use of popular media events. Both interests are served: the elevation of the concept is achieved and the work is made accessible. It is this interplay between opposing forces that most singularly characterizes the feel of these pieces. The distance of the artist versus the proximity of the actual subject. While remaining on familiar ground, the keeping of the act, the observance of ritual allows the artist the luxury of two levels of operation: the metaphorical one of the religious service and the actual familiar ground-level of the available format, which it in fact duplicates. The fashion show, night-club act, or Harlequin Romance. Often haunted by images of women in their past, the artists take advantage of their experience and use it to exorcise unwanted energies in these socially parenthetical situations.

In *Queen of the Silver Blades* (A Salute to the Vertical Smile), the poetry of Susan Swann, the photographs of Mary Canary, in slide form, and the choreography of dancer/artist Margaret Dragu combine to ward off the possibility of the *Playboy* version of risus sardonicus, or permanent smile of figure-skating heroine Barbara Ann Scott. In a multimedia performance at St. Paul's Centre, June 26 and 27, 1975, and later at Cinema Lumiere, (October-November, 1975) poems, dance and slides are used to resolve the difference between the real woman and her *imago*. Formally theatrical in its approach, it offers a contrast to the approach used by the visual artists whose efforts are described below.

Marien Lewis and cohorts, in pre-Hummer days, take over the two suites in the Edgewater

Hotel and use video and performance as preventative medicine for impending nuptials. Also very ritualistic in its approach and effect *Dance Soap* is the re-creation of the pre-wedding activity typical of North American contemporary wedding customs. It employs the application of make-up (the mask), selected readings from *Bride To Be* magazines and song (the incantation) and wedding apparel (the fetish objects) to invoke the spirit of plastic bridal reality. Playing it straight, Marien gets a facial, along with hints for cosmetics and grooming, takes the curlers out of her hair, and giggles nervously in anticipation. She then slips into her gown, replete with veils and train, and enters with her maid of honour, and several bridesmaids, the adjoining suite to meet with loved ones. Marien Gets Married. The groom is non-existent, beside the point — totally unnecessary, in fact. It is the service which matters here, and what the women involved bring to it. Executed in the fall of 1973, it is one of the earliest pieces of Women's Performance Art done in Toronto, of the format occupation variety, and to a certain extent helps to acclimatize the audience to the medium.

Glamazon, a fashion show in three acts, conceived and constructed by Dawn Eagle and Granada Gazelle, recreates the runway fashion show format to make its point — using sewing patterns as "blueprints of former times" to document how women saw themselves and were seen. During the course of the one-hour performance, which took place at St. Paul's Centre, on December 14 and 15th of 1975, we see forty costumes, day dresses, sports wear and evening wear, being modelled by six charming ladies. Models Jane Buyers, Leslie Patten, Anna X, Judy Holm, Dianne Lawrence and Isobel Harry, wear the clothes, tapping a variety of skills and intuitions. We see them pregnant, getting married, divorced and "new in town". In the kitchen, at the beach, on campus, and under the influence. Some dressed to kill. Others dressed to be killed. The models, two of them professional and the others amateurs display a physical knowledge of the appropriate gestures necessary to "sell" clothing alarmingly and convincingly well. It's plain to see that it's all second nature to them. It would seem the training since early childhood has paid off. The part of the model is played with the appropriate grace. Living clothes horses, completely accessorized in period paraphernalia — hair, make-up, shoes, hand bags, numerous props; the effect with the help of the score, collaged by Carole Pope of *Rough Trade* fame, and a script prepared by *Glamazon*'s creators and read by Suzette Couture, is strongly reinforced. With a certain amount of deconstruction of the fashion show commentary, heavily anthropological in its approach, it locates the clothing in terms of who wore it, when they wore it, where, and often why. To a certain extent it documents how the fashion industry and designers get over such historical humps as the Depression, the Second World War, Women's Liberation and just plain changing morals and lifestyles. And it is the script which tells us how to read *Glamazon*. How to see it, in fact.

Take for example this sample of the writing used as the accompanying text to a vision of to-day's fashion sensibility. Enter Isobel Harry, a Toronto artist with a style all her own. An aesthetic, consciously cultivated and highly personalized, with numerous references to the Far East, say a bowling alley at Queen and Coxwell.

It was almost noon before she knew it. Working around the house and watching *Concentra-*

tion in her black Carhart jeans, and her muted green orlon sweater. The sixties have started and the need for formality is decreasing. Luckily, husband Bert has left the station wagon for the afternoon, and she can get a few errands done. She slips her feet into green vinyl mules and grabs her matching handbag. Oh, I almost forgot — her clutch coat. Beige leather, made to look like leatherette. The raglan sleeves are cut to the elbow and joined in a point to the tapering sleeves. (waves car keys) Going to the hardware store, Isobel?

This salute to synthetics in words and material is based on colour, line, symmetry, structure, proportion, and style — quite formal in its concerns. It reflects the inspiration and technical proficiency of its creators. Forty such pieces, diverse in appearance, all wearable sculptures, found objects, are capable of generating atmosphere on their own. They are accessorized by the model, the script, the sound-track, everything in fact. Lifestyles as extensions of clothing, instead of the opposite. As historical pieces they are resurrected and inhabited. The choice of patterns, made from over two hundred collected and assembled by the artists, represents a selection of feminine personas — the housewife, school girl, debutante, career girl, sensuous plaything and jaded, somewhat faded beauties. They are brought back to life with the invocation of departed aesthetics, with the help of the corresponding fetish objects.

The *Torch Show-case*, A Space, July 25, 1976, was billed as an evening of "song stylings", co-ordinated, or curated if you will, by Robert Handforth, artistic director of the gallery. Posing as chanteuses, Brenda Donahue, Dianne Lawrence, Carole Pope and Suzette Couture sing a collection of fourteen songs, three each, with a group introduction and finale. All are actresses of some accomplishment on the local scene, participating in selected pieces of theatre, with the exception of Miss Pope who as writer and lead singer for *Rough Trade* has created a stage persona based on her fictitious lives and loves. During *Torch Show-case* they use the selected material to duplicate the ironic, double-edged charm found in their interpretation of the lyric, and the accompanying performance of it. The territory existing between their theatrically disciplined understanding of the song's meaning, and their instinctual reaction to the actual music, tapping the internal resources of collective feminine behaviour, is what is occupied here. Carefully balanced between the girl trapped on the piano in a smoky bar, and the artist's studied impersonation of the rôle. Most notable was Brenda Donahue's perfect location at the point midway between a possession by the combined spirits of Tammy Wynette, Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn, and a methodical, controlled reproduction of the character. An internal emotional reaction to nature, and an external intellectually developed awareness of culture.

Opening with a talking/singing version of "*C'est magnifique*", *Torch Show-case* offers everything from thirties black women's blues, to contemporary musical supplication, Mersey Beat style. British music-hall material, American country and western. Time, locale, and mood vary from song to song, but the prevailing instrument in the background is undoubtedly the bleeding heart. "Help Me Make It Through the Night", (Brenda), "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" (Dianne), "The Man I Love" (Suzette) and "You're My World, You're Everything" (Carole). Voices infected with saccharine, sometimes tough, pleading for affection, forgiveness, yearning for love, torches burning. In

the one original song written for the occasion, Carole Pope offer a version of one girl's battle with unrequited love. Reminiscent of Lotte Lenya's performance of *Surabaya Johnny* (Brecht-Weill), she lashes herself for her inability to stand up to the demands passion and lust makes of her. "When you look at me it's like any Grade B movie, I don't wanna let go", but she does and is forced to leave the stage — humiliated, and apologetic. Taking the myths so transparent in these songs of degradation and masochism for the sake of romantic love, and acting them out, driving them out in fact has somewhat of a purifying effect. One never forgets the gallery environment as well, and once again we look for decodification of the signals. A distance from the material, an editorial comment. There are few here and rarely do the actresses recognize the erection of the façade. The curator, in this case, bears most of the credit for creating the frame of reference for the work, the "cultural quotation marks" that bracket the event, its context. What we finally consider is not the body, nor the object worn on it, but the space between them.

Susan Harrison's *Love-letter*, also at A Space, January 15, 1976, was a reading and slide show that chronicled the all too common kind of love affair between a girl like "Nellie" and a guy like "Al". From their initial meeting/pick up to their somewhat obscure end, where Nellie's fate lies in the hands of a man who "loves too much", we follow them through a series of incidents documented in slide form by Rodney Werden, Toronto photographer and artist. The script, written by A.S.A. Harrison is read by Judy Holm and Whitney Smith. Nearly all one liners, it uses cliché language to describe cliché situations. The truth hidden in cliché, however, is quite visible here. Little more is needed.

Nellie: If you really want to go then

I want you to go.

Al: But I want to know what you really want.

Nellie: I only want to make you happy.

By the time the scene is over they are fighting, and the situation is painfully familiar. And so it continues, twenty scenes worth, each scene punctuated with a slide offering visual that read like a rear projection screen at the back of Nellie's lovesick mind. In stop frame fashion we catch Nellie seeing herself, and being herself. "A big girl, in love", in train stations, bars, bedrooms, kitchens and on the street. Al and Cupid bounce this kiewpie doll all over town, and Nellie grabs what she can on the rebound. The writing on the wall, or screen in this case, reads like confessions in a diary. They provide us with the overview as well, and remind us of the control the author/artist/Nellie has over the situation. Samples of end of scene quotes —

"I always stop liking it but

I'll never stop wanting it"

"I don't care about the relationship."

"I don't want to have what I want,

I only want to want it."

Love-letter illustrates the myths of passivity, weakness and subjugation, but recognizes them as tools to invert the political order. The illusion of their existence is enough of a basis for acquiring a power structure, and Nellie proves her point. "You can always get what you want". While masquerading as the victim of passion she manages not only to steer the ship, but chart its course. By becoming the puddle at Al's feet, she creates the mirror for him to see his own image, and vanity takes its toll. Residing in a no man's land, the painting on the easel between the artist and her subject matter is the surface on which we read *Love-letter*. This interfacing between activity and

passivity — the strings connecting the puppet to the puppeteer — is what we finally see.

This see-sawing back and forth motion between active and passive, involved and detached, love and hate achieves a natural balance, just as the distance between Miss Harrison and her alter ego finds its point of contact with its purpose, its fulcrum.

Raised on a diet of romantic heroines, high on sugar content, we see the artists surrounded by abandoned values, aborted careers, lives lying discarded at their feet. Dropouts from the charm schools, nearly song stylists, starlets, brides, figure-skaters, model women: beauty queens never crowned. The limits to the lifestyles were more than obvious to the women who created the work as testaments to the flatness of the myths, and to their acquired depth, as generations of women layer them with their thoughts and actions. Their involvement with these models is plain to see, and it comes from the knowledge only experience and removed observance can bring together. The recognition of their unidimensionality, and a respect for their complexity as well is always there. The sophisticated manipulation of these genres, the ability to see them as social constructs, thick with cultural reference, is combined with an internal physical need to play out the rôles. Women who have achieved a certain amount of freedom via the public re-creation of the walls they see surrounding them; the ones they built themselves, and the ones built by others. At the same time there are the vicarious thrills available by reliving those moments when they were safely ignorant of sexual politics, rôle modelling and acculturation. Before a live audience it takes on the appearance of psychological stripping, a therapeutic act. The two-sided position of seeing and being seen typifies the work. The reconstructing of these popular cultural phenomena acts as the form, and personal interpretation and information fill it with content. If at times it seems as if the results are the result of a marriage between a late sixties feminist consciousness, and contemporary art, then it is probably the result of devising this make-do politic, patched together with the resources at hand. Technical information is always last on the list of priorities. The seams are celebrated however and the finished fabric is a cultural collage. The boundaries between artists and their inspiration is often negligible. Performance art of the future may give us the real thing. The pause that reflexes. Game show hostesses opening Frigidaires with poise and charm, airline stewardesses doing mime performance of the location of emergency oxygen supplies — the sculptured beauties decorating to-day's cake. Performed by artists, non-artists and found artists. All three are still doing it:

"Doing it again.
Like an actress in a high school play,
Doing it again.
Like a whore on a holiday ..."

¹ Copyright — *Dream On Music*, lyrics by Carole Pope.

MICHAEL SNOW'S COVER TO COVER

By Eric CAMERON

Jack Bush and Michael Snow emerge not only as the major artists presently working in Toronto, but also as the major figures in contemporary Canadian art. While Jack Bush is

readily labelled in terms of his materials as a 'painter' and, in relation to his style (with whatever qualifications), as a 'modernist', Michael Snow's activity and allegiances are more diverse. There are some paintings of importance and, with only a little hesitation, one might happily call other pieces 'sculpture', but the totality includes not only books but also photographs, performances, videotapes and video installations as well as the films which have till now been the most regarded of his works. In relation to styles and movements one might think of 'Minimal Art', but also of 'process'; a few pieces relate to 'Conceptual Art' and a 'structural' approach is dominant. The fact of diversity as much as its nature locates him with equal clarity in relation to another tradition that stems from Duchamp and includes people like Bruce Nauman and John Baldessari among contemporaries. The truth is that the best Canadian art of the last decade finds its deepest level of significance as an appendage to developments now naturalized in America.

Cover to Cover may be the most balanced, most fully rounded and most fully realized of Michael Snow's major enterprises, but it comes a bit late in the day. The self-referential book as art was a product of the period of the late sixties and early seventies that saw Michael Snow's own self-referential films as art. In the days of the conceptual book the publishers, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, were right on the ball with important works by Lawrence Weiner, Daniel Buren and Gerald Ferguson; when the game moved another way they dropped it. *Cover to Cover* was produced, not by the Lithography Workshop (like those works) but by the Press and it comes in the context of a scholarly series dealing with source material in the contemporary arts. If this quirk of circumstance gives *Cover to Cover* another gratuitous level of self-reference as the document of itself as source material, it also conveys a sense that the art might have felt more comfortable to be history.

The front cover is completely filled with a black and white photograph of a door. At left and right the edges of the door coincide exactly with the edges of the cover. The door is hinged at the left just like the cover of the book. At the right the chain lock is disconnected, the clip on the Yale lock has been pressed down to fix it in the open position, and we guess from the empty keyhole underneath the door knob that the door is unlocked at that point also, and will swing open at the touch of a hand that might be our hand as we move to open the book.¹

The photograph achieves a unique identification of the format of the book with the reality of its narrative content. The door is more than a metaphor of our access to the story. As we reach out to lift the corner it is as if we were also activating the first episode ourselves: "A door is about to open" and at that point, it is as if we also had the power to determine the course of the action: "A door half opens and closes again", "A door stays shut".

It is of the nature of books to be mute, inert objects that will sit unobtrusively on shelves or on coffee-tables keeping their thoughts to themselves — I am thinking by contrast with people who shout to us from across the street. The book awaits our convenience, passively to be taken down and perused. The meaning we get out of it is as crucially dependent on our physical act of engagement with it — putting out our hand and turning the pages — as on all the time, energy and ingenuity the author may have put into the ordering of its contents. The message we take away with us comes about

through an interplay between our willful bodily commitment and the indications the marks upon the paper are able to convey.

The title, 'Cover to Cover' on the spine indicates the primary level of subject-matter is the book's own physical structure as an accumulation of pages with a thicker paper (price \$12.50) or cloth (price \$20.00) cover at each end. By implication it follows that the primary level of action is the 'reader's' act of exploration as he turns the pages. The door is only the first of many cues that serve to make him self-conscious in its execution.

The book is all black and white photographs, both sides of (almost) every page. From time to time hands appear at the corners and turn back the pages, or they may close in the centre leaves revealing earlier incidents on the left and later ones on the right. To understand the logic we have to follow the same procedure ourselves. Somewhat past halfway the photographs swivel around and turn themselves upside down so the book finishes like one of those typically Canadian bilingual publications that begins again the opposite way up at the other end in the other language. In this case, however, turning the book around causes the narrative sequence to be inverted; the figure of the artist is evidently walking backwards.

The illusion of the front cover suggests a one-to-one equivalence between our sphere of action as we move to open the book and the narrative space within which the story-line will unfold. More often the relationship is antithetical. Pausing just a little longer, we notice that we approach the door from the inside; in entering the book we may expect to be leaving the house. When, however, we do open the cover we do not step outside, but find ourselves confronted with another door and, when we open it, another door and another after that.

The genre of narrative photo-sequence is like cinema in that it records successive images on film, but photographs printed on paper refuse to melt into each other like the changing patterns of light across a movie screen. They have a temporal and spatial discreteness as substantive as that of a door in front of us, and so we pile door upon door as we turn the pages of the book. The inside of the cover sustains the illusion, the same door from the other side and, waiting to come in, the figure of the artist. We turn the pages but are powerless to admit him. He swings around with the door and piles up with the rest as we pass on. Inside the fourth leaf his left hand grasps the door knob. The door disconnects itself from the page. We lose our grip upon the material substance of the plot and now turn only paper pages as the figure enters.

Leaving the door open, he walks quickly past and out of our field of vision. Two cameras and two camera-men confront each other across the threshold. The illusionism of the front cover, with inside and outside equating with the front and back of the door, comes about through careful manipulation of a more general strategy that forms the basic structural motif of the work. (Almost) every shot is duplicated by camera-men on opposite sides of the subject facing each other at an angle of 180°, and matching shots continue to appear on opposite sides of (almost) every leaf. As doors or figures move aside we are reminded of the basis in mechanical contrivance of the naturalistic imagery of the photograph; the presence of the camera is a part of every photographic subject.

In the first dozen pages of *Cover to Cover* we progress from a magical realm of illusion almost on the level of the child's pop-up book — but more persuasive because it is achieved without

FASHION BURN

FAG FLOGS FASHION FAD ON INNOCENT BYSTANDERS

June 25th, 1977. At Crash 'n' Burn, Basement of C.E.A.C.
(Centre for Experimental Art and Communication). Intermission of
Dishes Jubilee Shocker. Is the New Wave a Permanent Wave?
What gives? Fashion Burn.

CULTURE CRACKS THE WHIP

Upwardly mobile artiste parades punkettes to trendy S.R.O. crowd
at local underground marginal institution. Crowd sits up, rolls over
and begs for more. Culture cracks the whip, but catches itself in
the act. Superficial wound to the wrist.
Fashion Burn.

PHRASEMAKER GETS SENTENCE

Fascist Fashion makes a stand.
Fascist Fashion takes a stand.
Artist pleads innocence.
Claims to be "Quick with the Whip, and Quick with a Quip".
Fails to convince jury.
Dressed to kill. Then dressed to be killed. Verdict — Guilty.
Chooses oven over hotseat.
Gets Hotpoint at 350° F. for 25 - 30 minutes.
Fashion Burn.

NEW WAVE FLAMBE

3 gross safety pins
2 garbage bags (Glad)
4 yds. green PVC plastic, 6 mls.
2 yds. black vinyl (uncrushed)
1 box band-aids
1 drop-sheet, blue
several found objects
plastic raincoat (peau de leopard, en plastique)
1 roll each of masking tape, electrical tape, adhesive tape,
aluminum tape, gaffer's tape, Scotch tape.
Assorted staples, pins, grommets, rivets, studs, razor blades, to
taste.

Add eight girls, young (not too tender), one artiste (slightly
jaded), shake (but don't break)
and bake.
Serve hot.
Serves twelve.
Serves you right.
Fashion Burn.

David Buchan

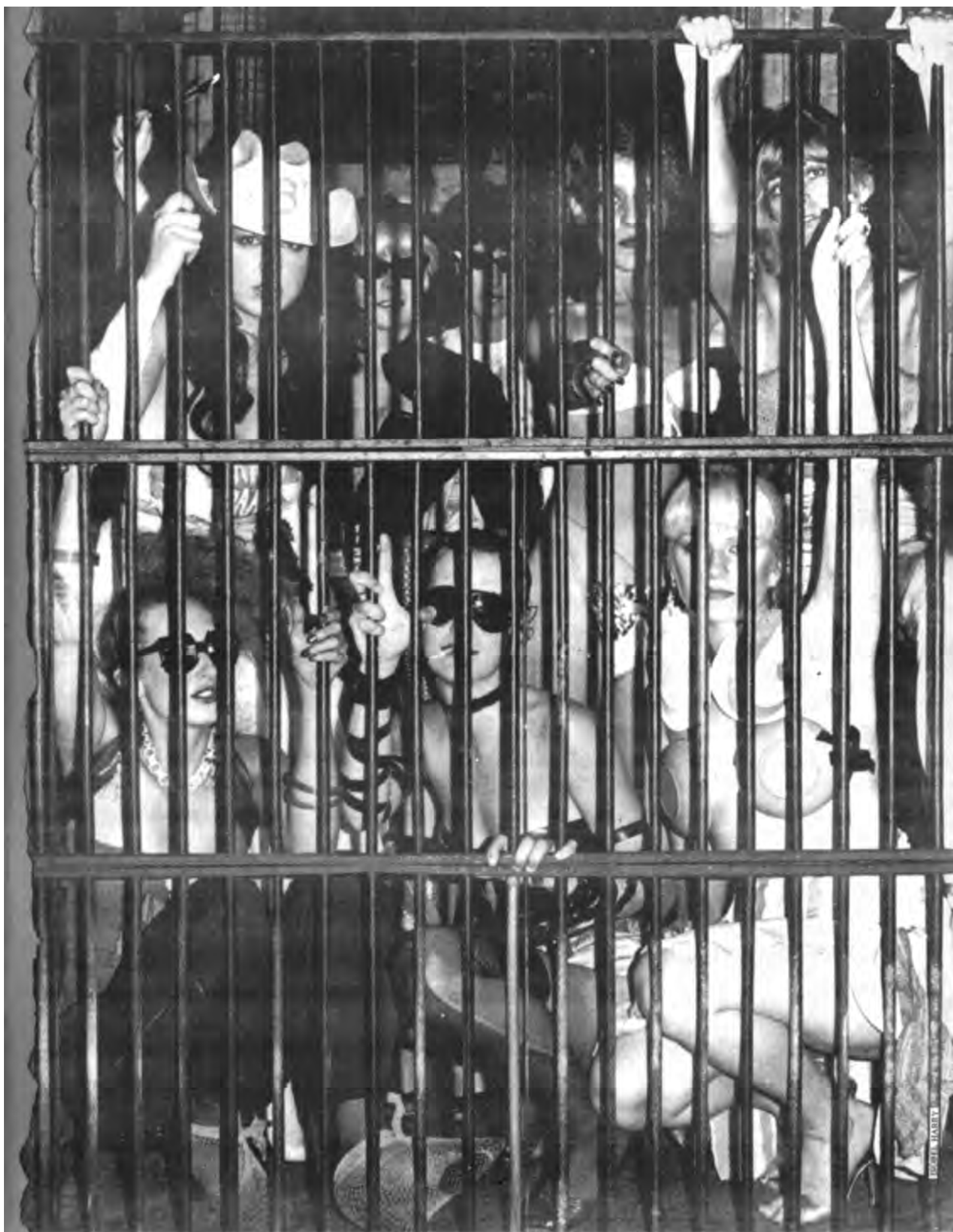
THE
FASHION BURNETTES
LUCASTA ROCHAS, ANYA
VARDA, DEBRA KADABRA,
PATSY POISON, CAROL
STARR, DAWN EAGLE,
ERIKA LARNER
+
XENIA



ISOBEL HARRY



ISOBEL HARRY



GEEK/CHIC

presented by David Buchan
in The Crystal Ballroom of The King Edward Hotel
May 26, 1977

Part one

Slide Show

- A) The Diary (160 slides by Michael Robertson)
B) The Geeks David Buchan, model)

Part two

GEEK/CHIC COMES ALIVE — Six musical numbers
performed by the Geek Models

- A) 'Just My Style'—The Davey Bros. + One*
(Garry Lewis & the Playboys)
B) 'Don't Just Stand There'—Laurie Entill
(Patty Duke)
C) 'Backstage'—Murray Ball
(Gene Pitney)
D) 'Shout'—Martha Corbett
(Lulu)
E) Music from 'La Dolce Vita'—
Isobel Harry and David Buchan
F) 'Julie, Do You Love Me?'—entire cast
(Bobby Sherman)

Intermission

Incidental Accordion music was provided

Part three

FASHION PLATES The Dishes in Performance

ELKE STELTNER TALKS TO
DAVID BUCHAN

GEEK/CHIC

es: Do you come here often?

db: I used to. I worked on the script for *Geek/Chic* here. Mostly I come here because it's close to where I live and because I like the atmosphere . . . it's one of the few places in town that when you walk in and sit down and the waiter comes over to you and says: "What'll it be?" and you say "the usual", he knows what you mean.

es: How did *Geek/Chic* come to take its form?

db: I'll start off by giving a bit of history. The original inspiration came from my involvement with *Glamazon*.^{*} I was excited by it and thought it was more interesting than painting or performance art as I was aware of it. My excitement was based on the fact that nothing interested me more than clothing and I began to wonder what an appropriate male version of *Glamazon* might be like. Could you in fact do a fashion show that was an historical analysis of men's clothing from 1940 to say 1970, which is the time period *Glamazon* worked with? I realized that what you would have would be thirty guys coming out, one for each year, looking almost identical. Two-piece suits, three-piece suits, the waist would go in or out, the collars would get a bit wider, the lapels would have one point, two points, the suits would have one button, two buttons, single vent, double vent, etc. Basically, you couldn't do anything

es: What about street wear and night wear? Surely men weren't always wearing suits?

db: No, but when you're doing research, the only thing that's documented is the suits. If you look at Esquire's *History of Men's Fashions*, they don't take into account much of anything besides sportswear and clothing for working because basically men don't do anything besides play golf and go to the office. Anyway, I realized that if I wanted to do a fashion show I could do one based on the history of my own wardrobe. It provided an incredible range because of the number of so called outfits I had worn.

es: But why *Geek*? One dictionary I checked defined it as *someone, a performer, who does things of the nature of biting the heads off live chickens*.

db: Well, I was aware of the circus definition, not so much via the chicken-head-biting-off version but via Schlitzky.

es: What?

db: Schlitzky. Schlitzky was a circus freak from I think the late Forties. He was this peculiar human mutation that had no neck at all and a very small head that had no hair at all on the sides, just this shock of hair coming off the top. You know that if you were to propose, in a certain way, a hair-cut based on the way Schlitzky looked, to a particular segment of the population, they would eat it up. So I started thinking about toying with making things that were supposedly 'out', 'in', and what could be more 'out' or 'outré' than something that would appear to the clothing industry to have absolutely no marketable value. Something like

clothing for people who pay no attention to clothing. The word *geek* itself is also like a number of other one syllable terms for 'losers,' people who are 'out to lunch.' Let's see, how many others can I remember off-hand? Geeks, nerds, jerks, creeps, drips, dips. Oh, there's lots of them. I chose *Geek* because it rhymed with *Chic*. The slash between the words was simply more available than the arrow which exists ideologically. The slash works visually and you can type it.

es: The slide portion of the show was very revealing, very personal. Did you intend that?

db: Sure. It's so personal I couldn't deal with it in the first person. I used the third person singular throughout: "Then he . . . This one . . . He's chosen . . ." I wanted it to be a diary that worked. I've tried writing diaries at various points in my life and they've never worked. The information in them was the only thing worth remembering. I didn't particularly want to remember how I felt and I didn't think it would interest anyone else. Anything that I was doing could be found in what I was wearing at the time. If I was working in a day-care centre that had a certain political ambience, I was going to be wearing something that allowed me to visually and physically blend in with my surroundings, my situation. I chose to dress 'down' for that occasion, lots of black, lots of navy-blue military surplus, very little colour. As I mentioned in the "Grouchy Marxist" grouping of slides, the only colour that person, I, chose to wear, was the little red book.

es: Did you read it?

db: No, it was in French. I used it as a prop. No, I've never read it and probably never will. I know if I read it I'll agree with everything.

es: There's a break in the slide show, after the punk rock section, where you become much more aware of the effect you're creating, much less the victim.

db: Yes, and I end the 'diary' portion of the slide show by making the statement that it's obvious that this person is shopping, shopping around for lifestyles, looking for jobs, recreational activity. Nothing seems to hold water, nothing seems to be able to have any credibility over a long period of time. And that's when I get into the *geek/chic* aspect. The solution was not to dress for the occasion, but to create a style of dressing that reflected a particular aesthetic. I wasn't as interested any more in following styles, as setting them. If someone who wore what I wore in the *geek* section of the slides got on the same subway car you were in, you would point and say: "Jesus Christ, who is this *geek*? Who is this jerk? Where does he get off?" Well, he gets off at Dundas and goes to a meeting of Youth for Christ or whatever. But those clothes have a life of their own. I was interested in the life that those clothes have and how, structurally, they change the way you look.

es: And feel?

db: Sure, but physically too. I made sure there were always shots of each outfit taken from the neck down so that you could in fact look at how the torso was re-structured. I've always been interested in clothing in terms of how it created sculpture of the human body.

es: Aside from the fashion aspect, is the diary section in any way an exorcism of your past life and interests?

db: Yes it is. Diaries are, I find, quite cathartic. I read all five volumes of Anais Nin's diaries and loved them totally. They're self-indulgent and precious at times, but they're also chronicles of different time periods that deal with individual style. Invariably, the individual style serves as a metaphor for the culture in

which the diarist is living. That's why I thought I could base a piece of art on my own wardrobe and call it art. It serves as a document, an historical, cultural, anthropological document to what was available to the Canadian male in the 1970's.

es: The lip-syncing part of the show, the musical extravaganza, seemed almost a parody in contrast to the intimacy of the slide show.

db: Yes and no. I prefaced the lip-syncing with the phrase, "Geek/Chic comes alive." I wanted to take the aesthetic that was represented in the latter part of the slide show, i.e. the Geeks, and transform it into a live stage presentation. I worked exclusively with music that was generated by film or television: *La Dolce Vita* is music that was written for the screen, Gary Lewis who sang *Just My Style* is the son of a film star, Gary Duke is a TV star, Lulu was the star of *To Sir With Love*.

es: Did you expect the audience to respond as enthusiastically to the music as they did?

db: Sure. All that music is aimed directly at the audience, it's intentionally manipulative and it works. In the slide show I was dealing with very personal material and I know I couldn't do that for more than 15 minutes with out boring the audience. I purposely kept it short and rewarded the audiences' patience by giving them something that they could respond to in a physical way which in fact they did. They stood up, they hooted, they hollered, they sang along, they clapped, they whistled. They did exactly what I expected them to.

es: You chose to be model, commentator, performer. Did you ever consider using anyone else for any of those roles?

db: I considered using somebody else to do the commentary because I was petrified of getting up there in front of everybody and speaking to them.

es: Do you think the piece would have been as effective.

db: I don't know. It wouldn't have been as personal. I wanted people to know that I was making a statement about my own history and I wanted my own history to serve as a metaphor for other people's history.

es: You're an excellent model. Did you use a mirror in setting up the poses?

db: No. If I strike a pose, I have a pretty good idea of what it looks like. I've been looking at fashion magazines, mail order catalogues, television, films and newspapers ever since I can remember. If someone says they're going to take a picture, there are about five thousand poses you can strike. And if you're familiar enough with the language of modelling, then you can duplicate it.

es: Do you think your approach is particularly North American. European artists using their own images in their work do so in a very different way. They don't seem to be so directly influenced by media.

db: No, they don't. They weren't raised on the stuff. I'm quite aware that I grew up on a diet of it. Sure, I feel totally controlled, influenced by the media, but I don't feel any resentment. I feel an understanding. There are people who set trends and people who follow them. I know I followed them for a long period and now I know the mechanics involved in setting them.

es: Why didn't you videotape the show.

db: I'm going to but the videotape will serve more as a document to the clothing in a way that I couldn't showcase it live. No one could see what the models had on their feet for instance. Those details were lost in the largeness of the performance in the ballroom.



Elke Steltner conducted her interview with David Buchan at the roof Lounge of the Park Plaza Hotel.

Isobel Harry

^{*}*Glamazon*: an art/fashion/performance event presented by Dawn Eagle and Granada Gazette at St. Paul's Centre. December 14 & 15, 1979.

es: What other forms can you forsee for Geek/Chic?

db: I could quite easily see doing a book of the slide show. I would use high quality stills, reproduced from the slides, and supplement them with a small, concentrated text, very much the way the piece in FILE is.

es: Who is your ideal audience?

db: When I originally created the piece, I thought my ideal audience would be an art audience, but it seems that the art audience of Toronto is not all that willing to accept what I offer them as art.

es: Who are you talking about?

db: I'm talking about Marien Lewis. I was informed that Marien didn't think it was art, not 'high art' anyway. I realized that the only reason she didn't think it was art was because it was entertaining. If I had shown the slides at A Space, had everybody sit on the floor, used a front projection screen and stood there talking quite bored for twenty minutes, then the whole thing would have been so dismal it couldn't have been anything else but art.

es: That seems depressingly cynical. After all it was only one person's response.

db: No, I think Marien Lewis probably represents A Space as well as anyone else. People would have seen it much more as an art event if I had presented it that way. They wouldn't have seen it in any of its other contexts: Theatre, fashion shows, performance art, musicals. I see it as a piece of art because I'm quite consciously synthesising all those aspects. I don't really care that much about the art thing, it's just for the record that's all. Anyone involved in performance is subject to their audience's approval, everyone wants to think that the work was accepted in the spirit in which it was created. I don't think I have an ideal audience except possibly a cross-section. I wanted theatre people there, people from the Parkside, from the dance scene, I wanted hairdressers, rock groupies, shopkeepers there and they were.



Angel Wells



Michael Robertson



Angel Wells

DOUGLAS ORD GEEK/CHIC or ALL DRESSED UP AND NOWHERE TO GO

Is there? I mean, once you've put on your bowling shirt or your jacket with the Indy 500 crests, is there really anywhere to go? Besides bowling or to the Indy 500 I mean. But maybe that's enough. Is it? Museums and libraries and art galleries (especially art galleries?) are pretty boring after all, aren't they? Not to mention laboratories and computer centres and offices. All of those Serious Spaces where it's everyone's business to be serious all the time. Blah.

How much more fun to get dressed up and pretend to be just another one of that big exuberant mob Out There. Or No. Not quite. Because the exuberant mob these days (Yonge Street style that is) is just so tediously and sanctimoniously jaded. Who needs that either. I mean, it was all right when there were only a few jaded people around, but now that languorous ennui is Entertainment Weekly's Posture of Choice for the Disco Scene it neither enriches the spirit nor sets you apart any longer, so who needs it. Much more interesting is . . . ah . . . Lost Innocence. Pure simple-minded innocence. Not to mention homely innocence. Cause now that Beauty has gone so institutional and accessible, what better way to cultivate La Difference than to be intentionally and conspicuously Homely. And what better preserve of the Homely, Ungainly, and Clumsy than . . . adolescence.

So that's what David Buchan's show was about. A celebration of the homely, the adolescent, the innocent. A repudiation of all the conventional standards of Chic. A succession of slides (many of which I now forget) showing David posed in various exemplary styles of the sixties and early seventies, suitable for discotheques, Sunday afternoons at the AGO, and punk rock pseudo-Armageddons. But culminating in, as the Style to end all styles, no style (or as David put it, no taste) at all.

Do yuh remember when yuh could get away wit that? I mean No Taste. Things were so much easier, and interesting, cause there was still this big clumsy exploration of the outside world going on. Back before you learned that the Answer was to be Proper and Fashionable in all things. Ahem. Away with all those toys, crests, collections, souvenirs of a (by now almost universally middle class childhood. We're steppin' into de world of high style translate Art. And you better believe that we're steppin' careful cause we don't want to make no mistakes.

Well Geek Chic takes care of that. In fact Geek Chic takes care of just about everything, being so ambiguous as to be almost all things to all people. Also sound ambiguous? Well take heed. See, the nice thing about dressing up in a bowling shirt/boy scout shirt/kar club jacket/United Church Youth for Christ sweater are:

i) the nifty thrill you get from reliving your very own childhood
ii) blending right in there with all those nice folks in the suburbs (like your parents) who didn't know what the hell you were doing ten years ago when you started growing your hair long and dropping acid. The centring of the nuclear family; social cohesion restored, etc, etc.

iii) still looking (& therefore being) different from all those turkeys who are still parading down to the discos in hordes to demonstrate their oh-so-perfectly coordinated but utterly mindless Hustle (or whatever. You know. The disco disco duck scene. Yeeh.) So fear not folks. There is still a visible profile to define your privileged space. (after all, who but one of us would wear a United Church Youth for Christ sweater?)

iv) (but anyway, to go on . . .) being able to Let Go, just the way the person you're pretending to be could Let Go if it were he

rather than you who was watching the 42nd lap of some Big Race (or other) at Mosport. You know? Cheering on your favourite driver, even though you don't really give a shit who wins, but it's more fun to pretend to give a shit rather than walking around blandly indifferent to the whole thing which is what you would do if you were a typical Art 'n' Kulture Snob. Or something like that. You get the idea though, don't you? I mean it does get pretty confusing sometimes. I know, like the whole question of, well am I really that person or not, cause, you know, it's kind of fun to be that person, watching an Argo football game, and cheering, or something, but I was also taught, shit, well it's pretty dumb to be that kind of person, and besides, football's pretty bloody and violent and all that, and cultured people shouldn't go to football games, but dammit! I like it & maybe I can just sneak down and go sometime without anybody seeing me . . . You know.

Well David Buchan's changed all that, thank God. Now we can indulge all of our adolescent, irresponsible, unpretty fascinations without feeling we've sold out to the Great Unwashed. I mean who can tell now if they see you going into the bowling alley on a Friday night whether you're doing in all out seriousness or in jest? And for that matter the more serious you look, the more successful your parody may be. Gets confusing, huh? Well it's all a matter of exchanged looks, and stifled giggles, and . . . But do you really take it seriously deep down inside? Do you? Cause I must admit that for me that is the kind of scary part of this whole thing.

I look back on my adolescence, and boy, yeah, I have to admit, was it ever geek. The high school dances in Beate boots and pencil thin tie. The gin guzzling from a paper bag at the back of the gym. Always fucking up in physed classes. The days and days and days in those stuffy classrooms. And of course the trembles and tremors and gasps and grunts, the sheer terror of a makeout session in the cramped back seat of the parents' car.

Oh yeah. My opinion until very recently that all of that was much better forgotten. After all, the times thereafter, being those of dope and travel, and the Real Thing always seemed so much more interesting. But now, like beauty, they're so accessible. Everybody's done everything, and is JADED. God. A breath of fresh air. Please. And by fresh air I don't mean stale, ultra-serious Culture. I want to enjoy myself for god's sake.

And so, in a funny way, what once seemed massively, often mortally embarrassing, is now merely quaint and rather endearing. Not to mention socially very successful. Cause it's nice to know that a lot of other people, who are (otherwise?) relatively intelligent were victims of mass culture to essentially the same degree as I was. We can relax together again, and maybe . . . be just what we are.

But the trouble is . . . I don't know who's putting me on either. I've been to a few parties where Geek Chic was in very high profile, and rather than everyone enjoying themselves by doing together some of the things that geeks seem to enjoy doing, they just lounged around playing the game that used to be called More Beautiful Than Thou, but that now seems to be called, simply, Homelier Than Thou. Oh God. Well I must admit that for me that's the boring (very boring) side of Geek Chic. Or actually, maybe what I'm saying is that the Chic part of Geek is a pain.

But David Buchan's show wasn't a pain. It was great, because somehow the degree of involvement in the game was tempered by just the right amount of detachment that said, Well we aren't really this dumb, but because we grew up in the time and place that we did, we're stuck. And if we're stuck we might as well enjoy it. The best part of the evening for me was the mouthed renditions of Gene Pitney, Lulu and Gary Lewis and the Playboys songs. Well it's nice to know that other people had the same fascination. That's definitely one that I've always been too embarrassed to talk much about. You know? Standing in front of the bathroom mirror, pretending to be Paul McCartney? But these people gave completely uninhibited command performances. Especially Murray Ball's version of Gene Pitney's Backstage. Complete with pink sequined suit and black tie. Bravo.

So most of the people who were there seemed to feel right at home, with the show and with each other's company. And yet, I still find myself bothered by a very old question. Has mass culture got us so by the balls that the most interesting and engaging entertainments we can come up with now are parodies. Because it still often feels as though we're only parodying ourselves, and with a vengeance. Is there anywhere else to go anymore? I don't know. There wasn't too much love in evidence at the Geek Chic performance, but there was a togetherness. Is that a beginning, or merely an end?



Bert Liffman

David Buchan

Lamonte Del Monte and The Fruit Cocktails



A report by Colin Campbell

The Dress Rehearsal

Lamonte Del Monte's "No More Bread and Butter" could well become the Canadian artists' (and landed immigrants') anthem in these days of cut-back, cut-off and cut-out. Never mind the toast and jam. We're getting down to basics. Take Lamonte's sets, for instance.

The recycled-one-more-time Dr. Brute Screen; the sets decorated in musical notes, stars and circles; the last three all painted in Day Glo. An involuntary shudder. Carefully painted in Day Glo. To look nice.

"Jeez, how much longer do we have to wait?"

A young Lauren Bacall look-alike husks the question.

Lamonte, looking up from blocking out the show with the camera crew:

"Soon. Please try to be patient."

"But I've been patient for three hours", she threatens, shifting her machine gun (plastic) to the other shoulder and walking off. Unruffled, Lamonte continues explaining the next shot.

The emcee looks up and tells Lamonte not to worry, that he's writing his intro speech for him

now.

"What am I saying?" queries Lamonte.

"Don't worry. I'll make you sound great," soothes Red Sublime.

"What are you wearing for your number?" (*Downtown* by Petula Clark. . . we remember her being moved to tears in the middle of singing *Fool on the Hill* on the *Ed Sullivan Show*).

"A pink polka-dot dress (chroma-keyed to the Day Glo sets). It has a big full skirt," replies Florida Sands. "Only, I haven't made it yet."

It is six hours before the performance.

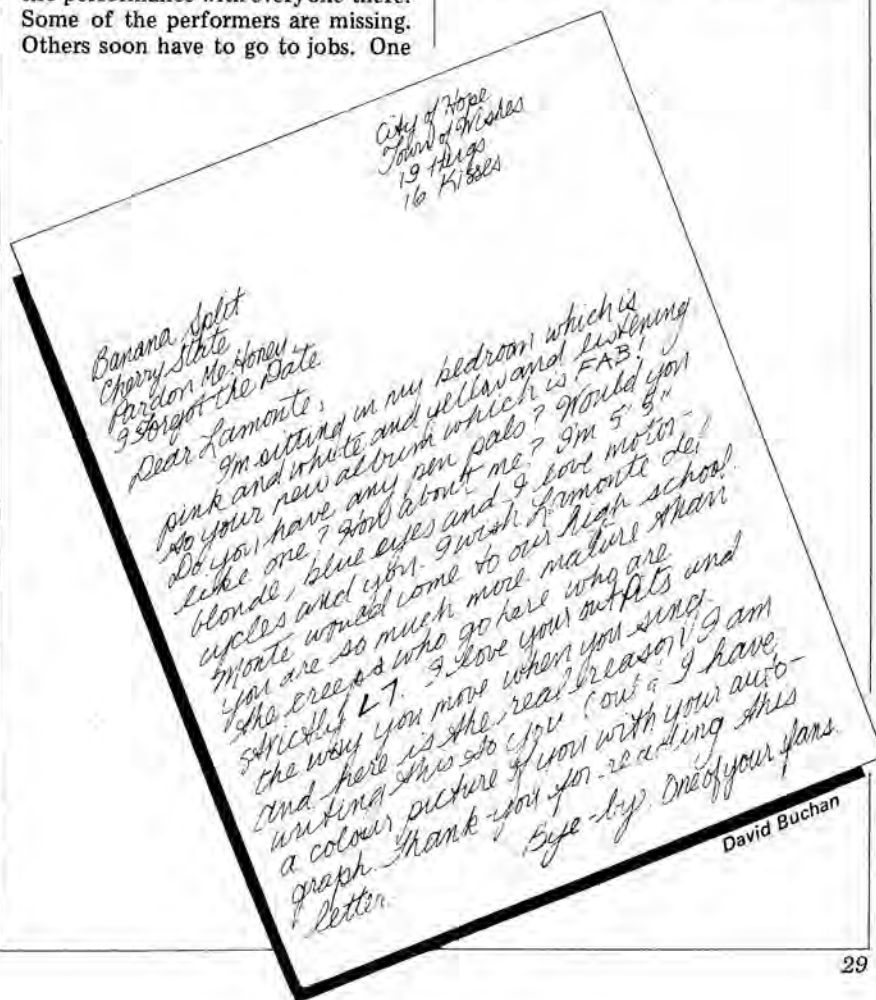
There are twenty-six people in the production (not counting the technicians), and Lamonte has not had a chance to run through the entire performance with everyone there. Some of the performers are missing. Others soon have to go to jobs. One

of the chorus girls has forgotten her machine gun in the washroom. Well, no, she can't get it because *The Clichettes* are rehearsing there. Admittedly, it could be a formidable errand to interrupt Elizabeth (*You Don't Own Me*) Chitty rehearsing in the washroom. The machine gun is retrieved by a braver soul.

"Just what kind of a show is this. . . like I mean, what could we use as a visual tie-in theme (a "bump-er" in T.V. lingo)?" the T.V. producer asks Lamonte.

"How about this?" offers Lamonte, holding up a little ceramic crock shaped like a man, and, crazily, looking like Lamonte. The head pops out. It is a cork.

Joanna Householder, the camera lights flashing off her 50's sun glasses,



comes out, does the splits, and tells Lamonte that the Clichettes have to do their rehearsal now because they have to leave in a moment, and would like to get the feel of the stage at least once. They do their number and leave.

Finally, the rehearsal begins. Emcee Red Sublime, an unnervingly accurate combination of *The Price Is Right* and Las Vegas' Circus Circus, warms up the as yet imaginary audience.

Three and one-half hours before the performance, Lamonte finishes

day," replies Peggy Gale drily, in response to why she wasn't on the other side of the door watching the video tapes playing before the performances. A.S.A. Harrison sends someone into the men's washroom to retrieve John. "He must have fainted or something." "Gee, I wonder how much longer those tapes are going to be playing?" inquires someone anxiously, peering through a crack in the door. "Don't worry, they'll just cut them off if they run overtime."

achieved by Clive Robertson and Tom Sherman's two performances. The audience is buzzing while the lights are up and the Day Glo sets are being positioned.

"I thought Clive's was just fabulous," says Ron Gabe.

"Tom has such a Lovely voice," says A.A. Bronson.

"Who is Lamonte, and what are the Fruit Cocktails?" asks Monique Belanger.

The Performance

Lights down.

Red Sublime, cheeks rouged, hair slicked back, and tongue greased, starts the show. He introduces Lamonte, who enters with an ease and charisma that speak of STARDOM. The gold lame vest and boots glisten, the peroxide hair shines. He's naughty.

"And these are my fruit cocktails." He drinks out of the look-alike crock. He's a tease.

"Just kidding folks, it's really fruit juice."

He's sexy.

"I'd like to change into something more uncomfortable," he says, indicating the black nylon pants that have cords gathering the material suggestively tight at the crotch, ass and ankle.

Red introduces Florida Sands. She appears in her very freshly made

The Clichettes



the second run-through, filling in for detained performers Murray (Privilege) Ball and Anya (My Heart Belongs to Daddy) Varda. Lamonte and Red decline an invitation to dinner:

"We have to do the cue cards."

Before the Performance

The lobby is filling up. Suzette Couture missed *Geek Chic*, and is excited at the chance to see David's new work. "I hope it's the first performance," she says hopefully. Lori Ental (one of the chorus girls) asks where the stage door is. "Can't see a THING without my glasses," she assures everyone. Suzy Lake, sporting new curls, offers a cheek (kiss), the other cheek (kiss), tells how she is showing Chantal Pontbriand and a friend around her new city. "And I don't even know where I am most of the time myself!" exudes Suzy, newly moved here from Montreal. "I've had my fill of video for to-

Rodney Werden



The tapes do run overtime. They cut them off.

Between Performances

The High Art context has been

Murray Ball and the Fruitcups

Lamonte Del Monte



pink polka-dot dress, lime green belt, matching green sun visor, for her rendition of *Downtown*. The version is more downtown than Petula ever intended. Murray Ball, who never did make it to a rehearsal, delivers a flawless *Privilege*. We empathise with the girls (The Fruitcups) swooning at his feet. The Clichettes do a dangerous, threatening and aggressively funny *You Don't Own Me*. Anya Varda, dressed in black on black, makes Marilyn Monroe's innocent version of *My Heart Belongs to Daddy* a rather disturbing idea. Just what is Daddy into?

Lamonte challenges all previous efforts at overcoming obstacles in communicating to the audience by singing *Going Out of My Head* in a strait-jacket. You try singing a song in a strait-jacket. To a corpse. He is positively touching as he bends over his recently, dearly departed. Then Lamonte Del Monte pulls out the stops, and stops the show with *Bread and Butter*, backed expertly by Michael LaCroix, Glenn Schellenberg and John Corbett. He is pure gold. Not only do we admire him. We want to BE him.

The performance ends with the chorus, eight girls in Scott Paper industrial paper suits doing precision formations to the strains of *Joker's Wild*. They finish crouched on the floor, plastic machine guns clicking noisily at the audience.

Red Sublime reads the credits and sends us all home.

Lights up.

After The Performance

Lamonte, now dressed down in a white sport coat and pink carnation, mingles with the thinning audience

Rodney Werden

accepting compliments, but there is not the adoring response that occurred when he was on the other side of the footlights.

Young woman:

"I loved the performance."

Companion nods in agreement.

("But you know, I'm a little put out by it.")

"Why?"

"Well, because I wish he'd asked me to perform. You see, deep down inside me, I know I'm really Connie Francis."

Afterthoughts

"You dress like a queerball," someone from out-of-town once said to David. And he wasn't wearing his gold lame boots. (It was the red sneakers that so inflamed her.) David's wardrobe is distinctive. So is his style. Surprised, then threatened by David's image, the young lady tossed off the intended insult to voice what she felt set him apart.

Some may be as taken aback by David's style as a performance artist.

Oddball Art as opposed to Serious Art.

Low Art as opposed to High Art.

I like it, I like it, I like it, but is it Art?

David dares to entertain his audiences. He announces his intentions. "We hope to be both entertaining and educational."

And then follows through.

As a rule, almost a law, performance art doesn't have to entertain. For fear of appearing low-brow, perhaps. Performance art requires an audience, one that is well behaved and silent. The performance artists, framed by the High Art context, like pictures on a wall, allow the audience to participate at the end. Simple applause would be most appropriate; no foot stomping, whistles or, heaven forbid, Standing Ouations. The new Chamber Art.

David, on the other hand, invites us to "Come on DOWN". His attention to detail, the layer upon layer of collage, the total transformation of the familiar to the new, attest to David's skill as an artist. Lamonte Del Monte and his Fruit Cocktails was produced on a two hundred dollar budget. Talk about bread and butter. A few more bucks, and ALL the chorus girls could have had gold lame boots ■

image nation

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In February 1978 Ben Holzberg and friends, with help from the Nightingale Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, Wintario, the Canada Council, National Museums and the Toronto Transit Company presented a unique photo exhibition entitled *The Rolling Landscape*. All overhead advertising was removed from a single subway car. 11 x 15-inch Ciba transparencies were made from fifty-two slides representing thirty-four photographers. The images represented a broad spectrum of sensibility from the absurd to the spectacular. The importance of this exhibition, however, is its token triumph of art over consumerism. The audience was a random selection of 50,000 surprised commuters, while countless art enthusiasts simply missed the train. Image Nation announces that it will publish as a double issue a complete catalogue of this exhibition in dazzling colour. The price of this issue after January 1, 1979 will be \$8.00. Order now and receive this collector's edition at a special pre-publication price of \$6.00.

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PREFACE

The Glenbow Museum is pleased to present the exhibition 'David Buchan: Modern Fashions', December 15, 1979 - February 10, 1980. The works in the exhibition were developed by David Buchan in response to our invitation to him to prepare a show of his wardrobe art. To our surprise and delight, what emerged was a new approach. In addition to creating his fanciful fashions, Buchan came up with the notion of presenting these new creations in the format of men's fashion advertisements complete with their own running commentary.

Thus, after designing the wardrobes, he modelled them for photographs which were used in the layouts of the ads and wrote the accompanying ad copy. For the exhibition, photo-murals were made from these layouts and displayed together with a selection of the clothing and an audio-visual presentation which chronicled some of his past designs. The same layouts that were used to produce the photo-mural panels for the exhibition were used in the production of this publication.

Not only a catalogue which documents works shown in the exhibition, this publication is equally Buchan's original art statement. In actual fact, this is an artist's book. Buchan originated the concept of presenting the work in a magazine format, was responsible for its design and, of course, for preparing and completing the layout of the ads.

We are extremely grateful to David Buchan for the inordinate amount of organizational assistance he offered to us during the preparation of this exhibition, which, in addition to the above-mentioned panels and displays, included his performance, 'The Lamonte Del Monte Story, Chapters One and Two', presented Saturday, December 15, 1979. It was Peter White's enthusiasm which guided the project and I wish to express my thanks to him and Joanne Carruthers for all their work on the exhibition.

This exhibition and publication were made possible through the kind assistance of the Canada Council.

Jeffrey J. Spalding
Curator of Art
Glenbow Museum

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DISSIDENTS WITH A DIFFERENCE

23-41

Clad in Kenzo corduroys with matching military shirts, bias belts and accesories, these boys mean business. Anti-leisure suits you might say.

Where are they coming from? Well, let's just say they represent the breakaway faction of the Fascists for Fashion Party.

What are they talking about? Tonight's meeting, of course.

Points of contention? Most of the evening's agenda - in particular the 'Death to Doubleknits' proposal, the 'Extermination of the Wallabee Factor' and the controversial 'No Panty Line' party line.

In any case, one thing is for sure. These guys are dressed to kill.



INTRODUCTION

Fashion. It is an integral part of our lives and our culture. Clothing signals a host of associations by which we can be identified. As the saying goes, we are what we wear. When the choice of clothing is imposed, for instance when jobs require uniforms, or when the uniform is a self-conscious creation, clothes are elevated to the level of style — the height of fashion. In such cases, clothes have broader implications. Not only are they a means by which the wearer identifies himself, but they are a barometer of the culture at that particular time. As one commentator has suggested, "... we think our dress expresses ourselves but in fact it expresses our environment and, like advertising, pop music, pulp fiction and second-feature films, it does so at a subliminal, emotionally charged, instinctual, non-intellectual level."¹ It is at this point, when clothes assume a metaphoric dimension, that David Buchan's wardrobe art begins.

Buchan's premise that clothes can signify such things as social values, intentions and meanings was first elucidated in a performance titled *Geek/Chic*. Based on the format of a fashion show, *Geek/Chic* presented a series of fictional characters, all played/modelled by Buchan, who were extensions of their clothing. As implied by the title of the piece, these were fashions for the unfashionable. Thus, for instance, in creating a prototype of a Bible school convert, Buchan marshalled an ensemble that included a Perry Como shirt, straight-legged slacks and a pair of polished oxfords.

Though the idea here is simple enough — the translation of clothes into other kinds of information — the effects were extraordinary. As AA Bronson has written, "clichés of the unfashionable were deftly manipulated into highly stylized costumes that were as much sculptural as they were ironic."² In objectifying such clichés, Buchan not only demonstrated the signifying powers of clothing, but in the process used the styles which resulted as the basis of powerful visual images, which, as Bronson also commented, were "the real motives for the exercise."³

The images convey an awareness that, by virtue of their attractiveness, we are captive to a host of external controls, socially and culturally determined, that compartmentalize our perceptions as neat mind-sets. In a depersonalized world of mass production, mass media and style without content we can in fact become extensions of what we wear. None of Buchan's characters can be thought of as real people. No condescension is implied; quite the opposite since, as nothing more than products of responses conditioned by their clothing, Buchan's geeks reflect not their unattractiveness but the shortcomings of the structures which make it possible to see them in this way. They are, to quote Bronson again, "decorative corpses inhabited by a program of action."⁴ Yet, adumbrated in these images is the presence of the artist whose sophisticated, witty and artful analysis and satire are contradicted by his compulsive need to play out the style whose implications he apparently is criticizing. The results are paradoxical, offering no easy resolution. What remains is the poignant dignity of the artist whose engagement with and acknowledgment of social realities preserves in some way his individuality, his humanity if you will.

Geek/Chic was followed by *Fruit Cocktails*, a performance starring Buchan's alter ego Lamonte Del Monte, a Las Vegas type of performer, strictly third-rate. Using the format of a variety show, Buchan deployed lip-synch and costume to evoke a fondly remembered but distant world of popular entertainment located somewhere between the late fifties and mid-sixties. For all its nostalgic appeal, self-deprecating insouciance and high entertainment value, *Fruit Cocktails* remained deadly earnest, once again reinforcing through the intercession of art the dichotomy between the individual and collectively prescribed responses. In *Fruit Cocktails*, Lamonte, his chorus line (in colour-coded paper dresses) and various guests dress and act in response to cues determined by the television script rather than their own talents and desires. In one memorable number, Lamonte, restrained by a straitjacket, lip-synchs 'Going Out Of My Head' over the prone body of a woman. 'Going Out Of My Head' sums up Buchan's attitude with disturbing concision. We are in bondage to structures which separate us from our desires and feelings, those things that make us human. Further, the very seductiveness of those structures raises the question of whether we have the ability, even if we have the will, to escape these bonds.

It was primarily with *Geek/Chic* and *Fruit Cocktails* in mind that I wrote the following about Buchan's work:

David Buchan's wardrobe art combines good humor with a highly perceptive kind of cultural reflexivity. Based on the assumption we are what we wear, he abstracts from popular



We all believe in magnetic personalities. We all believe that opposites attract, and likes repel. The mythology of the antonym is everywhere. These two fellows are as different as day and night, black and white, dark and light or wrong and right.

Au Contraire! contemporary fibres.

fashion to create "works of art." By identifying, glamorizing and blowing style up into a parody of itself, they focus consciousness on the self-consciousness, narcissism, tastelessness, easy gratifications and attractiveness of popular culture.

What makes his work especially ironic is his own love-hate relationship with his subject matter. His fascination with style, a drug to which he succumbs by nailing every arcane detail and nuance of the period style he happens to be investigating, is matched by a cool formality that reduces his fashions to pure, uninflected content. Thus, he is not only a willing archivist of style but its critic, removing the source of style's spell in order to call it into question.⁵

Buchan's art has not been limited to performance. Acting as his own model he has had his fashions photographed for reproduction. Several of the *Geek/Chic* pieces, for example, were published in *FILE* magazine (Spring, 1977). His involvement also extends to his work at Art Metropole, a centre for the distribution of artists' books, video and other materials, and the writing of art criticism.

A native of Grimsby, Ontario, Buchan started out as a painter. As a fine arts student at York University in the early seventies, his work had a strong Pop slant, incorporating song lyrics and related kinds of imagery. In 1972 he moved to Montreal where he stopped making aesthetic objects. During the three years he was there, Buchan produced charts, made on blueprint paper, which plotted the relations and interconnections of friends and acquaintances. From these simple structures he moved on to complex webs in which arrangement was based on such specified sub-categories as geographic location, time, occupations, sexual preferences. "Looking at those structures, it was possible to see that they represented a particular appearance or style," Buchan says. Thus the charts suggested to him that it was possible to use life, a flowing, shifting thing which takes on different forms depending on how you looked at it, as the raw material with which to make artistic statements. In so far as they drew on facts of the contemporary world rather than the imagination, genre subjects or emotions for content, the charts were related to his interest in Pop. However, unlike Pop, which memorialized popular imagery in terms of the history of modern formalist painting, Buchan's charts drew on these facts for what they offered themselves. Paradoxically, rather than personal style, his objectives were psychological, sociological and even anthropological in nature.

Though made in relative isolation, the charts were in step with the work of many artists who at this time were rejecting traditional art forms. While the charts may not have had a point on them, the work of these artists did. Implicit in their efforts was a critique of the pose and artifice that separates 'high' art from life and the artist from his or her world. In its place they offered an art grounded in the myths and mores of contemporary culture, seeking through this confrontation with reality to make art relevant to its own times.

When he returned to Toronto in 1975, Buchan soon became associated with a number of artists involved in these developments. Among them was the group General Idea, whose work was generative (as it continues to be) for the attitudes and activities of many artists. Through *FILE*, its take-off of *LIFE* magazine, and its Miss General Idea beauty pageant, General Idea co-opted for its own purposes the mechanisms which sanction power in contemporary society and thus determine how we view reality. In one piece, their dealer, acting as their spokesman, is interviewed in front of a fragment of the hoarding for their 1984 Miss General Idea pavillion. "We have expended as much energy," he explains, "erecting the hoarding for the media as we have in erecting it on real estate. It has to be real before they report it, but it is not really real until they do. . . ." In General Idea's analysis, the glamour generated by mass media and public spectacles becomes a symbol for the shallowness and emptiness inflicted on contemporary life by those structures. General Idea's use of the structures ultimately amounts to the only practical way to deal with such a world, for to ignore it would be to be destroyed by it. Thus, they ironically turn popular culture back on itself, filling it with their own prescriptive content in order both to expose it and glamorize themselves, the latter as a means to insure their survival as artists.

Contact with General Idea would seem to have been important for Buchan. Though his position is not as all-encompassing as theirs, it is rooted in a similar



We all believe birds of a feather flock together. Like father, like son. 'Peas in a pod' as it were. We all believe in brotherly love and complementary relationships. One's better half is logically one's twin, like these two fellows. After all - beauty is only kin deep.

Au Contraire!

contemporary fibres.

If the shoe fits . . .

There's no business like shoe business. What could be more basic wardrobe-wise than the article of apparel that acts as the interface between you and your ground. Assuming we start at the bottom and work up, no expense should be too great in selecting the ultimate foundation garment. Here's a few samples of available stock, the latest in support structures.



. . . Wear it!

What kind of man are you? Look around – see anything you like? Do you know what model you'd like for your own? How about a Gucci Loafer or a Tennis Sneaker? We've all had experience with Bedroom Slippers, or wanted to walk on Cuban Heels. It's time you made a choice, got off those platforms and got down to Earth-shoes. We've got just your type.



criticism of existing social structures and a concomitant fascination with the images and clichés they yield. Both General Idea and Buchan use such structures for the communication of their own point of view. This approach is based on a shared belief that these structures, which have more than proven their effectiveness, provide instant context. Audiences already are familiar with them and they are entertaining. Like General Idea's, Buchan's work is characterized by a good-natured iconoclasm. Puns, exaggeration, high camp and satire are employed to counter the seriousness of our most deeply held cultural beliefs, as well as that of his own art.

If General Idea was instrumental in helping Buchan focus his desultory ideas, a series of performances by women artists provided direct inspiration. Many of his own ideas are reflected in a review of these pieces that he wrote for *VIE DES ARTS* magazine.

The preformed cultural phenomena of fashion shows, ice follies, wedding ceremonies, cabaret entertainments or dime-store-novel plots determines the shape the events take, the raw material out of which the fabric of the work is made. The artists, writing words for their characters to speak, creating clothing for them to wear, choreographing their movement, virtually take over their bodies to mobilize their own ideas, with the intention of creating finished works that bear witness to their personal visions. Drawing heavily upon theatrical convention, the over-all quality of the work tends to be conceptual in nature, using established styles of information presentation to house newly-designed and reshaped content. The actual performing of the pieces is laden with reference to the intention of the work, but usually cloaked behind an ironic translation of the original intention of the genre.⁶

In terms of his interest in fashion, *Glamazon*, a three-act fashion show created and performed by Dawn Eagle and Granada Gazelle, was particularly important. "Glamazon," he wrote, "recreates the runway fashion show format to make its point — using sewing patterns as 'blueprints of former times' to document how women saw themselves and were seen."⁷ Elsewhere in his discussion of *Glamazon*, Buchan analyzes, in terms that parallel his own approach, how fashion can be raised to the level of metaphor in order that individuals be represented as images or stereotypes.

This salute to synthetics in words and material is based on colour, line, symmetry, structure, proportion and style — quite formal in its concerns. It reflects the inspiration and technical proficiency of its creators. Forty such pieces, diverse in appearance, all wearable sculptures, found objects, are capable of generating atmosphere on their own. They are accessorized by the model, the script, the sound track, everything in fact. Life-styles as extensions of clothing, instead of the opposite. As historical pieces they are resurrected and inhabited. The choice of patterns made from over two hundred collected and assembled by the artists, represents a selection of feminine personas — the housewife, school girl, debutante, career girl, sensuous plaything and jaded, somewhat faded beauties. They are brought back to life with the invocation of departed aesthetics, with the help of the corresponding fetish objects.⁸

Buchan's thought, method and subject matter are obviously very close to these artists but his vision differs. As is evident from his work, he is caught in a set of conflicting demands with right on both sides.

The photo-murals Buchan has created for his exhibition at Glenbow, all of which are reproduced in this publication, represent his most ambitious work outside the medium of performance. Men's fashion advertisements are recreated (all but three based on actual ads from *Esquire* magazine 1959-1963) in order to sell not actual products but Buchan's own aesthetics and ideas. Continuity with his past efforts is maintained. For instance, he once again uses an established structure from the world of popular culture and both parodies and pays it homage. As well, while the ideas are serious, they are presented in an amusing and entertaining fashion.

But the scope of this work is much broader. The underlying principle of his art, the idea that clothes can be used as metaphors for larger social and cultural realities, not only is retained but, because the devices and conventions of advertising are so well understood, is pushed to new levels of elaboration. As a whole, the ads constitute a statement about the structure of advertising, which, Buchan hopes, will draw attention to both the positive and negative aspects of the form. Individually, each ad represents a separate statement. Subjects dealt with range from art, misogyny and language to the tendency of the avant-garde to be as doctrinaire in its thinking as anyone else. What emerges is a comprehensive picture of Buchan's concerns both as an artist and person. Some of these are familiar. *Attention Please* restates that in life as in art, style determines meaning. Other ideas are new and would seem to have cropped up as a consequence of using the format of advertising. *Au Contraire*, for instance, investigates what Buchan terms the mythology of the antonym. "... I was always interested in the myth that things could be reduced so simplistically to black and white, good or bad, rich or poor, male or female. When you see things simplistically as one thing or another an implicit value judgment is being made." When options are presented in this way, the grey area between black and white is not taken into account.

Throughout the pieces, Buchan elaborates the notion that advertising is a language of partial seduction. He has said it became apparent to him that advertisers do not go all the way with their pitches. "They have to convince you to fall for this product but also to part with it at a later date. So, in a way, there's a certain casualness that's incorporated into the selling process." Likewise, Buchan neither believes implicitly in the goals of fashion advertising nor can he discount its validity or effectiveness because of the large impact it has on our lives.

To many of us such a contradiction would constitute an impasse. For Buchan it is an opportunity. The success of an advertisement depends on the viewer's ability to identify with the central character and the appeal of the situation. If you can't identify with the model presented, the ad doesn't work. By projecting himself as the persona of the main character in all of these ads, Buchan accepts the implicit invitation of advertising to play out the roles of these glamorous, fictitious characters. Thus through his interjection the viewer is allowed to share this vicarious experience. However, because he is so unlikely a candidate for these roles, as are we all, the humorous gesture is not without its critical side. By turning himself into a stereotype, as he has in all of his work, he is able to point out the manipulative and dehumanized nature of these nevertheless highly attractive structures.

Peter White
Assistant Curator of Art

FOOTNOTES

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3. *Ibid*
4. *Ibid*
5. White, Peter, "A Love/Hate Thing With A Wardrobe", *Toronto Globe and Mail*, September 8, 1978.
6. Buchan, David, "Artists in Residence: Women's Performance Art in Toronto", *VIE DES ARTS*, Spring 1977, p. 86.
7. *Ibid*, p. 87.
8. *Ibid*.

Men like you like *Semantic* T-shirts!



Going down? Perfect for all kinds of watersports. Get below the surface – get to the bottom of things in this outfit designed with total immersion in mind.



Tennis anyone? A bit of the old back-and-forth? In this dialogue with balls, it's not important who serves, but the quality of the exchange.



Our jocks are tops. Play ball, go for a long one, he shoots – he scores. Catch my drift? At any rate, in this game, it's three stripes and you're out.



This self-reflexive statement of the nature of compulsive self-identification in the latest style in self-addressing. His fetish, why the Semantic T-shirt!

Tell them who you are. When you've got something to say, don't just say it – wear it! No one likes to go unnoticed, and what better way of saying look at me than a sign. Logo Boys dancing to today's beat.

FIVE O'CLOCK SHADOWS.

As darkness approaches, one's thoughts turn to the evening. Where to go, what to do, and ultimately what to wear. After the major decisions have been made, after the cake has been baked, it's time to think about the icing. Clothes may make the man, but the accessories make the clothes. It's the little things that mean a lot.

So . . . when it's time to tie one on, remember it's not just what you wear, it's what you knot.

Controlled Neckwear . . . ties that bind.



Cam-o-flage® BRAND UNDERWEAR

brief encounters of the
wunderkind . . .



Now you see it, now you don't.
When you're looking for
something that's hard to find, that
looks like it isn't there, look
again.

Blending into one's surroundings
and chameleon-like behaviour are
prerequisites for living in the
modern world. Being able to
change one's colours or spots
allows for controlled visibility.
Destroy that fine line between the
inside and the outside to achieve
maximum homogeneity.

Cam-o-flage®
Understatements you'll
understand.

DAVID BUCHAN

PERFORMANCE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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TORONTO DANCE FESTIVAL,
TORONTO WORKSHOP PRODUCTIONS
ONE WEEK ENGAGEMENT
TORONTO, ONT.
- 1977 FEB. 7 *GEEK/CHIC*
THE WESTERN FRONT
VANCOUVER, B.C.
- FEB. 9 *GEEK/CHIC*
THE PARACHUTE CENTER
FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS
CALGARY, ALTA.
- MAY 20 *GEEK/CHIC*
FOREST CITY GALLERY
LONDON, ONT.
- MAY 25 *GEEK/CHIC*, WITH FULL CAST
THE CRYSTAL BALLROOM,
THE KING EDWARD HOTEL
TORONTO
- 1978 JAN. 19 *GEEK/CHIC*
ARTSPACE GALLERY
PETERBOROUGH, ONT.
- SEPT. 8 *FRUIT COCKTAILS*
TELEPERFORMANCE SERIES,
FIFTH NETWORK CONFERENCE
THE MASONIC TEMPLE
TORONTO
- OCT. 13 *FRUIT COCKTAILS* (EXCERPTED)
'HIGH PROFILE',
GENERAL IDEA'S TENTH ANNIVERSARY
CN TOWER
TORONTO
- DEC. 30 *THE LAMONTE DEL MONTE STORY*,
CHAPTER ONE
'RAID', A BENEFIT FOR THE BODY POLITIC
THE DREAM FACTORY
TORONTO
- 1979 JAN. COLLABORATION WITH COLIN CAMPBELL
MODERN LOVE
VIDEOTAPE, B/W, SOUND, 80 MIN.
PRODUCED IN TORONTO
- MARCH 7 *DRESSING FOR TURKEYS*
THE ANNEX, THE ONTARIO COLLEGE OF ART
TORONTO
- JUNE 2 *THE LAMONTE DEL MONTE STORY*,
CHAPTER ONE
'RECENT PASTS', A SPACE DANCE SERIES
HARBOURFRONT
TORONTO
- DEC. 7 *DEAR DIARY*
THE ARTHUR STREET GALLERY
WINNIPEG, MAN.
- DEC. 8 *THE LAMONTE DEL MONTE STORY*,
CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO
THE ARTHUR STREET GALLERY
WINNIPEG
- DEC. 15 *THE LAMONTE DEL MONTE STORY*,
CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO
GLENBOW MUSEUM
CALGARY
- DEC. 29 *THE LAMONTE DEL MONTE STORY*,
CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO
HALL WALLS GALLERY
BUFFALO, N.Y.

ROOTS

LAMONTE DEL MONTE'S FAMILY TREE

GINO DEL MONTE

Gino Del Monte was one of the black sheep of the family. Partially because of his disinterest in the arts, and partially because of his interest in billiards, he was rarely invited to family functions. At the age of thirteen, Gino found himself in a pool room brawl, in big trouble (which starts with T, which rhymes with P which stands for POOL). He lost a tooth or two, incurred a few scars, and never was forgiven by his mother, the pious Ramona Del Monte. Disgusted by his mother's rejection, Gino took to a life of crime, slashing the tires of anything but Italian cars, beating up on kids half his size, and necking at drive ins. It was often thought that if Gino had spent more time with Monty, he might have developed a taste for the finer things in life, and once or twice Monty did try and take Gino to the ballet but Gino never stopped talking about what fruits he thought they all were, and no amount of training it seemed, would turn Gino into the culture vulture cousin Lamonte was.

LAMONTE DEL MONTE

Here we see a side (or bottom, as it were) of Monty rarely captured on film. Monty's passions were many, as were his vices. Alcohol and cigarettes rated quite highly, with television and sex close behind. This shot, taken on location at the No-Tell Motel, after one of Monty's Hoolywood style parties, typifies the sordid behaviour exhibited by the man known to most people as "Mr. Show Business". A great deal of effort was expended by Monty trying to squash the release of this hot photo, but as we all know, the modern media know no bounds, and as always, sensationalism takes precedence over good taste. The photographer of this pic however managed to remain anonymous and the exact nature of the activities of the party at Monty's trailer parked behind the motel is not known.

HERNANDO DEL MONTE

Hernando, known by most as 'The Count' was responsible for several of Olga's children, and though no one knows exactly which ones, it is suspected he was Monty's dad. Lamonte grew up thinking of the Count as 'Pop', and Hernando never led him to think otherwise. Both exhibited a love of song and dance, and an occasional dip in the pool. Pictured at right, we see them together, in water over their head. Although Monty's Dad spent a great deal of time 'up the river', Olga never referred to her husband's absence as anything other than extended business trips. One of the most colourful members of the Del Monte clan, The Count never ceased his encouragement of Monte's desire to make a career in the entertainment industry, something he secretly longed for himself. Although it has never been proven, it is rumoured that some of Hernando's prison connections landed Monty his first job at a roadside cafe not far from the pen Pop was in at the time.

BOBBETTE, BABETTE AND YVETTE

Once while visiting her brother in Trois Rivières, Olga had what you might call a little fling with one of the local fiddlers. After fiddling with him, she found herself with not one, not two, but three little bundles of joy on the way. She named them Bobbette, Babette and Yvette, after the three dogs the fiddler kept, and trained them in much the same way she trained Monty. It was just a matter of time before all four of them were rehearsing in the basement, Monty doing lead vocals, and the girls Bop-Bop-Shoo-Bopping in the back-ground, illustrating Monty's clever lyrics with their supple bodies. Whenever possible, Monty used them - either live, or in the studio. It was just a matter of time unfortunately until they were discovered in a brasserie in Quebec, and given their own recording contract. All three have become household words in La Belle Province, and make a mean Tortière.

OLGA DEL MONTE (NEE DUMBROWSKI)

At an early age, someone once told Olga that all the world's a stage. She never forgot it, and soon after puberty struck she devoted herself to becoming the best (if not most prolific) stage mother in show biz history. She travelled the continent, selecting the cream of the crop to sire her children, with the intention of assembling a family as talented as the Mormon Tabernacle choir, and almost as large. Olga, after having her last child, settled down on Toronto's fashionable Queen Street West where she can be found at the world renowned 'Olga's House of Beauty'. Here we catch a glimpse of her doing two of her favourite things - ironing Monty's shirts and hitting the bottle.

THE DITCH KIDS

One sunny summer Sunday, Monty's dad was driving back into town from a visit to his probation officer when he fell asleep at the wheel of his '57 Dodge. Tragedy ensued when he sideswiped the car of a family returning from a weekend visit to their cottage in Muskoka. Killing all but two members of the family who were safely hurtled into a nearby ditch, Hernando was mortified. Out of a sense of guilt he persuaded Olga to adopt the two little darlings who seemed to have a talent for the dance. Within weeks, with the help of their great Aunt Tootie they had mastered the art of the Samba, the Bossa Nova and numerous other exotic steps. They were always a hit at Family Gatherings and Edd and little Wendell brought great joy into the hearts of many.

DOTTY DUMBROWSKI

Dotty came into the Dumbrowski family in a very special way. Due to a mix-up at the hospital, Tootie was given the wrong baby to take home. After the situation was rectified, Tootie couldn't get little Dot out of her mind. A brief conversation with Dotty's family led her to discover she was in fact available. Her parents it seemed had had their hearts set on a little boy, and here so disappointed at discovering the gender of the new arrival, that a cheque for \$21.95 from Tootie was all they needed to allow the transfer of the baby to the Dumbrowski family. Gus and Dot grew up together, and based on their mutual interest on clothes and dressing up, Dot became Gus' second in command when he returned from Paris to start his own label. Dotty had a flair for colour, and brightened up more than one family gathering over the years.

RICK LE VAIN

The only member of the Del Monte clan to spurn the golden name (that was fast becoming a synonym for talent) was the ubiquitous Rick Le Vain. A wild and crazy guy, Rick was the only combination stand-up-comic/hairdresser the family produced. Whether cracking them up at the saloon, or curling them up in the salon, Rick was a ladies' man. When Olga needed an assistant with a twist, to keep 'em coming back at her famed House of Beauty, she picked Ricky. It was often wondered where Rick picked up this talent, and his ambidextrose nature lent itself well to the parlour. Soon he found he could apply curlers deftly with one hand, and do Liberace impersonations with the other. One always knew Rick was on the job when one passed Olga's House of Beauty by the shrieks of laughter coming from within. Some claimed it was the combination of perm solution and brandy Rick served the girls, but most people knew it was just Rick's way with a word.

RAMONA DEL MONTE

Sister to Hernando Del Monte (the darker side of the family) Ramona was some sort of star from the word go-go. A performer since her earliest days she soon found work as an exotic dancer, most noted for her searing 'Dance of the Seven Bags', a Salome-on-Wry treatment of an old but classic theme. Ramona soon however left the world of Dance, for the world of Art, branching out into Performance, and multiples. Her exhibit "Ramona's Got a Brand New Bag" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, got rave reviews in everything from Artforum to Shoppers Daily. Her Performance work soon took to the streets, and Ramona's accomplishments in the world of art were not outdone by her work in the world of artifice. Here we see her with one of her 'Uptown Installations'.

MOOCH DUMBROWSKI

There is very little which can be written about Moch that can't be found scrawled on bathroom walls. A veteran drinker and shuffleboard player, he spent most of his waking hours (and some of his sleeping hours, too) at local public houses. Much to his loving wife's chagrin, Moch managed to squander most of his paycheck at the Rex, practising for the next Shuffleboard Tournament. His team often did very well, and travelled out of town on occasion. This allowed Moch once the opportunity of visiting Las Vegas, and Moch came back full of stories. Most of the stories were about the shows, but some of them were about the showgirls. Monty would sit on his knee listening to the stories of Moch's glamorous sallies into the outside world, and dreamed of one day doing the same.

MARILYN MUNSTER DEL MONTE

Marilyn was the kind of girl everybody liked. She was polite, charming, witty and never got pregnant. Something which was to keep her name pure as the driven snow, despite what only a handful of strangers knew. Sister to Gino, she picked up several of his bad habits, not to mention most of his buddies. Careful to keep her name clean however, she managed to lead a double life, teaching Sunday School on the weekend, and partying during the week. A big fan of Yvonne de Carlo's she adopted Munster as her middle name after becoming obsessed with sixties T.V. Unlike her slimy brother Gino, she did like the ballet, and spent many hours perfecting her own little choreographed numbers which were often based on articles of furniture. One of her best known pieces, illustrated here, was a searing portrayal of what life might be like, if you were a lamp.

LITTLE LUCY DEL MONTE

One of the most amazing of the progeny to spring from Olga's womb, was the multi-talented Little Lucy. Not knowing whether to become a painter or a dancer, at which she was both extremely and equally proficient, Little Lucy decided to combine her skills and do both at once. One of the youngest, if not smallest performance artists to come out of Canada, Lucy soon found herself the toast-of-the-town wherever she went. Dancing and painting for people all over the world, she became known as the Van Gogh Gogh Girl. Her older brother Monty thrilled at her success, and often had Little Lucy open for his act, if the club was appropriate. This unbeatable combo gave Olga no end of pleasure, and there were times when Olga thought she had died and gone to heaven.

GUS DUMBROWSKI

When Aunt Tootie discovered little Gus was on the way, she started a little bank account. Gus would never be deprived of an education, and from day one, he was tutored in all things classy. His flair for fabric soon found him in the salons of Gay Paree, when he met the very best the world of Haute Couture had to offer. Upon his return to Toronto, he started his own label and opened the now famous House of Gus. Mister Gus became synonymous with style, and no woman in her right mind ever thought of saying no to an original from the most chi-chi boutique in town. Whether it was his fabulous creations for evening, or his line of polyester bowling clothes, you weren't anybody unless you were dressed by Gus. Seen here relaxing in the foyer of his salon, Gus shows as much taste in his furnishings as he does in his wardrobe.

CHESTER DEL MONTE

Chester Del Monte, one of the most favoured of the nephews among the aunts is Lamonte's younger cousin (by only ten months), and twice removed. This subtle distance in blood relations fortunately allowed a friendship to foster when the boys were younger and holidayed together at Sauble Beach; memories Chester cherishes to this day. As puberty passed and the boys grew to be teenagers, a small rivalry developed between them. This competitive edge is to this day often apparent and at times puts the two cousins at loggerheads with each other and is further enticed by the intensely proud and determined nature they both possess.

Chester, recently left home, to set up his own pad, and when not 'basking' it with the guys, he works at a freezer manufacturing plant and has his eyes set on marriage in the near future to a pretty young thing named Connie.

RUDI DEL MONTE

Rudi Del Monte was a son born to Lamonte's Polish mother and an unknown father. He grew up unknown to Lamonte's father, and Olga thought that young Rudi had been safely adopted by some other couple, because he remained out of sight all through Lamonte's childhood. Imagine her surprise, (not to mention Lamonte's) when, on no less than the Ed Sullivan Show, they found themselves watching a tacky Elvis imitator called Rudi Del Monte. Lamonte was outraged by the thought of his surname being used by this no-talent blimp, but when Lamonte wanted to press charges his mother had to tell him the truth. Rudi actually did have a string of hits during Elvis' G.I. period, including that golden classic, PERU IN DECEMBER/TWIS ONE'S ON ME. However, Rudi became spiritually dissatisfied by pop culture, and its' payola morality and decided to one-up Pat Boone and Cliff Richard and become ordained as a minister. At the present moment Rudi Del Monte's parish is that of the First Methodist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, U.S.A.

AUNT TOOTIE DUMBROWSKI

Aunt Tootie, or Toots as most of the family called her was Olga's aunt, and wife of the infamous Mooch. Her hobbies included needlepoint, Scrabble, Bingo, dog baiting and baking, when in the mood. Tootie loved Xmas, which was when she baked most. Nothing gave her more pleasure than sprinkling red sugar on the Santa cookies, and passing them out among her family during the festive season. A sucker for corny movies, and President of the local chapter of the Ronald Colman Fan Club she took young Monty to the movies frequently probably helping to shape his final choice of careers. She firmly believed in pointing children in the right direction, and actively involved herself in many of the Del Monte children's future. In order to raise extra money for major appliances, Tootie gave tap dancing lessons in her basement, and taught a bit of baton twirling on the side. People often wondered about her relationship with her husband Mooch, but patience was one of her virtues.

COUSIN FRED

Fred Dumbrowski, son of Tootie and Mooch loathed his home life, primarily because of Mooch's foul language, foul behaviour and foul play. He left home at a very early age to find a life for himself in the arts. He remembered hearing "Go West" once and decided if it was good enough for someone else, it was good enough for him. He settled in Saskatoon, where there seemed to be an abundance of artists, and began painting his favourite thing - barns. His work, although primitive captured the hearts of many, and soon Fred was showing his works in galleries throughout Saskatchewan. Many restaurants liked Fred's work, too. Fred did not make what you would call a bundle selling his work, but soon found he could exchange his paintings of barns for credit in the local greasy spoons of these quaint Western towns. When the walls of these same joints became full Fred would move; consequently Fred became the best known artist in the province, and whenever Monty's travels took him to the west, Fred showed him a real good time.

AUNT LULU, THE COUNTESS

Sister to Hernando Del Monte, Lulu had a penchant for wealth. Since there was no money in the Del Monte family, Lulu had to go elsewhere to find it. She did, on several occasions. Her first husband, although not titled was filthy rich. The marriage lasted three years, until he met with an unfortunate accident driving on the French Riviera. Her second husband, the Count of Argent, whom she met several days before her first husband's untimely death, had as much money, and Royal Blood, to boot. This arrangement lasted for sometime, and allowed Lulu to acquire all the luxuries of life: jewels, furs, dresses from the House of Gus, and some of the best connections possible. One of these connections became her third husband who allowed her to keep the money she inherited from the first two, and her title. Lulu is now living on the Continent, and is the biggest shareholder in Del Monte Enterprises, Monty's personal business venture.

MONICA DUMBROWSKI

Almost everyone in the Dumbrowski family was good at something (except Mooch, who was good for nothing). Monica was especially good with numbers, and shone in school when adding and subtracting were being taught. She soon found herself reading books on accounting in her spare time, and longed to have the letters C.A. after her name. Not a party girl, Monica would spend long nights tallying figures, practising long division, and saving up for that gorgeous adding machine in the Sears catalogue. Monica became so good at Math in High School she was voted Most Likely to Succeed, and on the basis of this wonderful award, got a scholarship to go and study Accounting in her family's old country, Poland. Four years of diligence saw her graduate Summa Cum Laude from Cracow U. Upon her return to the New World, she managed Monty's complicated finances, and became very close to him. She was often seen on Monty's arm at gala premieres, and there were stories about weekends in Lewiston, but nothing could be proven.

UNCLE RENE

The youngest of Monty's mother's ten brothers, Rene Le Prix was brought up in Trois Rivières. Apprenticed to an electrician, he was soon bored of the trade, and took up electric accordion with a country and western band (much to the consternation of his family). At the age of 22, he was given a copy of Brecht's Mahagonnie by a wizened steel guitar player from Drummondville, and "ça m'a changé la vie". From that day on his days and nights were spent feverishly composing and playing satirical songs for accordion, bass and automatic drummer, about the life and times of an arsonist (resembling Rene himself) rampant in a small French-Canadian community (suspiciously like Trois Rivières). When a fire broke out at the Molson's Brewery, it coincided with the drying up of his bookings, and Rene shipped his wares south: on the Toronto-bound Greyhound. Installed on the local circuit as "Ronnie Price and the Firebrands", he can be heard anywhere from the Rondon Tavern to the Edgewater Inn, singing his torchsongs in French for the truckstop-and-heartache brigade, who don't understand a word and usually buy him a few rounds afterwards.

RAYMOND DEL MONTE

Monty's youngest brother Raymond was the only athlete in the family. The Xmas Raymond turned sixteen, he requested a ping-pong table, with the intention of finding a niche for himself in the highly competitive Del Monte tribe. Not particularly interested in music, art or dance, he found his forte one weekend when snowed in at the YMCA in Detroit, where he had gone to see the Chinese team thoroughly destroy the team from the U.S. After this earth shattering event, he devoted his life to ping-pong. He ate ping-pong, he drank ping-pong, he slept ping-pong. This interest lasted throughout his entire life until one day, while ping-ponging in Winnipeg he slipped on a Hershey Bar wrapper and lost the sight of one eye. He is currently living in Brandon where he is a Fuller Brush Man, and part time nudist.

DELBERT DEL MONTE

Very little is known about Lamonte's twin brother Delbert. Kept out of sight as a child, it wasn't long before little Delbert was shipped off to Orillia, to be with other children with similar disabilities. His learning handicap did not prevent him from making friends however and Delbert soon became one of the more popular boys at the institution. On his eighteenth birthday, he left the home for a job in a sheltered workshop in the Ottawa Valley. Assembling the pieces for model car kits for Cub Scout use made him very happy, but nothing made Delbert happier than a trip to the fire station. Monty, as kind a brother as Delbert could want would visit once a year, and take Delbert to the fire station of his choice.

PUBLICATIONS

Casual But Continuous

DAVID BUCHAN

Modern Fashions, exhibition at Glenbow Museum, Calgary. Dec. 15, 1979 - Feb. 10, 1980. Catalogue, 20pp. 1979. \$4.00 reviewed by Clive Robertson

This catalogue prepared and designed by David Buchan has a sub-title "Modern Fashions or An Introduction to the Language of Partial Seduction". Buchan is a self-described "wardrobe artist" which implies clothing but not advertising. The work that Buchan presented at the Glenbow consisted largely of photo-murals based on men's fashion advertisements, most from *Esquire* 1959-63. As such "Modern Advertising" though less 'catchy' could have been a more appropriate title. Buchan's fashion is high street-fashion that follows a twenty-year tradition of the artist having the ideas but not the money. The result produces schizophrenic alliances between the empty but clever patron — the boutique

owner — and the artist. Of course not all street fashion comes from 'creative' minds which adds to the cultural wealth to be plundered.

Buchan is underestimated as either a wardrobe artist or a performance artist. He is a determined archivist of popular culture, perhaps a "modern anthropologist". The advertising panels are the more effective aspects of Buchan's work — his objectivity here is clear whereas in some of his performances (see "Fruit Cocktails" *Centerfold* Vol.3 No.1), wish fulfillment often overcomes his capabilities.

The catalogue opens with an unfortunate but perhaps obligatory preface by Jeff Spalding, Curator of Art, Glenbow Museum who in an irritating manner, receives credit for saying nothing. The catalogue has an introduction by the actual curator of the show, Peter White, who writes a re-assuring (for the patrons) if not quite adequate history of Buchan and his work.

The most glaring omission is a

discussion of gay content within the work. All of the ad's are loaded with gay humour, the exception being "Take Her Breath Away" which White hints at as being misogynous. On top of the humour there are further incitements, e.g. at the bottom of the "Men Like You Like Semantic T-Shirts" ad the copy reads: "Tell them who you are. When you've got something to say, don't just say it — wear it! No one likes to go unnoticed, and what better way of saying look at me than a sign. Logo Boys dancing to today's beat."

White's diversion seems more related to proving that Buchan's work is art which somehow must be taken for granted if it appears at the Museum. Buchan like other gay artists in Canada appears hesitant to be identified with any gay liberation movement as if it would somehow simplify or too easily categorise his work. On the other hand as current examples of gay culture (a gay critique of such artists is long overdue) such focus need not be downplayed. Needless to say the gay struggle continues even if the artists can survive and succeed in a straight society. As Peter White writes: "What emerges is a comprehensive picture of Buchan's concerns both as an artist and person."



(left) A full-page advertisement from an early *Esquire* magazine. (right) In *Modern Fashions*, Buchan's up-dated view is full of gay humour. (top left) "Going down? Perfect for all kinds of watersports. Get below the surface - get to the bottom of things in this outfit designed with total immersion in mind."

SAFETY FILM 8017 KODAK SAFETY

FEBRUARY/MARCH/APRIL

A SPACE

SAFETY FILM 8017 KODAK SAFETY



• **Hallwalls at A Space**
February 16 - March 8
Opening Feb. 16, noon - 5 pm
A Space 299 Queen Street West

• **Murder Research**
An Exhibition of photo-works by Paul Wong
February 18 - 24
Opening Feb. 18, 5 - 8 pm
Music Gallery, 30 St. Patrick Street

• **Anne Turyn**
February 25
Performance : 8 pm
A Space, 299 Queen Street West

• **Second Annual Electronic Music Festival**
February 28 - March 2
series of concerts 8:30 pm
\$4 each, \$12 series
Music Gallery, 30 St. Patrick Street

• **Demonstrations of Brain Wave Music & Synthesizers**
Courtesy of Long & McQuade Musical Instruments
March 1, 1 - 4 pm
A Space, 299 Queen Street West

• **Sandra Meigs**
Film Installation
April 1 - 19
Opening April 1, 8 pm
A Space, 299 Queen Street West

• **A Space Television**
A series of six commissioned works by artists: available for broadcast
Opening April, 1980

A Space, 299 Queen Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 1Z9. (416) 595-0790

— 311 —

Some of these are familiar." And what is not is to be left unsaid?

Peter White makes much of the influence of General Idea on David Buchan. Too much. While Buchan works with and around General Idea, White over-implies a patriarchy. White further trivializes General Idea's own statements on glamour by suggesting: "General Idea's use of the structures (glamour from mass media and public spectacles) ultimately amounts to the only practical way to deal with such a world (emptiness inflicted upon contemporary life), for to ignore it would be to be destroyed by it." How can you be destroyed by an oppressive aspect of culture once you recognise and so decode its mode of operation?

White mentions that David Buchan understands that advertising is a language of partial seduction. Buchan says: "They have to convince you to fall for the product but also to part with it at a later date. So, in a way there's a certain casualness that's incorporated into the selling process." Casual perhaps but

continuous. Kraft food products hoped that after decades of advertising the products would sell themselves and they could ease up on the massive advertising budget. Not so, unfortunately for them (and us) — as they cut back the advertising the sales dropped considerably.

What is noticeable looking back to '58 - '59 issues of *Esquire* (in the early *Playboy* era) is the quantity — often 320 pages a month. Full of the "best" writers. The design is nostalgically ornate — scratch and sniff ads, fabric samples for shirt and trouser ads — all of which make today's glossy magazines look decidedly protestant. In current terms the advertising is both sexist and chauvinist which in itself adds a further twist to Buchan's appropriations. Though a lot of work in itself, the catalogue is thin. It would be interesting to see Buchan produce a complete magazine. Buchan does produce successful antonyms. Rather than suggesting a critical illustration of black and white, he could place such advertising where it belongs — out of the art closet. ■

BOOKS

Three Books - Three Lives

ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS: THE F.B.I. FILE ON JEAN SEBERG (PART 1)

by Margia Kramer. 36pp. New York: Margia Kramer, 1980.

RANSACKED

by Nancy Holt. 38pp. New York: Printed Matter, Inc. in association with Lapp Princess Press, 1980.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

by Martha Wilson. 16pp. Chicago: A Chicago Book, 1979. \$4.00

reviewed by Tony Whitfield

The book, open or unfolding, is a metaphor for life. The artist's book often recognizes this analogy. The associative and cumulative powers of adjacent pages, the sequential experience of the book, and the structural organization of the narrative, if not language itself, parallel the modes in which we recall or recount our experiences. Sets of facts, series of events seem to define our lives; what they are, what they have been, become our biographies.

Three new artists' books approach forms of biography from different territories, with different intentions. In Margia Kramer's *Essential Documents: The F.B.I. File on Jean Seberg Part I*, one is confronted immediately with the

record of the events of one woman's life as told by the F.B.I., a biographer under suspicion. As a public figure and a financial and intellectual supporter of the Black Panther Party, Jean Seberg became the target of a government plot to discredit her on grounds of sexual and moral turpitude. The F.B.I. file on the actress was over 300 pages long at the time of her death in 1979 when the documents were declassified. It covers the period 1969 through the early 1970's when the actress was under active surveillance by the Bureau and a victim of their counterintelligence activities. Late in 1979 these documents were sent to Kramer from the Freedom of Information Act's Office of the F.B.I.

Kramer's book is a compilation of thirty pages of unaltered documents, selected because they are most self-indicting of the F.B.I. They have been reduced to a 5 1/2 x 8" format. The story tells of the F.B.I.'s plans to neutralize the "promiscuous and sex perverted white actress" through the publication of her alleged pregnancy by a member of the Black Panther Party, "a Black Nationalist Hate Group." Doing so would "cause her embarrassment and serve to cheapen her image with the general public."

Tony Whitfield, artist and writer, is currently a curator at Artists Space in New York.

E Colin Campbell

- page 082 Tim Guest, "Modern Love: The Recent Videotapes of Colin Campbell," *Centerfold* 3:4 (April 1979), 196–97.
- page 084 Colin Campbell, "Modern Love," *FILE* 4:2 (Fall 1979), 12–13.
- page 086 Kerri Kwinter, "Modern Love," *Centerfold* 4:2 (January 1980) 8–9.

See also ...

- page 021 AA Bronson, "Automotons/Automorons," in *Performance by Artists*, eds. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979), 291–300.
- page 040 David Buchan, "Artists in Residence: Women's Performance Art in Toronto," *Vie des Arts* 21:86 (1977), 88.
- page 051 Colin Campbell, "David Buchan: Lamonte Del Monte and The Fruit Cocktails," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 29–32.
- page 172 "BZZZ BZZZ BZZZ," *FILE* 4:2 (Fall 1979), n.p.
- page 350 AA Bronson, "Imagine A Space as Karen Ann Quinlan ...," *Centerfold* 2:6 (September 1978), 104–09.

Exhibitions

the kitsch art to hang in the lobby of the Pavillion. Another interpretation is more related to the central theme, if it's discernible, of this review, which is: How much were these reliefs created to function as recognisable works of art that could sell?

AA Bronson ended the 1977 Press Conference by saying: "It's a shame that so many artists are only just beginning to understand what we've known all along, it isn't art unless it sells." In some ways it's a solid thesis: a starving artist is not much use to anyone, let alone to the

artist him/herself. However, whether or not an artist can pre-plan a work that will sell and can still maintain its other effective components remains a fragile proposition. In contrast with the large blow-up photo collages of the "Pavillion Fire" and "The Iron Curtain", a sculpture in last year's *Reconstructing Futures* show, much of *Consenting Adults* was not effective as a vision. Whether either of the shows sold or didn't sell, in critical terms is of little significance.

There is so much that is *not* art that sells on the assumption that it

is art, often an art which panders to its "please me" audience. It is not a sophisticated paradox and is definitely one that should be passed by. *Consenting Adults* seemed to occur at an awkward time for General Idea, the new material was honed too quickly. Having said that, it was a refreshing excursion into censorship and sexuality; there are times when the Pavillion and the Pageant should continue underground. ■

Clive Robertson, performance and video artist, lives in Toronto and is an editor of Centerfold.

Video



photo: Colin Campbell

LaMonte (David Buchan) and Robin (Colin Campbell) from "Modern Love"

Modern Love

THE RECENT VIDEOTAPES OF COLIN CAMPBELL

reviewed by Tim Guest

In a sense 'modern love' is the perfect title, an idea so 'apropos' for an artwork. Say it a hundred times it still sounds good. It's after all, what so many of us want: to be modern, to be in love. A goal so elusive it's impractical, so romantic it's at once the peak of sophistication and the dumbest pretention. Which is the story of Colin Camp-

bell's latest videotape. . . "Modern Love".

The tape is loosely structured around two parallel love stories: Robin and La Monte, Heidi and Pierre. The plot evolves simply enough as a couple of cartoon romances which Colin amplifies by portraying all the characters in drag. For his role as Heidi, Rodney

Werden is transformed into a stunning blonde, a fragile German frau-lein who wears tight sweaters, too much makeup, and a man's watch. Susan Britton plays the sultry play-boy Pierre, a slightly greasy Frenchman who chain-smokes. La Monte del Monte is David Buchan in a different sort of drag — no cross-dressing, just outrageously tasteless apparel, the failed showbiz smoothie. And Robin, played by Colin himself, is the simple-minded punkette from Thornhill who's too easily impressed.

Despite the extremity of the characters their portrayal is quite suitably low-key. That has something to do with television images, which tend to turn everybody into gray-scale (literally). There are certainly no big production numbers, and the home-made quality of video makes for a nice tension when dealing with such exotic subject matter. But more than that the drag in this tape is very different from the kind you see in "drag-shows". The role-switching doesn't assume a total identification with another (external) image. And while Colin and friends obviously enjoy the reversal it doesn't come across as an obsession. This isn't to say Colin's drag is just a theatrical device; rather any role-switching implies more of a departure from a role than a switch. What's left is an ambiguous identity, one with a heavy emphasis on artifice, a conscious superficiality. Gestures become loaded with meaning, but the meaning is ironic, paradoxical, and banal.

So to make a long story short (in this case it's easy), Robin meets La Monte at the Beverly Tavern where Martha and the Muffins are playing. Robin gets picked up, falls

Video

in love, but he uses her. She loses her job, her apartment, and in the end she loses La Monte. She gets dumped. Meanwhile, somewhere on the other side of the world Pierre is getting acquainted with Heidi. There is a language difficulty, presumably between French and German, so all emotions remain unspoken. They have an affair, Heidi is obviously in raptures, Pierre is just callous. He grows tired of Heidi and bids farewell with only the most calculated gestures of fondness. That's modern love.

There are flaws in the tape, mainly it's too long. Most of the ideas come across early on and what's left is the resolution of the story-line. However it's not boring to sit through, in fact it's very entertaining, only the content could have been accomplished more economically. And although the camera occasionally lingers on details (and there are a million details), most of them are interesting. On the other side of things, some of the imagery is quite successfully romantic. The heavy pathos, the heavy makeup, and the black-and-white still frame all combine for a silent movie effect. The scenes of Heidi and Pierre posing in mock-poignancy are even beautiful.

Actually, given such a simple plot, one can say this tape is more about being modern than being in love, and this 'modern' stuff is perhaps the most interesting dimension in Colin's work. What he projects is a 'modern' sensibility. To begin with, a fascination with anything foreign, sophisticated, exotic, which is always countered with utter disappointment. All of Colin's characters emanate a glamorous image while seeming caught in some continual fall from grace. All the little details revolve around ultra-sophistication and stupid pretention. And in a kind of double-think there isn't ever a situation which isn't faced by its supposed opposite. Every dilemma is funny, every joke is tragic. In this regard the role-reversals are an intuitive clue: as dangerous as it is to try to pin down a 'sensibility' in writing, let's just say that watching Colin's video is like thinking in reverse. ■

Tim Guest, a Toronto writer, is a frequent contributor to The Body Politic and Centerfold.



Randy in "Burns" performance, Peterborough

photo: Trevor Goring

Mainly Smoke

AS THE WORLD BURNS

Trinity Video Open House, Friday March 23, Toronto

reviewed by Clive Robertson

Trinity Video, the Toronto video-access facility, celebrated a physical re-location (from Duncan St. to Queen St.) by having an "Open House", highlighted with the premiere showing of Randy and Bernicci's tape *As the World Burns*, (see *Centerfold*)

The screening was held in Trinity's new "TV" studio ("Trinity" meaning 1st the camera; 2nd the monitor and 3rd the record/play-back deck, though Trinity was originally associated with a church organisation.) The well-attended reception stretched from the access office through the corridors into the studio and back again and lasted at least four hours. There were more than enough guests and the showing happened an hour and a half after a few major bottles of Donini, iced beer and some ten varieties of corn chips were consumed.

The tape itself was a composite of tapes made during *As the World Burns* and its presentations in various Canadian cities. Shot on different occasions in black and white and colour, the tape had been time-base corrected and synch-stripped (?) so that the monochrome and colour segments would lock together.

So the audience was warm and as they sat in their seats chatting and waiting they were served a little mood music over the P.A. and a little surveillance courtesy of a wide-angle

camera hanging in a string-bag close to the ceiling, which was fed to the viewing monitors in front of the assembled audience.

A Trinity representative introduced the tape to the audience informing them that a short interview with the artists would precede the premiere. The 'interview' in fact was Randy and Bernicci introducing the tape live from a sound booth directly behind the audience, carried over the P.A.. In turn they explained the development of the performance, their relationships to the characters depicted and so on. They explained that the nine episodes of *As the World Burns* (the title is a modification of the soap opera, *As the World Turns*) were sometimes seamless in the tape.

Here come the opening credits, out spatters the low signal-to-noise ratio audio and on, for the most part, the screen we see (again) the birth of video, often unfocused, epileptic in its hand-held capacity — but let's not quarrel with the aesthetic, the slick TV soap opera could do with some hand-held inversions.

From the very beginning, even with the introduction, the tape was not coherent for an audience who had never seen the performance, which is to say you could follow it with expectation but not with understanding. The tape *unlike the performance* presents a series of em-

SCENE: The washroom at the TD Centre.



Oh this hangover.
When he said water sports, I thought
he meant swimming. I certainly
never knew that people did things
like that. If my mother knew!
And all those little machines and in-
struments. I've never seen a
bedroom with more electrical
outlets.
And I always thought a french tickler
was some kind of bilingual joke.
Now I'm all bunged up.
He's a sweet guy. If he likes kinky
sex like that, it's OK by me. 'Cause I
really love him.

COLIN CAMPBELL

MODERN LOVE

16 pages, Toronto, 1979.

SCENE: Pierre and Heidi part.



*Heidi. C'est difficile. Je suis
très occupé, maintenant.
Heidi. Je dis..au revoir. Heidi.
Vous comprend...bye-bye?
Bye-bye Heidi.*

*Nein. Nein. Pierre! Pierre!
Ahhhh!*

MODERN LOVE

A videotape by Colin Campbell.

**Available from: 4th Floor,
241 Yonge St., Toronto, Ont.
1/2". B&W. 80 min.**

ESSAY BY KERRI KWINTER

Modern Love, more than anything else, is a story, a traditional tragic tale. But it isn't like a Soap Opera.

Soap Operas don't have beginnings and endings - *Modern Love* does. Instead, it asks to be compared to the film genre it alludes to: Neo-Realism. The elements that differentiate the video image from a film image, suit the use that Campbell has made of the medium. The video image being more immediate, less rich and detailed, as well as significantly smaller than a film image, is conducive to the 'close-up-on-real-life' intention that the Realists worked for. Other of many similarities, the use of open frames and long takes, are purported to allow quietly sentimental emotions to spontaneously erupt without the intervention of an energetic editor. Most Neo-Realist films (i.e. those of De Sica and Rossellini) also tend toward a 'pity the little guy' attitude. Like *Modern Love*, these films are magnifying glasses on a previously unnoticed victim of a larger, established powerful group. In *Modern Love*, Robin is the victim and the new wave/post-punk/suburban gone warehouse-urban 'scene' is the group.

The tape is perfectly narrative: essentially narrative. Given the many forms of 'making meaning' that video-art has coined and evolved, it's significant that Colin Campbell chose a strict traditional narrative vehicle. Stripped of all secondary and tertiary story telling tricks, *Modern Love's* narrative is bare, and totally conscious of itself, and of its audience. It's a simple story about a girl's attempted penetration into the cosmo life. Her name is Robin and she is played by Campbell. She leaves the suburbs to live alone in the city and work at a mundane job. She spends her leisure time with other self-exiled Thornhillians looking for collectively defined glamour and unconditional love. She has a hard time fitting in, and ends up being dumped by her boyfriend (Lamonte, as

played by David Buchan.), fired by her employer and evicted by her landlord. In the end she forecasts a re-attempted integration, only this time, with the guide book.

In *Modern Love*, all of the characters are in drag (this includes David playing his alter ego Lamonte, the hot show biz entertainer). Having characters in drag highlights Campbell's interest in understanding the meaning of codified, institutionalized gestures, that are particular to each sex, or to each faction. Everyone is playing what they apparently are not or cannot be. It's like the French Sunbather in the opening shot, who uses a wig as a bathing cap, stretching it over her hair - that is also a wig.

The first sequence, the French Sunbather, establishes the camera-lens as mirror. Lisa adjusts herself, the way women are apt to do, into the lens-mirror. She then puts on her protective coatings, the way women have learned to do, and goes to find the warmest spot in



Robin: she's brave but ill-equipped.

the ocean to bathe in. The second sequence is simply a man stroking his non-existent goatee, which is all that is necessary to denote maleness. He tries, unsuccessfully, to understand road directions from an off-camera female voice. In fact, misunderstanding recipes and directions is what the story is largely about. Although these two sequences are not part of the narrative, they establish the major themes in the story, and the storytelling.

The third sequence declares the man-woman love relationship. The camera is on Heidi, a German woman who later meets Pierre, a French man. (Heidi is played by Rodney Werden and Pierre by Susan Britton.) The camera pans up her body like it did the sunbather's, starting at the crotch. Only this time the crotch is obscured by all the paraphernalia of 'breakfast for two' (indicating that sex is over, it's time to eat). As Heidi's face comes into frame she mechanically begins to serve.

The Heidi-Pierre love relationship is not connected to the Robin-Lamonte liaison, except in a formal way. Although

they share the same fate, they never meet. The strong sense of establishing gender differences, in ritual, activity, dress and demeanor, is the grand gesture of this tape. Everyone does this depressingly well. Polar differences are increased by the characters playing off each other.

Susan's Pierre is straight. His shoulders are straight, his hair is straight. His moustache and cigarettes are straight. Only his eyebrows and smirk are crooked, and Clark Gable taught us what that meant. Rodney's Heidi would have it that 'female' is denoted by a wig that doesn't fit, wide red lips, little binding bras, delicate sweaters 'that forever need ironing' and shoulders with motorized joints. In short, Heidi is an hysterical, vacuous blood-red orifice, centred in a fluid but tamed circle of fluffiness.

The incredible ability to reverse roles, synthesize the 'others' personality, and portray it, kindles a hopeless sadness. First in the ironic pathos of the story's resolution and second in the 'sad-but-true' points it makes about women understanding men not understanding women, and, men understanding or seeing why women hate men.

The reversal of roles has another effect: it confuses audiences responses to stories like these. In a story so much about love and sex, told in such a visually personal style, it is difficult not to fall, even in an unarticulated way, for one of the actors or characters. If for example, you fall for a man in the story, you are falling for a man played by a woman, and have to justify that. If you fall for a woman, you are falling for a woman played by a man, and have to be conscious of that. In the end Campbell is discussing irreconcilable differences in love and further undermines our desire to be attracted to anyone anyway. So any response is invited to question itself.

As viewers, we can perhaps 'identify' (for lack of a better word) with Colin's Robin. She's brave, ill-equipped and destined for oblivion. But because she is on screen, she's *not-us* - besides, we clap to the music, Robin claps *not* to the music. And because we know that Campbell has fashioned Robin, he is *not* Robin either. For Campbell and Robin the lens is mediator. Each stands on opposite sides of the camera defining and crystallizing him/herself for the other. While recording, Colin makes Robin more Robinish for Colin. When its played back, Robin tells Colin she's **ONLY** Robin. She acknowledges him in

photo: Colin Campbell



All the characters are in drag...having characters in drag highlights Campbell's interest in understanding the meaning of codified, institutionalized gestures, that are particular to each sex, or to each faction. Everyone is playing what they apparently are not or cannot be.

the zerox room and says "Oh, Colin, he's so cute, But he's married." At the same time Campbell, by being both character and creator, tells us that the two of them stand together but are distinguishable.

Modern Love isn't pointed criticism of the world it is trying to portray or the people in it. The empathetic treatment of the characters and the non-editorialized presentation of the dilemmas undermines any hardline judgements that might have been detected. Portraying characters and creating a story that is as rich as this one

is an often unrecognized major achievement. It is not simple to tell a simple story. Campbell's clear and brutal method is rare and admirable. There are a few problems though. One is the use of an Aristotelian tragic form. Even if it is the most effective disseminator we know, it still eliminates choices and predetermines the outcome. The structure of the characters' relationships allowed the potential for change, but was restricted by the prejudices of narrative form. The understanding of the 'other' that was demonstrated by the actors could have lead to a more sympathetic, less misunderstood or typical end than the inevitable pain-and-loneliness-for-all declaration that tragedy makes. Campbell may have chosen this classical

form, precisely for these qualities, but we have to remind ourselves of its origins (totalitarian, patriarchal aesthetics) and limitations. People acting as 'others' rejecting themselves, or absolving themselves of guilt incurred or pain felt is marvellous catharsis, but in a political way, irresponsible to its audience. But these are not new problems, only more irreconcilable differences.

Colin Campbell has taught video art in Canada and the U.S. and is currently living in Toronto. Some of his previous titles are: I'm A Voyeur, Secrets, Hindsight, The Woman From Malibu (series of 3 tapes), Hollywood and Vine, and his most recent series, Bad Girls.

Kerri Kwinter lives in Toronto.

F Elizabeth Chitty

- page 090 Elizabeth Chitty: Demo Model: An interview by Peggy Gale," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 8–12.
- page 096 René Blouin, "Recent Pasts: an interview with Elizabeth Chitty," *Parachute* 16 (Fall 1979), 26–31.
- page 102 Elizabeth Chitty, "You Can't Rock The Boat With Cold Feet," *Fuse* 4:2 (January 1980), 117, 128.

See also ...

- page 021 AA Bronson, "Automotons/Automorons," in *Performance by Artists*, eds. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979), 291–300.
- page 350 AA Bronson, "Imagine A Space as Karen Ann Quinlan ...," *Centerfold* 2:6 (September 1978), 104–09.
- page 356 Clive Robertson, "And in the blue corner from Toronto, Canada." *Centerfold* 2:6 (September 1978), 110–11.
- page 360 AA Bronson, "Letters: A Space's Many Spaces," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 2–3.
- page 360 AA Bronson, "Letters: A Space's Many Spaces," *Centerfold* 3:1 (December 1978), 2–3.

Elizabeth Chitty

Demo Model



Rodney Wenden

An interview by Peggy Gale

You've been using video as part of your performances for some time.

I've used it ever since I graduated from school (at the York University Dance Department) in 1975. My first show in May 1975 included video and one piece called *Polyfil*. I've used it fairly consistently since then, in fact the show I did last December was the first one I'd done with no video. In earlier works such as *Lap* I was never really satisfied with my use of video; I felt that I hadn't really explored it quite enough. And obviously it remains important for me.

One of the things I find significant about video generally is that it manipulates time, and it permits overlaps and juxtapositions that wouldn't be possible without some sort of recording mechanism. In fact video offers a double manipulation of time, because although it is a recording, it has an aura of real-time. I think that is particularly interesting in a dance context, which is very much about movement through time.

Actually that was my beginning point in using video. That was the

content, in terms of the video performance, of *Polyfil*, and in *Lap* also. The very word 'lap' came from the idea of overlap in time, or trying to change a sense of time progression.

When you're choreographing, are you conscious of this element of time displacement or shifting?

In *Demo Model* the video had a kind of narrative quality to it, which the movement didn't, and while I was making the piece I remember being conscious and careful about how defined I wanted the narrative to be. The tapes had very specific scenes, the briefing, the interrogation etc. (there weren't actually titles in it, but they were implied), and I wanted to introduce a sense of narrative, but I didn't want the piece to be taken on only that level. That's a very basic concept to everything I've done; my priority is to create something not following just one direction or too closely tied to the content or meaning. I come from a dance background, which has always been a more traditional or conservative art form than others, where the basic structure of the theme is the whole content of the piece and I see that as being very limiting. It leads the audience's perceptions along one path. And I try to make a structure that will allow a more creative response.

It seems to me that the content of your piece is much more by implication than by explanation; you give a lot of facts or objects, and the rest is to be done by association by the audience.

It's also because the pure structural level of the dance is very important to me.

Can you explain to me what you mean by "structure"?

Let me give you a specific example, of *Demo Model*. The pure movement parts of it came directly from a perception of dance in semiotic terms. Even before I was familiar with the academic terminology of semiotics, I was aware that I was

looking at dance from the point of view of what the movements expressed, and looking at traditional dance vocabulary as a clichéd method of language. This is specifically in modern dance; gestures represent emotions. In this piece, and in the earlier work *Extreme Skin*, I reduced the movement to blatant sign systems, such as the deaf mute, and semaphore, and the poses also representing simplified but particular feelings.

What influenced me when I first began dancing/choreographing was precisely what happened in dance in the 60's, the Judson Dance Theatre kind of thing, Yvonne Rainer's "task" idea, but I didn't stay with that very long. *Extreme Skin* was the first piece with large numbers of people; it had the task sense but I wasn't totally satisfied with it.

In *Demo Model* there is a more elaborate sense of theme. I started out at the beginning knowing that the piece would be about information, and how information is relayed. Information is very different as image or movement or words, and information is relayed differently by moving images as opposed to still images. I would say that *Demo Model* is the most content-oriented work that I've done.

It's full of messages for me; it's practically a catalogue of languages. There's the video language, both live and pre-recorded. Then there were the polaroids (on-the-spot recording) and the pre-recorded photographs that were also looked at by the video camera. There was semaphore, xerox, sign language, the maps. . .

Actually that backdrop was a xeroxed collection of various things, again on a theme of language. There were a few sheets of playing cards, because of the way pattern relates to language, and diagrams from dance technique manuals. There were also some newspaper stories, including one about NBC being sued by a girl who felt she had been raped as a direct consequence of a tv programme about such things. There was also the newspaper story there about the MPs being sued for libel. The political sense was very much there, and comes from a perception of the kind of right-wing politics that's coming forward now.

In the sense of watching and be-

ing watched, and being coded and systematised and all of that?

Yes, and the person in the videotapes had that 'spy' feel, or police detective.

Was this to warn the rest of the world? Or was it just another format?

I guess I look at it from the point of view of content, comment; it's true that I do like to have a reality basis for my work and certainly this is what's happening in politics right now. The whole thing with CEAC last spring was the reason for including that news story about the MPs and libel, and referred to the whole censorship issue. I didn't want to make it too explicit, but I did feel that it related to the political overtone of the piece. In general language is obviously important to the whole piece.

Well, it's very inventive, with the semaphore and sign language. Were you spelling out something specific?

I didn't actually. When I used semaphore the first time, in *Extreme Skin*, I did spell out 'extreme skin', but this time language as a concept was important rather than any specific information.

It's all about language, but it also is language, you were speaking many languages. And as an audience, you not only listen to the language, but you listen to the theory that these are languages. That's already three levels: the specific content of the language, the fact that these are languages, and the fact that you are observing language as a system.

Right. I think when I mentioned the word 'structural' before in reference to *Demo Model*, the theory of language as such, those things are very important.

I also spoke. Those gun-moll phrases were intended to contrast with the photographs, which were fairly nondescript, empty spaces or images with no elaborate story to tell. The gun-moll texts were so emotionally loaded. They were sort of humorous as well, things like "I've got your number and it starts with zero", "I suppose it was business when I caught you with that redhead in Frisco", something about lefty and stoolies. . . they were very clichéd phrases.

Those are all a kind of lingo, and functioned as another sort of lan-

guage, although they fit comfortably into the rest of the piece. You were sort of done up in the punk look.

I first thought of erotic dancing as a good example of manipulative, blatant language. But I wasn't really comfortable with doing that so I decided to do just a rock dance as it also operates on a kind of sign level. I don't think the piece was a 'punk' piece, though Sol Littman kept referring to that, and to me as a punk. I thought that was rather facile of him, although my own performance sense does have a certain amount of aggression which can easily be related to a punk sensibility.

How do you go about beginning a piece?

It usually starts with a very vague feeling about something, and then gets elaborated from that point. In *Demo Model*, that feeling was information and image, and the first thing I did was write a few pages in a pseudo-scientific way: information, reception of information, mode of reception of information, information topics, information assembly. That was what I started with. And I added a couple of hypotheses: reception of information from an image is more simple, direct and mimetic, than our reception of informa-



Rodney Warden

tion from an actual person, object or action, because there are fewer and more distant active interfaces. So that differentiates image from performance, right from the beginning. And since mode of reception is a determining factor in the information, we are referred to a sort of manipulation.

Since an image is fixed, surely you can find out everything that's there simply by looking, which might take you more time or less depending on the complexity of the image. Whereas a performance is ongoing, and even if it's complex you can't use any more time for looking than the duration of the piece.

Well, that contrast is one of the real reasons why I've always been interested in the juxtaposition of live performance and videotape. But after I got this far with the planning, some of the other ideas just lost interest for me. I had thought of the 'rebel' as an example of social information. I guess that relates to the punk thing. I was going to have a whole section on 'political rebel', and information on terrorist activities.

That part at the end where you were reading from a book, and the monitor showed your hand. . .

Lobotomy. I introduced lobotomy as a means of removing information. It's an extreme, rather macabre example, and it certainly wasn't there as a comment on the morality of lobotomies.

There was an implied threat,

though, because of all this sort of interrogation, and 'we'll get you' and all that, and so although the notion of lobotomy was just dropped in as another fact, there was a residual effect that went beyond that.

On a theatrical level it certainly added to the whole ominous overtone.

The kind of police-detective issue, and the kinds of theories that were considered by this, seem to lead directly into a consideration of television and the mass media.

For sure. For instance, the 'briefing' tape, "assemble data, define the policy" — about two-thirds of the phrases were lifted out of newscasts, with the content removed. There is a whole language in television news and newspaper news. The story about the massacres in Africa was taken right out of the paper with no changes at all. It's all so manipulative, words like "bludgeoned with rifles", words with such a strong emotional reaction. And yet there's the irony of the removal into print at the same time, we are brought close to the information but kept away from the true reality. But it was also happening on a pure emotional level as well. While this was being read, I was doing endurance poses, which was the most metaphorical the movements ever got. Listening to this horrible story, which if you bring yourself emotionally close to it . . . And the voice-over was saying "stop", "no, don't go on", and of course the voice continued on.

That's very much a comment on what communication is, and how dangerous it can be. Overload of information in fact leads away from action. You become kind of blunted by it and you don't perceive it, you just sort of catalogue it. To me the whole sense of catalogue in Demo Model give that sense of here there's more information than ever before, we have more languages now, but the result is that we pay much less attention to any of it.

That's part of the political concern of the piece too, the sense of helplessness and frustration I have felt that wasn't in the piece directly, but it was there in an underlying way. I'm very concerned with politics; as an artist I'm concerned about the world we're living in and yet my art, or art, is the most important thing to me. I don't just go out and work for the NDP and knock on doors, but I really feel that art is as legitimate a political tool as doing something which is more active, more direct. I have no doubt that art is always political; I mean if you're getting up on pointe shoes and doing a dance that comes from the time of Imperial Russia, then of course it assumes a political context from that time. It's impossible to separate what you're doing from its context and history, it's there all the time in the work of artists who are involved in changing art. The whole stance of change or exploration can't be separated from its political implications.

And yet it's relatively unusual to make that connection explicit in art today.

It was definitely a decision on my part to specify that political awareness. I really felt I had to do this now.

There weren't any real assessments of the performance series by the newspaper, but Littman did write about your piece. Do you think that these messages hit him on some subconscious level?

Well, it's peculiar, because he spoke to me after the performance, he came up to me and said do you think you could throw a little light on what you've just done? And I spoke to him for a few minutes in very clear terms about the image, information, etc., and he seemed to be a very intelligent man who was asking questions and taking in what I said. And he said at the end, well



Rodney Werden

Rodney Werden



I like you am somewhat concerned with the political sensibility right now, and don't you think you could be more explicit? He meant "improve your work" by being more clear. And I said no, because the expression of this political stance is not my only priority, and I made reference here to what I've said today, that I didn't want to create a work which led only to one specific message for the audience. I didn't just want to write a sign that said "down with the liberal party"...

It's much more evocative to be dealing with issues of control and manipulation and subversion and eventual political lobotomy. It seems to me that the points you discuss are made quite clear, saying that information is an issue, and communication is an issue, and recording devices and tools and languages are issues. That's pretty specific. Do you feel that you're one of several people with similar thoughts?

I have no doubt at all that there are people with similar thoughts; it's all that people have been talking about — censorship, and the cut-backs. Most people look at that not just from the point of view of oh dear we're not going to have enough money, but from the fact that it implies a perception of art and culture as frills for our society. And I have no doubt that any artist with integrity about his work knows that that is just not the case. That awareness is all around.

I don't have any presumption that what I do is totally accessible to everybody in the street. And I'm familiar with the whole accusation of elitism and you-don't-care-about-your-audience, and I totally reject those ideas. Of course I care about my audience; if I didn't, I certainly wouldn't go to the trouble of making something different from that formula we're all familiar with. I'm concerned with art and with evolving art forms, but I still consider my work dance because it's evolved from dance. And of course it's tied to its roots.

It all comes down to the role art is seen as having in our society; it's still seen as a luxury for the upper classes, a decoration to cover up some of the hard parts of life.

But your work is not about decoration or pleasure, but about some of the realities themselves. And you're not alone in that.

I was even more stringent about that in my earlier work; I think that now I'm showing some awareness of theatricality and visual sense again. I am concerned with performance quality, and I definitely don't want to be so involved in my concerns that the work becomes academic.

I had the sense in watching it that it was pared right down; by way of criticism I could only say that all of those things could have been elaborated on. There wasn't time for an audience to muse over those issues very much, because they were being confronted with the next one right away.

I think that comes because I work very specifically. I like to have the conceptual framework of what I'm doing totally together before I do anything, and perhaps that leads me to stick to a conceptual framework more than people would like to see me do. But the issues are all inter-related, and that led to a mingling of the ideas.

I just think the audience would have been more satisfied if they had more extra stuff.

Yeah, I tend to fulfill what I intend to do, and that's it. I guess I look at extra things as extraneous. I certainly started choreographing from the point of view that I wasn't going to fulfill the audience's expectations, and I suppose I'm uncompromising in that sense.

You said earlier that you've been interested in semiotics and a study of and definition of the terms of language ever since school. Is this piece then part of a continuum of work, and ongoing intention?

Actually I can say something about my plans for the immediate future. Even before I performed *Demo Model* I'd made the decision to stop choreographing for awhile, a year or so. The main thing I want to do in that time is to do a conscientious study of language and to apply that to what I do. After all, communication is a very basic priority for me. I've been concerned most in the past with communication from the point of view of making something which allows perception in a multi-dimensional way, but I feel now that I want to get a handle on other aspects of communication. I want to do a lot of reading.

But in longer-range terms, the next thing that I do will be BIG, and

I'd like to do it in a theatre space. But my notions about it are all very vague still.

And are you pleased with Demo Model?

I think it's the best work I've done so far. ■

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RECENT PASTS

an interview with Elizabeth Chitty

by René Blouin

In the seventies, one of the most stimulating and challenging developments of the history of dance in Toronto will have been the emergence of a new context of creation and presentation of danceworks to which we refer as "the phenomena of independent choreographers". At first hand, the expression included those choreographers who no longer work within the traditional structure of companies. However, within that group of artists, a nucleus has developed a new sensibility. They have left behind the preponderant structures which had subsisted until this post-modern era but also the traditional frames of reference of dance: they have engaged into a thorough analysis of the medium and of its constitutive elements. Those researches could be categorized into two major types of approaches. One deals with the properties and intrinsic qualities of movement, of the body in space. It is formally oriented by a morphologic analysis of the vocabulary and architecture which lead understandably to minimalism and conceptualism. The other main approach bases itself on analytical and structural semantics; the relationship between the signified and the signifier, the changes of meaning, the synonymy, the polysemy and the very structure of language itself. It is therefore inevitably concerned with the notion of narration and the elaboration of a new vocabulary which has its roots in dance but formally has little to do with it. It pushes to the extreme (often) the limitations of the traditional vocabulary of dance to arrive at new sets of elements of language, to new propositions. In both cases, we can notice the reliance of a new theatricality which of course, will be much more developed in the second approach described above. In both cases, we can notice the reliance on a new aesthetics: the results but not the ends of those researches. They were not the primary concerns of the artists. This new theatricality and these new aesthetics proved formally to be very close to some work in "Performance Art". In some cases, it has become very difficult to draw a definite line between dance and performance.

In essence then, those new works confront directly the traditional concepts which have prevailed in dance for so long. In general, they were presented to small but very receptive audiences within the network of artist-run spaces such as A Space, 15 Dance Lab, CEAC, etc... which have been set up to promote activities of experimental nature in all artistic disciplines and mediums. The interaction between dance and other disciplines of the arts has stimulated this new brand of dance-artists as much as they have stimulated artists working with other mediums. The question of validation of the work, although not important at the moment of creation as such, has become an issue at some point. In an attempt to fill this gap and to have a critical look at some of the work of the seventies, Elizabeth Chitty (performer, choreographer, video artist, dancer, editor of the defunct *Spill* magazine and dance curator) has curated for A Space a retrospective of such works. The series focused on seven choreographers who have worked consistently in Toronto over the past few years. It presented a wide

variety of works in various formats and mediums, the common link being a vanguard sensibility rather than considerations of style and form. The following text is a conversation with Elizabeth Chitty where she explains the precise context of the series *Recent Pasts* and elaborates on the notion of feminism and dance.

René Blouin: How did the idea of such a dance series come about? Why did you want a retrospective?

Elizabeth Chitty: Since the early seventies, a lot of work has been done in dance in Toronto. I decided to chose the year 1975 as a major point of reference as it seemed to be a catalyst year for the new dance work here. Of course, work was being done before: Missing Associates had been working since 1972. But in seventy five, a lot of things happened. For one, Margaret Dragu moved to Toronto. In the Fall of that year, Lawrence and Miriam Adams organized *Dance Artists '75*: the first gathered and cohesive acknowledgement that there was new work being done at all in dance, in Toronto. The artists involved were Lawrence and Miriam Adams, Susan Aaron, Jill Bellows, Missing Associates (Lily Eng and Peter Dudar), Margaret Dragu and myself. Since that first acknowledgement, much more work has been done. The whole dance scene has really exploded in all milieus, going right from ballet to modern. Another factor of this explosion is that graduates from York University started to appear on the scene in 1974 (I think) and that did have some impact as well.

R.B.: Why did York graduates have such an impact?

E.C.: Well, because it was the first Dance Department in any Canadian University. That in itself was an accomplishment because dance has a history of being the least intellectual, the least analytical, and as far as I am concerned, the least advanced artform. Its major preoccupation, for God knows how long, has been tradition. And the idea of expanding the definition of dance has never been an important factor. There certainly have been some revolutionary movements. I mean Martha Graham and all that sort of stuff. But the situation in Toronto, in the early seventies, was that Toronto Dance Theater was Modern Dance and that was it. Oh, there was also Judy Jarvis who had been around for a while but both of these companies relied totally on the work that had been accomplished in the thirties and so on...

R.B.: And the same kind of language and vocabulary?

E.C.: Exactly, and the same ideas, I mean ideas is just almost like an unexistent word in so much of dance. That sounds like a generalization but it is really quite true. There always was such a preoccupation with technique (I think probably more than in any other artform) and the idea of personal expressiveness, which in so much work just degenerates into a kind of "see my guts" attitude. Mind you, this kind of approach has still a lot of respect in the dance world now. But the fact that dance was being taught at university (where Dance History and Dance Criticism were also offered)

really offered a new element to the dance scene in Toronto. It meant that people took it seriously enough to even admit that there was a history behind it. And while it may sound like an awfully square one position, at the same time, that hadn't happened yet, and so many members of the dance community have been so intensively involved in work on technique that it lead to a situation where the entire work has become only that. I think that York provoked definite changes to that situation. Even though I give York a huge amount of credit, it does not by any means have the kind of innovative character that for example their Visual Arts Department has the kind of reputation for. But still it was an important aspect of what was happening in Toronto.

But coming back to seventy five, people were working at A Space, at 15 Dance Lab and at the St. Paul's Church. Performances were happening. And while avant-garde dance was happening, a lot of work was also being done in modern which was popping all over the place.

In 1976, I organized the second dance series, it took place at St. Paul's Church. It offered works by Nancy Shieber, Charlotte Hildebrand, Johanna Householder, Missing Associates, Jill Bellows and myself. The year after, I organized another series: *Dance Artists Soho* which involved thirteen artists-choreographers. But that even was not much an emphasis of a vanguard sensibility but rather a kind of free-for-all. Basically, any independent choreographer could appear. Some of the work was clearly very traditional. The phrase "independent-choreographers" appeared and was accepted, along with "dance-artists". Lawrence Adams and Peter Dudar are responsible for one each. Although the terms were accepted, I think it had already lost its political implications. Some of the independent choreographers' work was very traditional. Going back a few years, all dancers were working for a company. If you were a dancer, you had to be hired by a company to work. It was then as much a breaking away from the administrative structure of the dance companies, many of which are hopelessly tied to maintaining a tradition rather than developing new work. It was that reaction to companies and the attitude of those companies that lead to the phenomena of independent choreographers. Because those people were the people who took that decision, it was also, to make sense, those same people who were interested in doing new work. Now, there is a whole score of independent choreographers, lots of them do not do such new work at all but, in terms of dancing, have their roots in the sort of avant garde dance world in Toronto.

All that work then was being done, but in Toronto the dance establishment is very strong and powerful. A lot of that new work was not even given the validity of being work. And certainly, the press did not have an objective and intelligent attitude to most of it. I thought that a phase had just finished and I felt the real need to stop and say: "Well, look, all this has happened and let's look at it. Because, it really deserves it." It is so

easy for things to just slip under the wire, especially when the size of audience that we have, inevitably, for this kind of work. I felt that a lot of work had been done under the name of dance. That was a kind of work of particular interest to me for its different vanguard sensibility. I wanted to take the work that, in my opinion, stood out, and have a critical look at it. In spite of the almost academic viewpoint involved in organizing a retrospective, I think the exercise is absolutely worthwhile. We can see the developments, the evolution and departing points of the ideas, the transformation of formats etc... Besides, it is great to see these works again.

R.B.: What set of criteria did you apply in the selection of the artists that were included in the series?

E.C.: The first criterion I used was that the artists had to have been working consistently in the last few years. And right then, that made certain decisions obvious. For instance, Charlotte Hildebrand had been very active a few years ago but had suddenly become less visible and produced less public manifestations. So, that made some things clear. The other criterion is purely a curatorial decision: I was looking for works which I thought stood out. I was interested in a specific type of avant garde sensibility rather than a variation on the modern dance tradition. I was not interested in presenting a modern dance series at all. Besides, the Toronto Dance Festival is totally aiming at that. Mind you they are oriented towards companies rather than independent choreographers. Briefly, I was looking for a more advanced kind of dancework. Also about criteria, basically a lot of things worked out just by physical possibilities. There were certain things that were just impossible to remount. Like a lot of Margaret Drago's works. For instance, *Pick Up* was impossible to re-do because it involved a cast of X number of people and had some very specific technical requirements. And that would have meant a bit of money and quite a lot of time, none of which we really had.

In general, the choreographers involved in *Recent Past* weren't that much interested in the idea of a retrospective. Even at the end of the series, when we discussed things in the forum, there was quite a bit of mixed opinion. The first thing everybody said to me at the very beginning was: "Doing old work? Yurk...". But in the forum, Janice mentioned that she found it very interesting because she saw connections between her works that she hadn't realized before. So, artistically, it was interesting for her. But Louise said that she found it uninteresting. I personally thought it was fabulous seeing these works in retrospective. But there seems to be this premise in everyone's mind that you have to go ahead and do new work all the time and so on... without ever re-assessing. In a way, I guess, it comes mainly as a reaction to what used to be the dance framework which is basically a repertory kind of situation where people would repeat themselves over and over again. So perhaps, it is from one extreme to the other...

So, people were not totally thrilled by the idea of a retrospective but I thought it was the major aspect of the series. For me, it was also my major differentiation between this particular series and the other festivals. I think that the whole idea of festival has worn itself out and I was a bit tired of the whole idea of a bunch of people getting together where you see no real directions... Another important aspect of the series was the idea of a forum and the workshops which actually didn't prove to be that successful because of bad publicity. But in theory, the idea was interesting: choreographers don't talk that much about their ideas and the intellectual aspect of the art-form being so undernourished. I thought it could have been a good occasion to articulate around the concepts developed in the work. Unfortunately, as I just said, because of the publicity which was inadequate, only a few people showed up.

R.B.: The programme, the choice of work, presented a definite cohesiveness. How did you arrive at that particular choice? Did you select the works yourself?



Missing Associates: Lily Eng/Peter Dudar

E.C.: No, I didn't select those particular works myself. The artists did. But, as I said, I was looking for a very particular type of sensibility. That criterion however, had its variances. For example, I don't think that Anna Blewchamp represents really the sensibility I am talking about. But I wanted to include her because she was one of the very very first independent choreographers. I think her work is really top quality modern dance and it had not really received the kind of critical look and recognition it deserves. That is why I placed her in the series.

R.B.: Could you say that her presence also helped to make clear certain parameters? For instance certain distinctions between categories like "dance" and "performance art", two notions often associated, it seems, in the areas of research we are dealing with here?

E.C.: Well, I am not quite clear myself about these dis-

tinctions. For instance, personally, in my own work, I involved myself very deeply into that controversy of what is dance and what is performance. I have been quite militant about it, about the fact that I thought that my work was definitively dance for political reasons involving the control exercised by the dance establishment and the Canada Council on what they think dance is. I mean, if you rely on different formats, standards and vocabulary from the ones they are used to, for them, the work is not dance. It is sort of a colonial attitude and understanding of the artform and they certainly do not promote genuine creation. Anyway, it seemed necessary for me to engage in this battle. Since then, I went through a total reversal of my point of view. A) Because I lost interest and lost the energy to engage in a confrontation with stupidity and unawareness. I really started to question, as people told me to question, you know like going to bang your head on the brick wall... process. B) The fact that I knew that, in my own work, my interest was going



further and further away from the notion of movement, made me begin to question the relevance of my work to dance. In the case of *Demo-Model* for instance, the argument I made is that the very basic premise of the work was a semiotic perception of movement. You look at ballet and modern dance and can break down each movement into it, as a symbol, as a sign. Approaching language purely from the point of view of being a symbol, a representation of what is being expressed is a very unidirectional way to approach language. And dance seems to be very hopelessly tied to that very narrow semiotic approach. In fact, dance is a physical art and is very clearly tied to gesture, even when that gesture is abstracted into a dance language, there is that built-in innate semiotic approach. So much dance makes no attempt to go beyond that, to enter from a different angle than how can I best express X but expressing it in a kind of sign-post way. So, in *Demo-Model*, I made brute reduc-

tions. I went right to that semiotic root and involved myself with semaphore and poses which were evocative of particular states, such and such... I always thought, how come that cannot be dance as it comes totally from the roots of dance? It is completely a linear line to that. I mean what I arrived at, looking at dance and the relationship, in that case, was very clear and obvious I think. However, I don't feel that the relationship does really exist in my work anymore.

R.B.: This brings me to talk about the whole notion of narration in dance. Where do you stand? What kind of consideration did you give to that notion in elaboration of the programming of *Recent Pasts*?

E.C.: I am glad you mention this aspect. If you look at Peter and Lily's work, although it has changed and is not so fastidiously conceptual anymore (but certainly still is somehow) you can feel that whole awareness of structure. It is almost a formalist kind of approach and

I think in the general development of dance, specifically in Toronto, this has been quite valuable. I know it has been valuable to myself as an artist because that is where I went when I left dance school. I went to conceptualism, so I thought. Because it seemed the right antithesis. I was seeing what was lacking in dance, in the dance training I received, and yet I was sort of getting to the point where I felt a need, after a while, to grow, to develop from that very strict conceptual framework. I find also some of this awareness in most of the works in *Recent Pasts*. For example, Janice and Johanna, even if it was not done in a very cohesive or obvious way, even if they didn't pass through a very conceptual phase, there is certainly a residue of a conceptual approach to their work. Just because of the fact that they did come from a traditional dance background and that they are aware of it, to me, means passing through a more conceptual approach. Not necessarily formally very conceptual but a very intellectual approach for sure. A

critical approach which involves looking at their work, looking at what the history of dance was and how differently they felt about that, to modern dance which is being done today and, how they felt about themselves as artists as well. And passing through that conceptual phase but developing from it, it went to what you call narration because they (including myself) thought they had to involve themselves with subject matters. Of course, I think that most artists feel very strongly that their work, their art, has to be involved with people. (Johanna mentioned how it felt to perform other people's dance pieces. In sort of realizing that in doing such and such movement, it had absolutely no relationship to her life whatsoever).

So there is the personal angle, the idea of your work related to all sorts of human beings, and to have your work socially and politically relevant too. Those two things are probably the reasons why people's work got involved in a kind of narrative, with some kind of narrative concerns, although certainly not narrative concerns of traditional dramatic formats.

R.B.: Then, let's talk about the heavy reliance on dramatics, most of the pieces of the programme used dramatics.

E.C.: Indeed, there was as heavy reliance on theatricality, I think that the use of "theater" in those pieces has quite a uniqueness about it. For instance, in Johanna's work, particularly in her early works, the visual theatrical impact was the biggest thing, the most important aspect of the work, the most powerful as well. And some of her earlier work certainly didn't have the kind of intellectualized idea content that maybe her present *Sgt. Preston* has. And because of that visual orientation, and because it is performance, it obviously lead to mean theatricalism. In the case of Margaret, whose work has a sense of total theater, I think that visual images are also an important thing. The same for Janice and Louise. It is not important at all though in the case of Peter and Lily.

Another interesting element is that they commonly use the method of collage. For instance, in *Sgt. Preston*, they have a theme, they gather certain images, they have movement-images etc., and various issues which they want to address. Certainly, they define and refine those and it works. But I think that, at least for me, it is now the time (or there will soon be a time) when the method of collage will have really become inadequate. Other methods of architecture will become necessary. Of course, this is a totally personal observation.

But coming back to your question about the architecture and the relation to dance training and such, not too many of the people involved had a cohesive education in dance composition. This is not surprising because dance composition as it is usually taught is pretty stifling. When I was at school, some of the composition students were taking Louis Horne's composition classes from the forties... I am not saying this necessary is an aggravating situation, but it is certainly relevant. And people would make studies on a "A" "B" "A" theme and this kind of approach. Considering the fact that this is the most codified method of teaching composition, and then you had improvisation which appeared sort of later on the scene, people would pretty well act on their own devices. And then collage seems to be a method which was arrived at (and as I mentioned, I am moving out of it myself).

R.B.: In addition to a new architectural research slowly happening, what kind of statement did *Recent Past*s offer in terms of new language? Do you or did you see any particular development throughout the series of works presented?

E.C.: The choice of language bears a certain relevance to the notion of subject matter. In *Sgt. Preston*, which I keep using as an example, a lot of the movement quality comes from the subject matter. I mean for example, "the woman" as a thematic concern and then the taking of a stereotyped view of women. I think that really lead to movement qualities.

An example in that piece is when Johanna is being chased by a little motor car, walking on those high heels in such mincing steps; also the whole RCMP reference lead into the movements of guns and such.

So, definitely, there is a strong link between language and subject matter.

R.B.: But then what kind of methodology do the choreographers use to develop and articulate such language?

E.C.: I think it is specifically developed intuitively. In choosing the subject, in developing the subject matter, intuitively you arrive at a specific language. For instance, in Louise's *Down and In*, the action of soaking yourself in cold water in a pool was a very strong theatrical image. And it was totally tied to the notion of self-pity. So I think it is intuitive, except that you can't remove it from the formal aspect because of the decisions of theme. In Peter and Lily's case, of course, their intent is almost totally formal. It is then different. But in Margaret's case, you have seen that she uses movement-languages that, I think, are also very intuitive. She has a real showbiz theatrical awareness and it is quite clear in her work.

R.B.: This notion of theatricality suggests some specific relationship with the audience. How do you feel about the theory that performance is different from theater for it does not attempt to conquer the audience as a social entity but rather attempt to establish a specific relationship from an intimacy to another intimacy, from the performer's intimacy to the viewer's intimacy? I would refer you here to Fabio Mauri's theory.

E.C.: As I mentioned before, I am not so sure about those kind of distinctions. I can see the distinctions between... I mean the difference between mass effects and individual effects, except that the mass effect is made up of those individual effects. For example, in Margaret's work, because it has a real high power and her movements are more immediately recognizable, there is that element of mass excitement. Other artists in the series relied more on the individual response, the individual understanding, in order to get any response at all.

As we said before, it is also a matter of language, specifically. I always thought that when people are using an established language, something that has a tradition and a history behind it, any member of the audience is involved in operating on pre-conditioned responses. If you have a show which starts with a "Broadway number", you see these elements before you, then you know what there is to it. There is a tendency somehow to follow that response on that kind of mass plan which for me is what experimentation is about. To bring the audience from this pre-conditioned plane to an element of individual serious response.

R.B.: Then, those considerations are obviously very important in the conception phase of the work, in the articulations of the elements used.

E.C.: They are the premises. That was like my first premise, when I decided what was important for me as an artist. And recently, I have used a recognizable entertainment form in my work (performance and video) which, as far as I am concerned, has an involvement with the viewer which is very different from something which is not immediately recognizable. Consequently, I don't think that I can really break it down to two great lines: in theater and dance versus performance. In that response, I cannot consider it original work versus formula work.

R.B.: Another important aspect of *Recent Past*s is the feminism of most of the work.

E.C.: First of all, it is a fact that most of the people around in dance are women. Peter Dudar was the poor... lonely man in this project and it has always been like that. Lawrence Adams hasn't done any work for quite a while now. John Fahey was doing work a

few years ago but now he has also stopped. They were the only ones on that scene. So without anybody having made any decisions or coherent judgements about it, inevitably dance has been a women's orientation.

R.B.: But the artistic directors of companies and so on are mostly men? How do you explain that?

E.C.: Going back to the differences between the traditional dance structure and the context of the independent choreographers, you see that in the traditional dance situation, you have dancers, most of which are women and some of which are men. And then, you have the choreographers, many of whom are men and a few women. The artistic directors and the upper echelons of the structure of the dance administration present a balance of men and women but there, again, very different from the workers. Some people have drawn the comparison that the dance world is like a good microcosm of the whole male/female structure. Most of the workers are women but most of the 'top dogs' are men. So, I think that the people who created the independent dance world, who decided to take that route and invented that route, necessarily had a strength of a sort of revolutionary (if that is not too strong a term) sensibility. Then it is not surprising to find that balance quite totally shifted. I have never been able to understand why there aren't more men. I can think of men modern dancers and a few choreographers but none of them have ever arrived in this particular scene except for John, Peter and Lawrence. It is quite strange, isn't it?

I draw a comparison between feminism and the choreographers. The feminism in the form, Louise articulated it as being dance itself. The independent choreographers concept means taking power by and for those who hadn't had it, in the traditional dance world, the dancers didn't have it. In the independent dance structure, the choreographers have decided to leave that structure and take the power for themselves. And that is what feminism is about: taking the power by those who hadn't had it: women. So she drew the comparison on that line. Because the independent choreographers are concerned by taking the power of their own lines into their own hands, they necessarily, as women, had that concern too. There was then a strong link with feminism. But the other thing is, and that is a very personal point of view again, that the feminism that has always been called feminism for me seems to be a process that has been in need of a change. That belongs, in my mind, to the late sixties and early seventies. I know that for myself, as a woman, my idea of feminism has certainly changed a lot. For example, I wouldn't wear make up and high heels for years... you know that kind of thing... But being the kind of person who needs to respond to personal needs, not only on the basis of ideology and dogma but having to involve a more global context, (knowing that your personal needs are influenced by a larger ground of concern including tradition), I found that kind of particular dogma intellectually agreeable but clearly insufficient. I must say that I have not had much experience in feminist art, I sort of hear about it and when I hear about it, it always seems to be pieces called: *Menstrues*, *Ovum* and that sort of thing. God... I kind of intellectually understand the necessity of looking to womanly roots, or uniquely womanly issues, and addressing them in the name of feminism but for me the preoccupation always has to have a relevance to the idea of the human being. Certainly, I am interested in the idea of the power complex, the inequalities between men and women. But not to the point of isolating women. Now, this is a particular part of feminism, and in any movement for social change, that militant aspect always exists. However, I don't find it personally viable nor do I feel that as a political mechanism for change, it is by any means an end. You pass through it and then you grow up. You are then able to involve the world in a larger way.

The feminism, in the case of Margaret's work, is interesting. Her work, under the guise of what I have



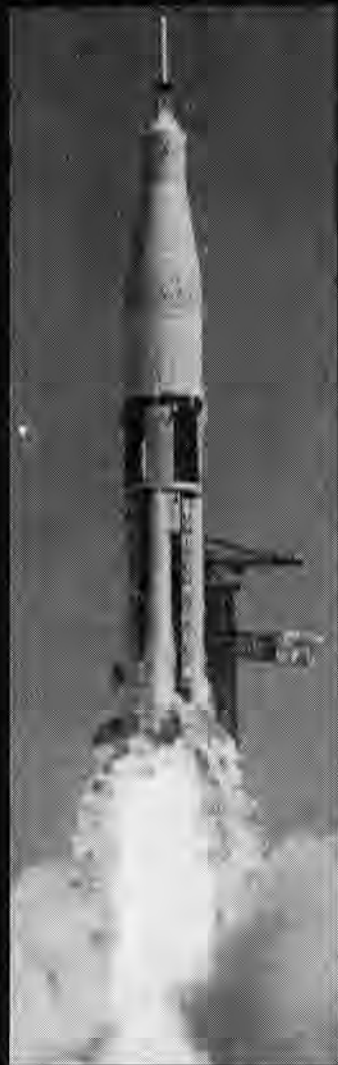
Louise Gahfield, *Balloon 2*, 1977, photo: David Smiley

been calling certifiable feminism, is definitely not feminist. From the point of view of feminists who look at strippers as an object of sexual exploitation, etc... But I think that is a misunderstanding of her work and of feminism. Her work contains a positive, very strong sexuality. To view it only in the light of it being a victim of macho sexuality is quite wrong. She is not promoting such things. She challenges the militant feminist anti-sexuality which, as far as I am concerned, is only anti-sexuality and by no means any different from any kind of anti-sexuality. Her projection of sexuality is a controversy of one end of the framework of feminism. I find her work, like much experimental work, definitely political because it inherently is a response to conformity and repression — as a vehicle of change and resistance to status quo ideas, it is political. Janice's work is the most overtly feminist. She has, over a period of time, addressed herself to specific feminist issues and in a way that is more certifiably feminist than some of the other work. Like in her *Partu* piece: the image of her "50 prom dresses", and the resource material in *Was It in Her Blood*, the romance books with their idea of female passion and sexuality and such... and from a very passive sense.

Anyway, going to the work in general, I think that it is very positive that it was not in itself so painfully, obviously and facetiously feminist. None of this work was about menstruation! I think that this plays in favor of the work. I also don't think that it is necessary to address oneself particularly to certifiable feminist issues in order to be a feminist artist; I don't accept that criterion of certifiability for being feminist. But most of the work presented was about women and that was maybe the strongest way it could be identified as feminist work: it was the best clue, anyway. I don't think you are a feminist only if you are up on a soap box talking about very obvious attitudes of feminism. Louise considers herself a feminist artist and yet I do not think that her artistic concerns are related only to women. They are related to people — though — because she is a woman there is a strong link there, a particular vision. Actually, when she first did the "self-pity" piece, she did it with another woman. Doing it with a man changed the piece quite a bit. It was quite interesting to see those changes. I remember she said at one point that Michael Glasburg was at first very tight about admitting that he had self-pity. Then he loosened up... It seemed like a weakness at first but once he got into it he was real good at it...

R.B.: So, although the concerns were essentially and clearly feminist, it did not translate into a narrow point of view. It rather expressed a comprehensive vision of the socio-political context of the issues to which those choreographers addressed themselves. The fact that those works had been done before allowed them to feel the creative variances in re-doing it. Thank you Elizabeth Chitty for having specified for us the context of the development of a new dance sensibility in Toronto through the presentation of *Recent Pasts* and this interview. ■

gallery 76



student exhibitions,
outside exhibitions,
seminars, thematic
shows, events, per-
formances, etc.

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Cold Feet (continued from page 117)

that it is attempting to explore the issue which it seeks to condemn.

Nicol observed that the women's movement has a history of puritanism going back to the days when emancipation was linked with the temperance movement. She capsulized the history of the imagery of the women's movement as the desire for the heroic. Both poster images offend that standard. Rina Fraticelli characterized the *Fireweed* poster as being a clear image of woman as both classically defined sex object and as support staff. She considered the possibility that its rawness might be an affront to the limited gains of the women's movement - a reminder of tenuous accomplishments. She expressed concern about the available imagery of 70's media on the grounds that little has really changed. Gone is the apron-clad housewife of the 50's, but she has been replaced by an image almost as limited - ranging from the asexual to the elegant businesswoman with beautiful leather attache case to the housewife who now weaves in the back room. Fraticelli sees a danger in this imagery. The variations which were formulated as an acceptable compromise between the demands of the women's movement of the early 70's and the previous stereotypes have instead created an even more confusing image-statement. The 'change' embraced is only superficial.

One part of the parody in the *Fireweed* photograph was the shoes and wig. Standard fashion and taste were not exhibited, a fact that further stresses the parody. Fashion and feminism have not been comfortable partners and the rhetoric of the early 70's could easily be construed as producing as rigid a set of rules concerning dress as the one it replaced. The consciousness of fashion conditioning that reinforced the role model of sexual object was counteracted with a role model of anti-sexuality. Narcissistic adornment and aggressive sexual expression were suspected of being in collusion with the stereotype. The photograph highlights a use of clothes-as-costume that differs from an unaware acceptance of fashion as status quo. However, it must be admitted that this approach to costume is removed from the everyday work world of office fashion and as such is open to misinterpretation.

Rosenberg contends that there is a basic problem: women aren't supposed to deal with sexuality and the image in the *Fireweed* poster is a sexual image. It depicts a powerful woman - the very act of carrying a huge IBM Selectric around doesn't exactly illustrate vulnerability - and the outrageousness of the image has a power of its own, and yet one of the



...but can she write?

The *Fireweed* poster: carrying a huge typewriter doesn't suggest vulnerability.

protesting letters described the woman on the poster as "threatened" and cowering behind the typewriter.

In recent years, Toronto has seen a great deal of concern over pornography, sex-shops, strip clubs and so on. The motivation behind the crackdown is not to eliminate sexual exploitation, but to maintain conditions of sexual repression. The women's movement has exposed pornography representing violence toward women and has had rape named as a crime of violence provoked by hatred rather than sexual desire. These are immeasurably valuable accomplishments. Concern arises, however, when an all-or-nothing attitude takes hold allowing these concerns to become the tools of sexual repression. Feminist opinions can thus provide fuel for the anti-sexual fire. Exposing and rejecting the traditional female sexual stereotype of woman-as-victim as the product of male oppression was the first step women took toward claiming responsibility for their own sexual self-determination - a right which has always been allowed to men. The struggle against the sexual exploitation of women is often manipulated into a tool of anti-sexuality and repressive puritanism and as such affects human beings of both sexes and all sexual persuasions.

Feminism has made some gains for women, both gay and heterosexual. Feminism has been part of the socio/sexual reorientation begun in the 60's. But the accomplishments are still few and the right-wing swing of the late 70's maintains a puritanical status quo. Although sexual behaviour has changed, our moral values have not. It would appear that the only 'freedom' we have is to expose what is still considered to be our 'immorality'. ■

G Carole Condé

page 106 "Walking on the Line?," *Centerfold* 3:3 (February/March 1979), 121–22.

See also ...

page 109 **Section H**

Profile

Carole Conde

Walking on the line?

by CAROLE CONDE
(edited by Karl Beveridge)

It was the 9th day of the strike and cold for that time of year. We parked the truck and walked over to the picket line.

My mother thought that I should take some kind of special training as a symbol of her status in the community. It was either ballet or art lessons. So I painted roses.

There weren't many on the picket. "It's mid afternoon," explained a woman in her late thirties, "and between shifts. Come back around 5:00, and you'll see how many we get out here!"

By the time I was 16 I had mastered paint on canvas, and was bored stiff with Delta High. I bugged my parents into sending me to art college. At the time, it didn't matter how much schooling you had, O.C.A. simply taught a trade.

Two women dressed in parkas joked about the layers of clothing they had on. One of them was wearing her husband's long johns. Some goon in a passing truck yelled "go on home you bums". I shouted back. In a low voice the older woman commented "Put the bastard in front of a sorting machine with a supervisor breathing down his neck, that'd keep his mouth shut!"

My knowledge of history was nil. I remember being impressed by the painted flies on Dutch still-lives. Art was something that pleased, not something that you pursued as a career. The majority of students at O.C.A. were female. All the instructors were male, except the English teacher.

I asked if it would be okay to take some photos, and what they thought'd be a good shot. "Show us walking on the line," the older woman replied, as she straightened her hair and took her place with the others.

After a year and a half at art college I became a Sunday painter, with husband and children. Later I took some evening classes in which the instructor insisted that we paint abstract forms. I broke down crying several times — how could I show off the talent I'd taken so long to develop?

We talked with two women leaning on a station wagon, in which other picketers were warming up. Earlier that afternoon, a car had stopped and a complete stranger had given them a \$100 cheque in support of the strike.

I gave up suburban life and Sunday painting. It wasn't something that was consciously planned, but I had created a set of circumstances that forced me to change. It had also given my Mother a nervous breakdown.

One woman, seeing the camera, asked where we were from. I showed her a political newspaper. "Oh sure, I've seen it before and agree with most of it. It's a lot better than the crap the dailies print about us."

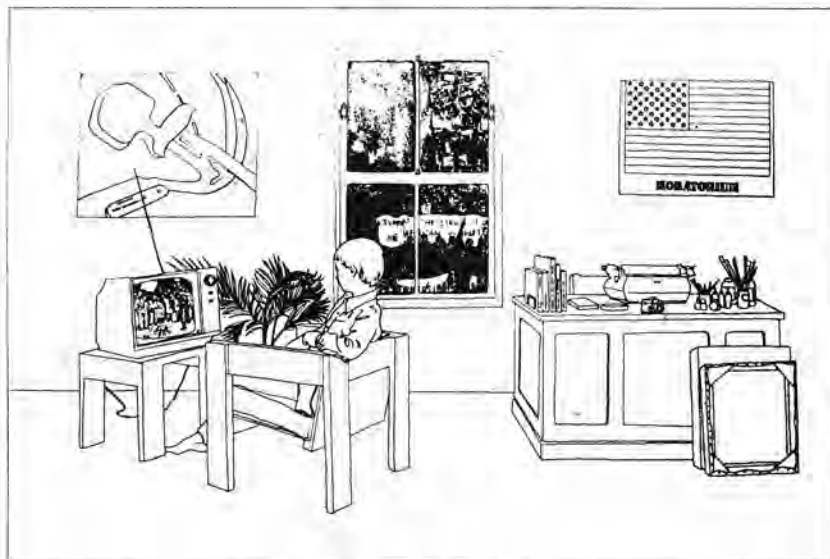
A one-woman show of large delicately-balanced, stain paintings launched my career as a professional artist. There were two other 'up and

museums, and talked about a feminist art. Once the 'stronger' members obtained galleries and major shows, however, the group fell apart.

Some of the younger workers were standing off to the side, a little unsure of what to do. An older black worker was saying how he'd been out every day last week, and things looked good. Another commented that he'd lost his mortgage the last time out, but workers had to take a stand. As far as he was concerned, Trudeau could stuff it, and Broadbent wasn't much better.

Another women's group was formed which had a political orientation, but I left over the issue of women and the class struggle. Most of them felt that women's struggles were the ultimate aim. I was the only one who was married with kids.

Lighting a cigarette, the woman worker continued, "Whose laws are



C. Conde, K. Beveridge, 1977. ink and watercolor, size 36" x 27 3/4". Title Window, part 1 of 5 part piece.

coming' women artists showing in Toronto at that time. The Globe & Mail did a big spread on us.

Across the street from the picket line were two signs. "C.U.P.E. supports Postal Workers," and "Steelworkers support C.U.P.W." A woman, probably in her forties, continued, "They can put us in jail if they want to try, but we won't give in."

We moved to N.Y. The competition was much tougher, but it was an 'exclusive' world. I met other women artists who belonged to the women's ad hoc committee. We demanded 50 per cent women in the

you going to follow; we have the right to strike. We damn well fought for that right. But you strike and the next day they legislate you back to work."

I had begun to work together with my husband, and we became involved in different political art groups. But in N.Y. you had a very narrow view. We could only talk about our own experience in the art world — which meant very little politically.

I asked why she thought that happened. "They're out to make an example of us. If they can bust our union, they can then force all the

workers to accept what they want. But it's only the beginning. Someday we'll run it all ourselves. We aren't going to put up with this shit!"

We left N.Y., and I'm not sure what we're going to do here (Toronto). I do know that culture comes from the people and their struggles, but that's easily said. Art appears to be totally separated from politics, so you have a foot in both worlds. The point isn't just to move politics into art, but art into politics, which makes it a class issue.

The woman was taking her picket sign off, "I've got to clock out now. My daughter was bumped by a car last week and she has to go in for a check-up." I mentioned that my son had broken his leg in a bicycle accident, but that kids come around real quick. She smiled, "After all, who's the strike for?" and crossed the street to catch a bus. ■

Carole Condé is an artist and former co-editor of The Fox and Red Herring. She lives in Toronto.

Powerhouse Gallery

A formal statement

by NELL TENHAUF

This summary is the result of taped conversations with members of the original pre-Powerhouse discussion group — Clara Gutsche, Pat Walsh, Stansje Plantenga, Isobel Dowler-Gow; former directors of the gallery —Tanya Rosenberg, Kina Reusch; and the present co-ordinator—Linda Coult.

Powerhouse operates on the premise that, in terms of numbers and also of real recognition, women artists are not adequately represented in the art system. Statistics show that in spite of there being more women than men in most art schools, around 20 per cent women is still the norm in the exhibitions and collections of Canadian galleries and museums.

The gallery was born partly from a reaction to this inequitable situation, which typifies the position of women in general, and partly from the discovery of a special interest on the part of women in each other's art work. The official status of Powerhouse as an incorporated body

came in 1974, but the unofficial birth was a year earlier and much more a landmark event. A discussion group of nine women artists had emerged from a women's art/craft outlet called 'The Flaming Apron' early in 1973. Although their art and aesthetic outlooks varied, the women were energized by their contact. They met frequently to look at and talk about each other's work. In the late spring of 1973 they organized an exhibition for themselves in a small space on Greene Avenue, the first Powerhouse exhibition. This was followed in early 1974 by a Local Initiatives Project grant with which an expanded group of women artists operated a gallery in the same place, really an apartment which they enthusiastically renovated. In July of that year, the gallery moved to its present location on St. Dominique. Over the past five years, the drive behind the gallery has grown from a pioneering spirit into a steady conviction of our place in the Canadian artworld.

The phenomenon of women grouping together is not a new one. In our time it has become the basis of feminist consciousness-raising. Women come together with an implicit understanding of particular problems such as responsibility for children, isolation from public life, or a sense of inferiority. At this point in our history, when in a sense we're catching up, women working together is a method for discovering, cultivating and broadcasting what women are really doing. The original Powerhouse evolved around these concepts: that a supportive environment is not a refuge but a strength, and that uniting could create an impact not easily ignored. The group's medium for promoting women was the uncovering of art being done by women, and this has remained the basis of the gallery's purpose and direction.

In practice, showing art by women artists has meant selecting from among the many who have approached the gallery wanting to exhibit their work. The fact that it is individual artists, members of the gallery, who have always collectively chosen the exhibitions is an important one. As a specialized and non-commercial gallery, Powerhouse reassesses the standard criteria concerning quality in art. Specialized in our case means women artists focusing on women's art. This focus creates the likeliest circumstances for picking up on any unique quali-

ties of that art. Taking chances on traditional "women's" media or subject matter, supporting strong and innovative statements, tapping women's creativity to the extent of risking bad shows, trusting our individual responses to work that doesn't fit the usual definitions; these are anathema to commercial galleries and contentious policies for any gallery. They come into conflict with "public image" and "credibility", and they have at times split the ranks to the point of people leaving the group because they were unable to accept the prevailing aesthetic. But the ultimate strength of working in a collective selection process, with an open-ended definition of quality, is twofold: first, it does not limit women artists to any old or new definitions of "women's art"; and secondly, the resulting range of exhibitions and events defies categorization, preserving an excitement in discovery that is the lifeblood of art. The exhibitions have at different times been outrageous, splashy, intimate, experimental, realist, conceptual, purely abstract. . . the list is long.

Collective decision-making as the basis for administration has also characterized the gallery as an alternative space. Co-operatives require a great deal of co-ordination to function well, as the power structure is a non-hierarchical one. In theory and practice, each member contributes a personal input based on their time and talents. Each individual has an equal say in decisions. Some voices are inevitably louder than others. Powerhouse hasn't been spared factionalism, infighting, power struggles. Some serious issues surface from time to time — power vs. responsibility, living our feminist ideology, professionalism in our work. They've been resolved to the point of not interfering with the gallery's functioning. Or they've been set aside as unresolvable in the context of a co-operative, where individual needs, tastes and ideologies can be influenced but not squelched.

In the past, dedicated women with strong personalities have pushed the gallery from being an unknown entity into a recognized name. They also set up the channels for an ongoing rapport with the public. *Artfemme*, a major show of women's art initiated and organized by Powerhouse for International Women's Year (1975), increased our public considerably. In September 1976

H Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge

- page 111 Walter Klepac, "Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, "... It's Still Privileged Art," *artscanada* 33:1 (April/May 1976), 67.
- page 112 "Carmen Lamanna Gallery" (1977).
- page 114 Tim Guest, "Maybe Wendy's Right," *Centerfold* 3:5 (July 1979), 277–78.
- page 116 "Letters: What is the basis of his personalism," *Centerfold* 3:6 (August/September 1979), 282–83.
- page 117 "Tim Guest replies," *Centerfold* 3:6 (August/September 1979), 283.
- page 118 Philip Monk, "Reading and Representation in Political Art," *Parachute* 16 (Autumn 1979), 49–50.

See also ...

- page 001 **Section A**
- page 105 **Section G**

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge:

... It's Still Privileged Art

Art Gallery of Ontario

January 24–February 29

WALTER KLEPAC

Having recently rejected their earlier minimal-conceptual style of work, Karl Beveridge and Carole Condé regard their combined exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario as the first step in their move toward creating an art which both reflects the concrete realities of their daily lives and possesses a larger social purpose.

The single most important insight contained in the recent show is the couple's recognition of the fact that when an individual begins to take personal responsibility for the meaning and implications of his or her cultural acts that person is inevitably led to an examination of the political character of society as a whole. As Beveridge and Condé interpret this responsibility, the artist is committed to confronting the viewer with the real priorities and ideological premises in terms of which the structure of consumer-oriented, technological North America is determined.

There seems, however, to be a dull earnestness about the present exhibition which severely undermines the vigorous and tough-minded critical re-evaluation it otherwise might have stimulated in viewers: granting the sincerity of their convictions and good intentions, one cannot help but feel that Beveridge and Condé have taken a wild leap into areas of investigation for which they have neither the practical political expertise, the needed historical perspective or the depth of mind to engage in meaningfully. All too soon they move from what they know – i.e., generalizations based on an intelligent reflection upon their own personal experiences – to a too facile acceptance of the visual clichés and doctrinaire precepts of a highly simplistic, New Leftish Marxism.

In a series of three-part silkscreen collages the artists are shown in various poses seated on their living-room couch; above them in each part is an image culled from a glossy consumer publication. The common theme linking these images is written across the bottom of each collage, the idea being that the revelations about contemporary life expressed in the group of images is to serve as a vivid and telling illustration of the statement found below them. The trouble is that in almost every case the selected images merely generate a set of loose and vague associations and not some specific, unavoidable and profound connection between them. Depending on the viewer's past reading habits and political inclinations the "truths" conveyed are not always self-evident or unambiguous.

The fact that the single most frequent sight in the exhibition is that of the two artists sitting in their comfortable loft talking to themselves might well arouse the suspicion that their exercise in self-criticism has not really extended beyond the confines of their relatively insulated existence within the inbred art circles of SoHo. Their avowed intention to develop "an art practice that successively embeds itself in an expanding social consciousness" seems, by all indications, to have short-circuited into a form of entrenched narcissism. This impression of isolation from the



CAROLE CONDÉ AND KARL BEVERIDGE
Installation view of *... It's Still Privileged Art*

common social experience is only strengthened by the fact that their contact with the outside world, again judging from what we see in the show, is limited to standing before various public buildings, placards in hand, and to looking at pictures in magazines.

Finally, Beveridge and Condé seem to have been drawn to the idea of revolution in order to give their criticisms and desire for social change a coherent form and a palpable direction. In doing so, they have borrowed liberally and eclectically from other nations' revolutions – not in terms of

the lessons to be learned from actual historic human experience but rather the symbols and rhetoric of those struggles. For this reason the heroic worker variety of Social Realist art of both the Chinese and the Russian Revolutions becomes a dominant motif for the present show. Thus, what could have been a seminal attempt to evolve an art which truly investigated levels of political awareness and involvement has degenerated into an indiscriminate sampling of past forms of "political art," i.e., a vapid and gullible recycling of someone else's propaganda.



CAROLE CONDÉ AND KARL BEVERIDGE
Untitled, 1975-76
three colored silkscreen images with
superimposed reproductions, 39 1/4" x 21 1/8"
Photos: courtesy Carmen Lamanna Gallery

CARMEN LAMANNA GALLERY



Over the ten or so years we have been associated with Lamanna, we hardly know him, nobody really does. We each have our own theories, but no one knows what really motivates him, or what his ambitions are. That he is honest and sincere within his own limited framework, we don't deny, but there is more to Lamanna than the conspicuous development of his 'personality'. For all his emphasis on the 'individual' and his fight for the subjective 'perogatives' of their art, Lamanna typifies an objective process, which perhaps more than any other art dealer, speaks to present day reality.

The contemporary art dealer is a product of capitalism. They function as one of the mediators between the artist as a producer and the anarchistic market of bourgeois society. As monopoly capitalism developed out of competitive capitalism, the role of the art dealer changed little, remaining entrenched in the petty bourgeois ideology of the small independent producer. True the character of the market changed, especially in its international—imperialist aspects, but the relation between the artist and the dealer remained ideologically intact—if somewhat more business-like.

Art, as a form of consciousness, is an ideological weapon—it is a form of propaganda. High cultural production reinforces the ideology of competitive capitalism, a form of capitalism long superseded in all other sectors of society. Although it serves the interests of petty bourgeois ideology well, those interests are no longer sufficient to monopoly capitalism's political needs. High culture, bluntly, can no longer be left to its own devices. As the contradictions of monopoly capitalism intensify, there is an essential need for monopoly capitalists to bring high cultural production under control. Monopoly capitalists increase their control through the apparatus of the state, which serves the dual purpose of making it appear that this control is a process of 'democratization', while increasingly forcing the working class to foot the bill (taxes) for this process.



Where does Lamanna fit into all this? With the development of state 'patronage', and the concurrent 'democratization' of the arts, the private art gallery, as a significant arbitrator of artistic 'value', has to eventually give way.

Lamanna has been one of the most vocal in the fight against state control. He is correct in recognizing that it is on the ideological level, not the economic level, that opposition must be waged. But what is the character of this ideological opposition? It is a plea for the individual, for private production, for the old forms of competitive capitalism. His opposition is regressive and futile for it flies in the face of reality. It has a certain romantic appeal, granted, but it obscures history. It ignores the socialization process—wherein artists, for example, are increasingly pushed to collectivize their interests, e.g. C.A.R., the parallel galleries etc.—on the one hand, and the increasing repression on the other, inherent in the trend to state monopoly capitalism (facism). It further ignores the class nature of cultural production and therefore Lamanna seeks support by enlisting the so-called 'classless' individual artist. Real opposition must recognize the class character and social nature of cultural production.

Lamanna could move into the state bureaucracy, but to do so would relinquish his claims to the 'creative' role he sees himself performing—a role necessitated by the need to identify his 'cause'. Lamanna is fighting for his way of life, for he knows that he, as well as the forms of production he supports are becoming less and less significant. It accounts for the content and form of his public personality, and the desperation of his actions, for Lamanna, himself, is a paradigm of what he is fighting for.

Why this harsh analysis of Lamanna? 'Just to bite the hand that feeds us'? No, Lamanna pumps out propaganda, reactionary propaganda. This is also a piece of propaganda. But propaganda is not the issue. The question is, whose class interests does it serve?

Exhibitions

(two rows of twelve) for easy reference. These function in serial progression, one to another, and are thus interrelated. The viewing audience is challenged to break the code.

J.M. might have made it easier for us, he said, if he had put 36 Drawings on display. There are after all, 10 numbers in the decimal system and 26 letters in the alphabet. Nevertheless, according to J.M., "the complexity of the code is only equal to the information related". That information, or the "secret message", is still

forthcoming.

John Mitchell's draughtsmanship is deceptively simple. Not to be confused with (but, definitely associated with) child's play. Meticulous precision nurses his innocent prodigy. The artist considers his experiment an exercise in abstract pedophilia. He points to his geometrically virginal parody of the traditional: "The Kiss".

John Mitchell will further explore the isometrics of perspective. Sensitive assembly towards mass production is his immediate concern.

Both C. K. Tomczak and John Mitchell will publish catalogues of this exhibition in affiliation with Pumps Books, within the month. John Mitchell has already printed an original and limited edition of 50.

April 10, 1979, I missed the opening.

I have since recovered. I never see the walls at an opening, anyway. ■

Monica Holden-Lawrence is a prose writer living in Vancouver.

"Maybe Wendy's Right"

CAROLE CONDE AND KARL BEVERIDGE

Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, April 21 — May 10, 1979

reviewed by Tim Guest

photos Conde/Beveridge

MANAGEMENT'S OFFERING 5 BUNS
IF PRODUCTION GOES UP
A GUY LOST HIS HAND ON THE
CUTTER THIS MORNING.



From installation — 2nd & 4th photo of 15 photo series, 17 x 22".

The problem with political art is that too often it comes across as a combination of naive politics and bad art. The idea is that two avant-gardes unite in a common interest, for a politic which entertains an aesthetic and an art which is "socially responsible" — a great formula if only the world was less complicated. Too often political artists offer work which is simplistic, pompous, and uncritical of its own excesses. And the latest unfortunate example is an exhibition by Karl Beveridge and Carol Conde which showed last month at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery.

The show consisted of fifteen sequential photographs with short captions, illustrating a political drama in soap opera/cartoon format. The plot revolves around a small suburban home, Dad works at the steel plant, Mum worries about the grocery bills, daughter Wendy has been listening in on the party-line. She's studying marxism-leninism and what with the lay-offs at the plant and those rising prices, Dad and Mum both wonder, "Maybe Wendy's right". It's a very obvious message, so obvious my initial reaction was to think I wasn't catching the irony behind the dumb allegory. But a careful reading proved there was really nothing written between the lines. I won't mention here the aesthetic failures (like for instance the crooked letraset), what I found most objectionable was the politics of the show.

First of all, this cut-and-dried narrative is an attempt to expose the basic daily contradictions of a working class family, but with the incredible omission that the structure of the nuclear family itself is never drawn into question. Secondly, although Conde and Beveridge try hard to personalize their figures, to the extent of casting themselves in the leading roles (stretch

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wig, etc.), they are never more than cartoon people with cartoon problems. And this reflects, not so much on the contradictions of capitalism, as on the failure of the Left to address those contradictions effectively, in human terms.

It all reeks of so much condescension, appealing to the lowest-common-denominator with watered-down rhetoric, reducing political conflict to a moral tale. In the Beveridge-Condé allegory, working people are the uninspired victims, just normal people . . . ordinary folks. The artists identify with their characters but only as external beings. And like most of the Left in Canada they view the 'working class' quite abstractly, with just so much repressed envy and middle class guilt. Which produces, at least, some remarkable inversions like the sensational glamour of industrial accidents or economic crisis as melodrama. But all things considered it's a moral dirge, without any real understanding of the dynamics, the dialectics of social change.

That said, *who* is the show aimed at? Certainly a work which carries such a heavy message, which tries so hard to be effective, certainly Beveridge and Condé must have a specific audience in mind. It's not trade unionists after all. Carmen Lamanna's is not what you would call a workers' little hive. It's not the Left, that would be preaching to the converted. It must be the 'avant-garde', which I suppose means Toronto artists — which is hardly a cohesive social group. Finally, I don't think the exhibition says anything new to anyone. Rather, it simply re-states basic ideas and shakes the finger.

The paradox here is that despite its naivety, their work is overly theoretical, in a manner which is abstract and moralistic instead of illuminating. I wouldn't say this is always true of 'political art': take for a good example a contemporary feminist artist like Martha Rosler, or historically, the constructivist experiments in the 1920's. I wouldn't say either that Beveridge and Condé are unintelli-

gent artists: it's a poor show because I think they're barking up the wrong tree.

I might speculate their involvement in left politics is not critical enough, especially now, as the "new left" fast becomes just like the old left: conservatized, locked into debate, and sterile. This exhibition is self-conscious propaganda taken from an over-specialized and isolated rhetoric, and here, socialist realism and the fake spirit of 'proletarian culture' is too close for comfort. Maybe next time they should try articulating their own reality instead of someone else's . . . or starting with their own experiences moving outwards, instead of assuming generalities. Political art implies a synthesis which doesn't come from wishful thinking, the best intentions, or even the correct line. Rather I suggest, in the right context it comes quite naturally, almost intuitively . . . just like being in touch. ■

Tim Guest, a Toronto writer, is a frequent contributor to The Body Politic.

Publications

Tribal Expressionism?

13 CAMERAS VANCOUVER
Black and white photographs, size: 9" x 12", 240 pages, 1979.
Paper \$19.79

reviewed by Isobel Harry

The National Film Board of Canada bought an entire photography show that hung in the Vancouver Art Gallery last year. The show consisted of 16 photographs by each of 13 photographers, who were paid \$100 for each of them. The photographers re-invested the total, \$20,800, into the book which I hold in my hand. Excluding travel expenses, etc., it cost them \$16,000 to print 1,500 copies, or \$10.66 per book.

The front cover has 13 larger than life fingers pressing the shutter of an oversized Leica. The spine says 13 Cameras Vancouver, and the back has the same pile of fingers and the camera, only 'backwards', with 13 names listed alphabetically over the fingers.

The photos run into each other throughout. There's no identification

of the photographers, or places, until the end when an index of small photos with corresponding photographer in full-page portrait lets you in on who did what. From this you see that the photos are placed not in order of who did them but in some type of formal aesthetic arrangement.

The intro by Roy Kiyooka says



this book exists "to take another look at our fair city". To do this, there's been a lot of "talking, incessantly, talking, week after week, about images and their processes". This leaves the photos produced "to explain each other, not themselves", to be found "androgynously, sun-struck". The intros are difficult because the binding cuts the large type down the middle, sometimes obliterating whole words. The 'look' is high contrast, and with one and two page spreads, 'large'.

The title is superfluous. The book could have been produced in Toronto, or New York or any other city where photographers photograph their feet, their crotches, their meals, their friends in the toilet, toilets, mirrors, water on windows, sun on ferns, blurred faces, and leave it at that. No doubt all these people can use photographic equipment, but to what end I kept wondering?

The book is free-form, unrelated 'personal expressionism', with the Vancouver theme almost non-existent. The intense, introspective musings make for very elusive-looking images, but this seems to have been the purpose of this publication from the out-

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with it. The V.A.G. show was a different project with a different format and different content. But the more dangerous insult regards the group's "navel gazing" and supposed lack of "social conscience". Ms. Harry seems to have completely overlooked the fact that 13 artists with widely diverging attitudes towards their art, worked together for a year and examined very closely what working together is all about. The book has no director, no editor and stands as their report on this research into a political alternative to authoritarian hierarchical control. This "working together" is its political content. To suggest it was made for "money or promises of fame" is missing the point to say the least. They all made sacrifices the first of which was money.

And any time she wants to discuss the distribution of funding I'm ready. Finally, in answer to her comment that "the Vancouver theme is non-existent," the Vancouver theme is totally there in that book whether she likes it or not, and I suggest that it is so different from what she is used to that her only reaction can be one of indignant shock.

*Hank Bull
Vancouver*

What is the basis of his personalism?

Tim Guest's review of our exhibition ("Maybe Wendy's Right" June/July *Centerfold*) was okay, given the usual hysterics that pass for the criticism of 'political' art. At least he dealt with the issues raised in political terms. However, we do have some problems with the political criticisms he made. The main points raised by Guest were that in both form and content the work was stereotyped, rigid and rhetorical etc. This he traces to a moralizing attitude inherent in the left that itself has become rigid and rhetorical. Unfortunately, this is true, not only of the work, but of the left as well, to a point. It is here that we part company with Guest, for it is all too easy to simply blame the failures of any social engagement on the problems of the left itself, and as Guest does, opt for some vague and even more problematic 'humanist personalism.' Guest's review stops short of the critical analysis needed to locate the problems he is so quick to discern and of which we are not unaware. The problems of a socially responsible art, and more importantly of a socially

effective left have to be seen historically in terms of the specific social and productive conditions within which they operate. Part of the problem stems from the left's failure to account for and sustain an analysis of the productive capability and ideological resilience of advanced capitalism and thus develop an effective strategy in the face of it. This in itself is a result of specific historical conditions, including the development of the left itself, which it is beyond the scope of this letter to attempt to address.

What it does indicate, however, is that the 'moralizing' attitude all too common to the left often arises from the need to cover over the lack of concrete analysis. Developing this analysis is not simply a matter of sitting down in an easy-chair and figuring out what's going on. Any credible theory has to be developed from a viable social practice, a slow and painstaking process to say the least.

There is a curious belief that when dealing with everyday life, or your own personal situation, ideology is suspended, i.e. you are dealing with the real stuff of life, far from the concerns of economics, politics, etc. This implication underlies Guest's criticism. It is most obvious when he suggests that we deal with our own lives. True we may be more familiar with the details of our own lives than with those of others, particularly those whose life situation is considerably different. But the point is, how do you look at your own life or anyone else's for that matter. On what basis do you select, explain and fit together the details you observe, and of equal importance from what point of view do you observe these details. Guest would seem to suggest you are what you eat, and you eat what's in front of you. What is the ideological basis of Guest's personalism? He's up against the same wall.

This brings up another problem, that of representation. This too has to be dealt with historically, specifically in terms of the history of cultural production. Again to simplify a complex development, it is the mass media that has virtually monopolized the forms of representation of social reality. The fine arts, increasingly divorced from social reality, depicts its own internal concerns. Of course, the mass media totally distorts social reality, and the fine arts may be a true representation, but of its own circumscribed reality.



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Letters

What this means is that the artist who attempts to depict social reality is, on the one hand, confronted with images of that reality which the mass media has trivialized — the most cliché images being those of the most socialized aspects of life; and, on the other, is confronted with a lack of the means to depict that reality in a socially meaningful way.

Political content can only be organic to a representation which at the same time is organic to the social conditions represented. Over and above that, an artwork takes on, of necessity, a didactic function i.e. it will contain elements of overt propaganda. At this point, given present social conditions and the limited understanding of them, any work that attempts to depict social reality is going to contain some degree of rhetoric. The interplay of the ideological intent and the details of everyday life are bound to be tentative and problematic.

It is therefore true that the work in our exhibition was rigid and rhetorical to the degree that the political analysis contained is incomplete, and the images of everyday life are limited. But these problems are not ours alone.

Karl Beveridge
Carole Condé
Toronto

Tim Guest replies:

In reply to the above letter, a few points may help to clarify the issue. Far be it from me to believe that ideology is suspended in daily life. In fact the reverse is true — that ideology is brought to us in living colour every day, and fleshed-out in the homes and factories, offices, schools, etc., not only by the masses (in an abstract issue), but by us. This is the basis of my "personalism" and also the reason I suggested, as a broad hint, that political artists should articulate their own experience first, and then generalize outwards.

Secondly, I don't agree that images of daily life are so limited or that the problems of representation are so immense. There is positively a wealth of cultural information everywhere which is never articulated in the popular media — because it's too complex, or radical, or irrational . . . and which functions in a way like a collective dormant language.

Finally, I don't think "you are what you eat", rather "being determines consciousness", and that's an important distinction.

MODERN LOVE



COLIN CAMPBELL

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LEE PLOTEK

Galerie Yajima — AVRIL 1979

Il se trouve parmi les peintures abstraites de Léopold Plotek une série de dix-sept toiles qui s'inspire de l'œuvre musicale *Pierrot Lunaire* du compositeur Arnold Schoenberg, œuvre construite à partir d'un recueil de poèmes d'Albert Giraud. *Pierrot Lunaire* est l'histoire d'un dialogue entre Pierrot et la Lune à l'intérieur de jardins nocturnes et romantiques, voire pathétiques. Son thème central est la "Folie", en son sens poétique. Ce thème sert de point de départ à l'exposition présentée chez Yajima.

L'œuvre de Léopold Plotek est forte, les toiles sont possessives. Tour à tour, les scènes abstraites et intimistes plongent le spectateur dans une ambiance recluse et mystérieuse. Pénétré par le calme et le silence, le spectateur est invité à la méditation.

Le fait que ces toiles de grandes dimensions puissent être qualifiées d'intimistes constitue un paradoxe fort intéressant. On ne retrouve habituellement pas cette caractéristique à l'intérieur de si grandes toiles et surtout à l'intérieur de scènes abstraites. L'intimisme est

plutôt propre aux scènes de genre de petits formats comme celles que l'on retrouve par exemple dans l'œuvre de Jean-Baptiste Chardin. Toutefois, cette illusion au peintre du XVIII^{ème} siècle est rendue possible par l'emploi de trois ou quatre couleurs et par le rembrunissement progressif de la valeur chromatique de celles-ci. Le maintien de la scène dans l'obscurité empêche en effet toute intrusion possible du spectateur à l'intérieur de la toile. L'acuité du rembrunissement des valeurs chromatiques des scènes compose un voile sombre qui subjugue et qui pousse à la contemplation. Cet intimisme est renforcé de plus par la composition géométrique de chaque scène dans laquelle s'impose le plan parallèle à la surface plane du support. Ce plan produit une barrière visuelle entre la scène et le spectateur. Celui-ci demeure donc un voyeur.

L'arc domine la composition géométrique de chacune des toiles reflétant l'attachement du peintre pour l'architecture de la Renaissance italienne, particulièrement pour l'architecture d'Alberti et de Brunelleschi. Le peintre lui a assigné deux rôles. D'une part, du point de vue plastique, c'est l'élément prédominant autour duquel la structure picturale est organisée. Élément formel, l'arc est composé de bandes verticales qui déterminent la limite des plans de couleurs et d'une courbe supérieure qui permet une intégration souple des différents plans tout en perturbant le statisme des bandes verticales. D'autre part, à titre de

sujet iconographique, l'arc perçu dans son environnement chromatique procure l'atmosphère intimiste romantique de la scène abstraite. Souvent à demi-fermé, l'arc prend en effet la forme d'une porte entrouverte, une sorte d'entrée vers un monde intérieur inconnu du spectateur. Comme celui-ci ne peut pénétrer ce monde, l'illusion de mystère est créée et l'intimisme est maintenu. L'arc compose donc la base formelle et symbolique de chacune des scènes abstraites.

D'un point de vue formel, la plasticité bidimensionnelle de chacun des plans et leur interaction avec l'arc suggèrent un espace optique dans lequel est niée toute lecture fond-forme. Cet espace évolue en effet selon le principe du "push and pull", chacun des plans alternant positivement ou négativement, selon son voisin. La couleur renforce cette lecture tant par sa valeur chromatique que par son opacité. On note une absence totale de modulation gestuelle ou coloriste. Ainsi, la lecture de chacun des plans interdépendants se fait au niveau de la surface bidimensionnelle du support. Le peintre, tout en s'inspirant d'un thème romantique, demeure fidèle aux qualités intrinsèques du support. En ce sens, il est formel. Le principe du fond-forme est exclu et l'artiste procède à l'intégration d'un phénomène purement plastique dans une symbolique romantique.

LOUISE BEAUDRY

READING AND REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL ART

(CAROLE CONDÉ AND KARL BEVERIDGE:
"MAYBE WENDY'S RIGHT")

Artists who work with politics in their art confront an unprecedented problem: the (re)incorporation of content within an art and a culture controlled and coded by formalism and media. Neither formalism in art nor media ever have accommodated themselves to content, although they *seem* to carry the message of content. This situation perhaps developed because content demands a public, and both content and public (rather than a spectator or audience) are located within the space of politics. There is a history of this loss of content in relation to a public inversely proportional to the progressive control of the individual spectator in art or the "free" labourer in the market. The critique of the formalist loss of content, however, is already beyond necessity since formalism in art may be an outmoded form of production related to industrialization. Presently, we are ruled by the simulation of the code whose indeterminacy co-ordinates and distributes all the sign systems of society of which formalist art is a small and outmoded part (therefore, decorative?) and media a pervasive model.

Within the indeterminacy of the code itself "inheres" the problems or limits of an art of content in a society hostile or indifferent through coding to any sort of content, that is to say, politics. (The recent Federal election in Canada revealed how thoroughly our present politics is stimulus/response, question/response controlled: the politics of referendum where we are already coded for our responses — mere form and not content.)

In raising the question of a political art of content we perhaps should ask whether there is a distinction between political art and political content. This is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, "political art" is in danger of being recuperated as a stylistic category. At

Léopold Plotek, *Die blasse Wäscnenn*, huile sur toile, 78"x78", 1977



the present time we console ourselves with the knowledge that in many cases of political art what is a style has not yet become a genre. Although within a more desired political society — a desiring political society — politics in art may be reduced to a genre as the common sphere of understanding within the matrix of daily life. Secondly, political content must be examined in light of the whole question of content. There was reason for the overthrow of the substantive by the relational in every discipline of the twentieth century. We must understand, however, the historical motivations of the structural revolution of value (I use Jean Baudrillard's terms) while maintaining the possibility of content separated from the substantive. This is where content must confront rather than be absorbed within representation. Content, as I wish to use it, is not an intention, a representation, or a reading. It is not substantive, but a process, a process that is productive in relation to a public — and that relation is one of desire. And it is exactly on this question of reading and representation that the content of Condé and Beveridge's political art fails to make connection with a public. In this, Condé and Beveridge show themselves to be traditional leftists who wish to represent (in the dual sense in art and politics of the represented and the representative) the desires of the masses.

Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, previously associated with the art politics magazines *The Fox* and *Red Herring*, have already produced two political art shows: "It's Still Privileged Art" at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1976 and one last year at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto. The recent exhibition at Carmen Lamanna Gallery, entitled "Maybe Wendy's Right," is their most coherent presentation yet. In a series of fifteen tableau colour photographs, the artists "narrate" the crises of a working class family against the implied social crisis of a strike. The dual structure of the narration — individual/family against the social — as implied in the captions, begins to break down as the social and political enter the family. The social and political enter the family through the strike, but politics has always been implicated there, for instance, in the role of women within the family.

Each tableau within the narrative series is not just a juxtaposition of photographic image and imposed text which directs and explains. Each image is a composition of signs. It is a type of semiotics in reverse (like propaganda) — thus, a tableau — yet, it does not have the density of a sign system of representations in the "real" world, of capitalism, for instance, which could be deconstructed for a release of energy. Nor does it have the force of rhetoric of what Brecht called the social gest ("the critical demonstration of the gesture, its inscription — to whatever period it may belong — in a text of social machination of which is clearly visible." Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein"). Failure to find the appropriate gestures for our situation, gestures that inscribe their making within them, is part of the defensiveness of this work. Its failure to relate the gesture to public desire is what keeps the work within the limits of representation. While there is no social gest within the work, there is also no ambiguity within the images. The composition of signs point to one meaning only: representation as one meaning.

Condé and Beveridge's work remains contained within the frame of representation. And representation, it should be said, need not solely be reproductive of visual reality, that is, imitative. Representation occurs when the subject (artist or spectator) cuts out a space of vision in each photograph where a unified action is depicted or meaning signified. Everything has its place in the "correct" designation/control of meaning, like depicted objects in the perspectival space of Renaissance painting, itself the model for representation. Where everything has its place, where meaning is ordered, nothing emerges, nothing breaks. Moreover, nothing connects because our identity in this representation — which creates us as subjects and creates meaning — is a self-projection of perspectival reading. Although on another symbolic level, the work



Carole Condé/Karl Beveridge, *Maybe Wendy's Right*, part no. 1 of 15, 16"x24" mounted colour photograph and text, 1979

functions like a traditional representational painting contained within the ideal viewing space of the art gallery. With no ambiguity, with no breaks that signify contradictions, there are no connections with the "spectator" except through control (of meaning) and identity (through perspectival constitution of the self). Only through a break, through ambiguity, can the individual as part of the social inscribe the contradictions of the social on his or her body, following a line of issue that carries away the self through desire.

Representation as represented and representative is a matter of control: control of meaning, control of us. Leftist politics is representational, in that it tries to represent the future (the one meaning of the future), and representative in assuming political representation of the masses. Jean-François Lyotard has spoken of the representation of the future in terms of the work of art: "To suspend the meaning of a work of art to its ulterior political effect is not to take it seriously once more, to take it as an instrument, useful for something else, as a representation of something to come; it is to remain within the order of representation, within a perspective that is theological or teleological." ("Suspendre le sens de l'oeuvre à son effet politique ultérieur, c'est de nouveau ne pas la prendre au sérieux, la prendre pour un instrument, utile à autre chose, comme une représentation de quelque chose à venir; c'est rester dans l'ordre de la représentation, dans une perspective qui est théologique ou téléologique." Lyotard, "Notes sur la fonction critique de l'oeuvre").

Not only does politics in art, as in practice, wish to represent the future, but it also presumes to represent public desire. It is in this manner that the Party in Marxist-Leninism represents the working class, but by representing it, interprets and directs it (controls it) according to a theory of history, but not desire, which cannot be represented — that is, symbolized and directed. This desire, I should add, is not spontaneity, but real production critically recognized. The public assumes its own history by recognizing its repressed desire in the social world — that is, its ideological oppression. This desire can only act in a situation of the "accumulation and exacerbation of all the historical contradictions," that is, their "overdetermination" (Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination").

Representation and reading proper are inseparable. In the case of Condé and Beveridge, it is a matter of the reading of clues, a reading of signs that compose the totality of the message. A reading that does not go beyond itself is representation, contained within the frame and limit of one meaning. It does not even matter what one's politics are: there is still only one reading. Multiple readings, ambiguity, would open the work to desire, but also to ambivalence, to positive or reactionary investment in the work. Any intervention in history, however, must open itself to this possibility of positive action/function, recuperation, or negative response and reactionary usurpation (the Nazi abuse of Nietzsche, for example). Any art, any act, must be open to this lack of control, to the abandonment of the hierarchical distribution and unification of meaning, to the release of a mechanism from which desire issues. Reading as representation does not lead to action; only multiple readings can. How do we act from content or even think about it if there are no breaks to provoke thought, no gaps, no ambiguity, no tension of meaning? Because one reading cannot construct — where earlier I wrote "signify" — contradictions (contradictions are an impossibility where only one meaning or reading is possible, just as they are impossible in essences which are the ground of univocal meaning), that is, inscribe the overdetermined social contradictions within itself, because it cannot be connective, disjunctive or conjunctive in its breaks, the subject of its reading (who multiply create themselves in these readings) cannot inscribe the contradictions on their own bodies because desire is an issue from/through contradiction leading to production and action. To be effective, a reading must be a productive transformation of the text — within one's body, within the social. Hence, the text must be open to the productive transformation of desire.

Condé and Beveridge may wish to take control of the signs usurped by media in the service of capitalism. By remaining within representation, however, the effectiveness of the action is neutralized. Moreover, they are still contained within the limits of control: the control of signs, the control of meaning. To escape both, we must infiltrate the code and rupture the semiotic flow.

PHILIP MONK

I Judith Doyle

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- page 129 "Facsimile Hardware," in *Spaces by Artists/Places des artistes*, ed. Tanya Rosenberg (Toronto: ANNPAC, 1979), 54, 56.
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- page 138 Tim Guest, "The Metaphor Machine," *Centerfold* 4:1 (October/November 1979), 56.
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- page 141 Philip Monk, "Anorexial," unpublished.

See also ...

- page 220 *Peripheral Drift: a Vocabulary of Theoretical Criticism* (Toronto: Rumour, 1979).



Bell was right about wire uniting the world. But he would have been surprised by the *nonvocal* applications of the network his vision inspired. Today, with telephony the universal communications medium, Ma Bell's voice grade telephone lines are being used increasingly for a wide variety of analog and digital transmissions. Computers, facsimile, and slow-scan television (SSTV) are only three of the relatively new electronic systems currently enjoying intensified experimental development. These and other innovative devices are loading the circuits. Abstract audio tones now carry a significant part of contemporary communications content. A large percentage of *FORTUNE's* top five hundred businesses are succumbing to the increased worldwide trend toward tying mainframe computers, intelligent terminals and minicomputers into inter-connecting networks via telephone lines. The U.S. government has computerized 3.9 billion records on most citizens which are now stored in the Personal-Data Systems of 97 federal agencies, and are available at the touch of a telephone-connected computer button. Most of the image-transferred material published by newspapers, most of the hard-copy text information constituting the daily flow, most of the organizational structures framing our lives pass through the hard-wired telephone-lined global network.

The extraordinary communications possibilities presented by these new tools have not been widely recognized. Even within that small sector of the international art world interested in multipoint time-shared collaborative communicating, microelectronic systems awareness has been thin. In September 1977, at the instigation of Keith Sonnier and Liza Bear, the Center for New Arts Activities, Inc., New York, of which I am Executive Vice-President, contracted with NASA/Lewis, the Public Service Satellite Consortium (PSSC),

the Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco, the Public Interest Satellite Association (PISA), New York, the Franklin Street Art Center (FSAC), New York, and other organizations for the Send/Receive Satellite Network's *TWO-WAY DEMONSTRATION*, the first artists' satellite transcontinental transmission which utilized the jointly owned NASA/Canada "Hermes" CTS satellite. Few of us were aware at the time that a similar San Francisco/New York interconnect with local Cable TV feeds could have been accomplished through SSTV for about one hundredth of the cost. Fourteen months ago, we were very video-experienced, but relatively uninformed and inexperienced with interactive microelectronic communications systems.

Since then, things have changed markedly. The cost of microprocessors has fallen to the purchasable level. Today's under \$1000 home terminal does the work that the house-sized tube computers costing a hundred to a thousand times that did ten years ago. Start-up "dumb" terminals costing less than \$400 transmit alphanumeric information through telephone connects into mainframe memory anywhere in the world. Using a networking service such as I.P. Sharp Associates' "MAILBOX", multipoint computer-aided conferencing becomes a daily occurrence. The impact and future effect of the microelectronic revolution currently judged to be of greater consequence than the industrial revolution is put into perspective by estimates that the world's electronic industry will grow from about 100 billion dollars last year to between 325-400 billion dollars in the late 1980s depending upon the penetration into the world market by very-large-scale integrated (VLSI) circuits each of which stores more than 100,000 functions. By 1990, electronics will be the world's fourth largest industry after autos, steel and chemicals, each of which totals about 500 billion.

My first real awareness of the scope of the computer-configured world came last January when a chance visit to a friend's "home-brew" SOL computer terminal buffered to a SONY color TV monitor opened my eyes to the interactive possibilities of computer communication. This insight refocused our second phase funding drive, especially to the National Endowment for the Arts, which already had awarded a start-up grant to the Franklin Street Art Center, an eleven member New York artist group of which I am Executive Director. The FSAC's Live Injection Point (LIP), a professional broadcast-capable TV production facility, created weekly real-time programming with local performing artists which was aired Wednesday evenings on Manhattan Cable/Teleprompter TV, New York during the last three months of 1977. Realizing the interactive limitations of the LIP, we recentered our activities around what we saw as the relatively unexplored areas of computer communicating. In April, the FSAC was awarded the first computer project grant by the Visual Arts Department of the NEA, \$10,000 for the Computerized Arts Network (CAN). This program is being implemented by Duff Schweninger, Paul Shavelson and myself in three phases: R & D, the most important part of which has been the initiation of Control Data's PLATO Computer System (950 terminals in 140 worldwide sites) between Honolulu and New York, (*CANCOM I*, May 20, 1978) wherein the FSAC, NEA, HEW, U. of Hawaii, and Dr. Donald Bitzer (director of U. of Illinois' computer-based Education Research Laboratory, and the inventor of PLATO) real-time dialogued in the "Talkmatic" mode for four hours with other worldwide terminals joining intermittently; the establishment of a mobile, multi-directional, multi-national distributed processing network with bi-directional polarities in Toronto and New York; and a written evaluation of the concept, design, development, implementation and application of the CAN project.



After spending six weeks this summer as "Artist-in-Reticence" at the Western Front Society, Vancouver, and having a computer-oriented show, *CANCOM II: TALK TO GOD*, at Pumps, I arrived in Toronto in July to help coordinate the "HANDS ACROSS THE BORDER" six cities slow-scan interconnect. In this transmission, the first multi-point Canadian/US SSTV narrowcast, ROBOT 530 Phone Line TV transceivers were used to convey slow-scan images between approximately eighty representatives from the Franklin Street Arts Center, Inc., N.Y.; the Center for New Art Activities, Inc., N.Y.; Collaborative Projects, Inc., N.Y.; Televista, Inc., Memphis, Tenn.; Relay, Inc., San Francisco, CA.; Open Space, Victoria, B.C.; Satellite Video Exchange Society, Vancouver; Western Front Society, Vancouver; Pumps, Vancouver; Mainstreet, Inc., Vancouver; and Art Metropole, Toronto. To a great extent, this project grew out of the pioneering work done by Liza Bear, President, Center for New Art Activities, New York and Bill Bartlett, Open Space, Victoria who had previously collaborated on a two-way two city SSTV interconnect in May.

The Fifth Network Conference in early September held me in Toronto. Due to my interest in computers and my friendship with the Hummer Sisters, they introduced me to Burt Liffman, former director of Memo From Turner, a Canadian government funded organization that accomplished important work in computer networking in the early to mid seventies. Burt generously lent me four corrugated boxes of what he said were ten thousand dollars worth of reports on the computer state of the art from Rand, IBM, Stanford Institute and various government agencies. On September 4th at an A Space opening, I met Norman White and Judith Doyle. My meeting with these individuals lead to long discussions concerning the possibilities of initiating a truly global computer net capable of dialoging world problems. On the evening of September 12 at Burt Liffman and Isobel Harry's Spadina apartment, Judith Doyle and I excitedly sketched out nine major areas of central concern:

1. The establishment of a computerized networking facility.
2. Interactive conferencing and information exchange using all available media.
3. Utilization of established networking systems.
4. The initiation of local and out-of-house research and discussion groups.
5. An investigation into computer modelling.
6. The investigation into computerized applications in the fields of art, science, education and welfare.
7. The need to establish TV production capability.
8. Research, development, design, planning, launching and maintenance of an artists' controlled communications satellite.
9. The need for a regular, international print publication.

With these ambitious and somewhat unrealistic goals, it was necessary to have two things — a base of operations and an in-house computer terminal. Burt offered to lend his Texas Instruments Silent 700 terminal. Judith agreed to make space available at her storefront office: Rumour Publications, 720 Queen Street West. WORLDPOOL was born!

Two nights later, the new organization met at 720 with eighteen people present, including Glenn Lewis of the Western Front; Bill Bartlett of Direct Media Association; Richard Hill, Chairman of the Photo/Electric Arts Department, Ontario College of Art; Mary Anne Carswell from Soft Arkiv; Gary Cherlet, an independent computer consultant; Andreas Blackwell, an independent video producer; Sharon Lovett, newly arrived in Toronto from the Video Inn; Norman White; Judith; her partner in Rumour Publications, Fred Gaysek; and I. The energy was high. Everyone was stimulated by the new collaborative possibilities. Regular Wednesday meetings were agreed upon. Procedures were decided. Areas of specific responsibility were delineated. Project priorities were discussed. Areas of consensus began to crystalize. We began to think ourselves "WORLDPOOLERS".

Since then, WORLDPOOL has held fourteen weekly '720' Wednesday meetings with approximately 110 different individuals attending; conducted about 140 local, national and multi-national facsimile transmissions between 720 and WORLDPOOL-related individuals in New York (Liza Bear, CNAA; Colleen Fitzgibbon, Michael McClard, Robin Winters, COLAB; & others), Florida (Kyr, G.L. Sullivan and 30 students at Broward Community College), Montreal (Studio Z), and 3 other Toronto locations. We have plugged into the I.P. Sharp Associates "MAILBOX" distributed computer network (New York, Bolder, Victoria, and Toronto), and narrowcast two SSTV transmissions with Direct Media Association, Pender Island, B.C.

WORLDPOOL representatives have attended the Fourth International Conference on Digital Satellite Communications, Montreal, Oct. 22-23; TELESAT CANADA, Ottawa, Oct. 26, Norpak Ltd., Pakenham, Oct. 27; Bell-Northern Research Ltd., Ottawa, Oct. 27; TransCanada Telephone System, Ottawa, Oct. 27; The American Society for Information Science, New York, Nov. 19-23; and the Canadian Computer Show and Conference, Toronto, Nov. 28-30.

WORLDPOOLERS have visited five Canadian provinces, and fourteen States talking to and audio interviewing a broad range of people in education, industry, computer science, networking, telecommunications, and government, building up an archive/library of audiotape, videotape, books, pamphlets, magazines, reports, perspectives, specification sheets, computer print-outs, facsimiles, clippings, and xeroxed information concerning the present state of the communications revolution.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

My work during the past year has convinced me that we *must* implement a logically integrated computerized communications network. We need to be able to computer conference. We need a shared database. We need a linked computing utility that will be able to inform us of what we are doing, what we have done, and what we intend to do.

I have a hazy vision of the day when we all will have access to a computer network containing the entire body of known facts. In the meanwhile, we must start to construct our own network from our own shared needs. Many of the people with whom I have daily contact also acknowledge this need. There are many indications that this feeling, this need, is broadbased. At the present, I think of the main solution to this problem in terms of the Computerized Arts Network (CAN).

The Computerized Arts Network can be developed on an incremental basis with only as much computing power being installed as is required at that moment in time. It should be a distributed network consisting of independent nodes. If one node of a distributed system goes down, processing will still continue on the other nodes.

CAN is now being implemented in two geographically displaced computing nodes, New York and Toronto. These nodes are developing somewhat independently. They do not need to have the exact same computing facilities. Their hardware bases can be quite different. Their computing facilities can consist of either dumb terminals or mainframes. Secondary storage and communications capabilities are desirable. Application programs can be loaded and run at each node. Forward thinking systems design requires that displaced computing facilities be linked through telecommunications. Interlinking of this distributed network will be most economically accomplished through the developing communications satellite system. It is advisable to start thinking about and planning our own satellite.

CAN is a particular form of distributed network — a distributed database system (DDS). In the broadest sense a DDS could be considered to exist when each user has permanent files attached. However, this does not imply any relation between the databases. Each individual terminal can have private files to process in-house information. CAN will operate when an integrated database is physically distributed over several linked computing facilities. This is already happening. But I.P. Sharp Associates has provided the network linkage; we have not created it. In the future, we will.

CAN should develop as an integrated network. Integration means that each node has potential access to the entire database. Ideally the physical distribution of the database will be transparent to the application program. At each node, the software should consist of an operating system, a database management system and a communications management system. CAN aims at gaining the benefits of the database approach by the control of integrated data while not imposing centralisation.

Consequently, CAN is developing as a horizontally rather than a hierarchically distributed system. Instead of a single central node dictating control over lower level members of the hierarchy, all computing facilities will cooperate at an *equal* level. Linkage between nodes is on a dynamic basis. Control of the data flow is shared by the originating and receiving nodes.

Although CAN facilities are now going on line, this network is in a primitive developmental stage. Possible performance parameters have still to be worked out. Hardware acquisition should be decided from a systems standpoint. Database management systems should be decided with present and future users. Network needs must be considered in light of local needs. Transparency, integrity and consistency must be maintained. Data Dictionaries describing local databases have to be developed. When the structure and location of data change in the network, the system components must make appropriate changes. These and other aspects of CAN must be discussed if we intend to create a workable global communications network. And if we don't do it, others, with their rather than our interests at heart, will.



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TORONTO, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1978

72 PAGES

Bell seeks to take over cable TV service using fibre optics

By BARBARA KEDDY

Fierce rivalry between Bell Canada and the nation's cable television operators came to a head yesterday when Bell Canada announced it plans to eventually replace the existing cable television system and provide its own network.

A. Jean de Grandpre, chairman of Bell Canada, said the firm plans to fight for the right to be the architect of the new telecommunications network. He

made the comment while officially kicking off a two-year field trial in fibre optics technology in some 35 homes in Toronto's Yorkville district.

Bell's test is the world's first field trial of a fibre optics system used for residence telephones. In the future, a fibre optics network will provide a delivery system to meet all the foreseeable communications needs of a community. For example, telephone service, television distribution, computer data services and all

kinds of new information services will be delivered to homes and offices through a common fibre optics network.

Fibre optics is the conversion of electronic signals into light beams which are transmitted through strands of glass fibre the thickness of human hair. Light pulsing through the strands can carry 10,000 times more information than a regular copper telephone wire. One hair-fibre has the potential of carrying more than 4,000 voice conversations simultaneously.

The gradual shift to fibre optics technology has been planned by both telephone companies and cable television firms. Because fibre optics can combine both telephone and television signal delivery on a single fibre, the need for two cable systems is being questioned by Bell Canada officials.

"While there may have been some technical justification for constructing separate telephone and cable television distribution facilities in the past, new technology is found to remove any jus-

tification for separate facilities in the future," Mr. de Grandpre said at a luncheon attended by people prominent in the communications field.

It makes sense, Mr. de Grandpre said, to have a single network to carry all services.

"I believe that the public interest would continue to be best served by one carrier in a given area, providing, for shared use, a single integrated network capable of transmitting all voice, visual and data communications."

Bell challenges cable firms

From Page One
can build a fibre optics network.

When asked how Bell Canada intends to take the carrier system away from the cable industry, Mr. de Grandpre said that the question will be resolved one way or another. "We are going to develop this as we did the telephone system. We financed the development of

the telephone system by leasing out services.

"You have your choice. Either you're going to have a natural, regulated monopoly, or you're going to have competition. . . . so we're going to have a competitive situation and offer a portion of the pipe (fibre optics cable) that we've built, or we are going to have a competitive system,

in which case I'm going to build it. But I will be given the opportunity to deliver a cable signal to the same degree that the cable operators are delivering a cable signal."

Talking about his plans to build an integrated fibre optics system left Mr. de Grandpre red-faced. Seated next to him as he talked about building a fibre optics

system was federal Communications Minister Jeanne Sauve, who often added in agreement with Mr. de Grandpre's statements about the importance of fibre optics technology.

She said that "down the road, the question is, will there be two fibre optics systems? The marketplace will decide that." She added that any monopoly that

might develop would be regulated.

The federal Government knows some changes will occur in the telecommunications industry as telephone and cable television technology converge. That is one reason she recently established an independent committee to examine the communications industry, she said.

Mrs. Sauve said some cable television operators may decide to lease space on the fibre optics network to provide programming services to subscribers.

She cautioned that the replacement of copper cables with fibre optics will take place over time, up to 30 years from now, and that the industries will have time to make adjustments.

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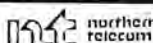
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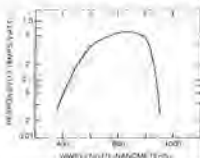
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The Globe and Mail

TORONTO, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1978

Bell's plan to monopolize network services prompts angry debate

By ROBERT STEPHENS

An angry debate has broken out in the Canadian communications industry following the suggestion by the chairman of Bell Canada of Montreal that his company should be the sole carrier of all telecommunications services in Canada.

A.J. de Grandpre told a gathering at the official kick-off of Bell Canada's fibre optics experiment in the Yorkville district of Toronto that the firm plans to fight for the right to be the architect of a new telecommunications network. Opponents and sympathizers have been quick to respond.

"I think Mr. de Grandpre is sticking his neck out a mile," said G.G.F. Steele, president of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters.

"The broadcasters don't like the idea of a monopoly. Also, I'm worried about the fact that Bell and the Department of Communications tend to think alike about how things should be handled in the future."

Reports of Mr. de Grandpre's address noted that Communications Minister Jeanne Sauve was "often nodding in agreement" with the Bell chairman's views.

However, a spokesman for the minister said Mrs. Sauve never intended to give the impression that she favoured Bell's position. In fact, the spokesman noted that Mrs. Sauve altered the text of her prepared speech

because of Mr. de Grandpre's comments, adding at the last moment: "Federal legislation may not necessarily imply institutional integration."

In other words, Mrs. Sauve wanted to emphasize that although it may be technically feasible to carry every telecommunications service on one system, plant integration may not be the best solution in the public interest.

In addition, the spokesman speculated that Mr. de Grandpre may have been "taking advantage" of the minister's presence to promote his idea of a Bell monopoly. Colin Watson, secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Cable Television Association, said "I think she was set up."

Andrew Roman, executive director of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, said Bell used the occasion to foster "the impression that the minister endorses its monopoly concept."

Michael Hind-Smith, president of the cable association, said it was "unlikely that the minister would seek to prejudice the findings" of the nine-member committee recently established by the Communications Department to study the telecommunications system in Canada.

However, others continue to feel that Bell and the department are too cozy. Mr. Watson said the telephone companies are strongly represented on the department's new committee and that "things are very much stacked against" the cable companies.

Mr. Roman said the department often sounds like it's a branch plant of Bell.

Bell's philosophy, as summed up in a writing paper it prepared for the department last year, is that "the public interest is best served when one carrier provides, for shared use, a single integrated network capable of transmitting all telecommunications."

The telephone companies and that "things are very much stacked against" the cable companies. Mr. Roman said the department often sounds like it's a branch plant of Bell.

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only build and own the system. Equal access would be a condition of an integrated plan," said Donald Cruckshank, president of the Canadian Telecommunications Carriers Association.

But K.E. Hancock, director of engineering with the cable association, said the cable companies would be opposed to a monopoly even under these conditions because "if we don't have control of our own business, Bell can exert undue pressure on us."

He said Bell could "drag its feet" on such things as adding cable or repairing breaks and that cable companies would be assigned the lowest priority.

In addition, he said Bell likely would be reluctant to give up non-programming services — such as interactive television and electronic fire alarms — to the cable operators because "Bell and the other telephone companies see this area as their natural monopoly."

"If they own the cable, we can't see them letting us get into any non-programming services," Mr. Hancock said. "History has shown that the telephone companies are paternalistic at best and dictatorial at worst."

Mr. Roman said that rates would be regulated in a monopoly "so that we couldn't take advantage of the C.A.T.V. companies."

However, Mr. Roman said large rate increases would be a normal occurrence in a monopoly situation — "that's what happens when Bell is in charge" — and the cable companies would be forced to pass on these costs to the consumer.

James McDaniell, general sales manager with CNCP Telecommunications, said a monopoly would result in poor service and a lack of technological innovation.

"Monopolies don't ask the user what he wants. They tell him what he can have. Monopolies don't rush to bring in new technology. They use every last bit of outdated equipment until it falls apart so that they can

maximize return on investment."

Mr. Hind-Smith said cable companies may be interested in building a fibre optic system in joint-ownership with the telephone industry "at some point in the future," although only the integration of subscriber loops would be feasible because of the differences in plant.

Joint-ownership is not particularly appealing to the telephone companies, however. Mr. Cruckshank said telephone companies have approximately \$12-billion invested in plant in Canada, while cable companies have only about \$500-million invested.

In addition, cable companies would be operating in the lucrative urban centres, and thus the telephone utilities would not be able to "subsidize" the less profitable rural areas.

Although Bell is promoting the idea that fibre optics have paved the way for a natural monopoly, cable representatives claim the technology will not become widely available for at least another 50 years. Mr. Watson said "Bell's position is totally unsupported, considering the technology involved."

Mr. Hind-Smith added that "there is nothing in the technology of fibre optic distribution plant that persuades us of the technological or economic imperatives to combine these different distribution systems."



Video-caller James Snow takes

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technology

Mr. de Grandpre made several references to Bell's natural monopoly to provide telephone service. There are growing indications, he said, that competition and regulation make "strange" and indeed incompatible bedfellows, and that "there is no way they can co-exist in effective and equitable harmony."

Monopoly has made it possible for Bell to build a telephone network and should be allowed to continue as Bell BELL — Page 2

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• 96 PAGES

THROUGH A GLASS CLEARLY

Bell wizards have hooked us
to Britain with a glass thread



These 12 little devils, glass fibers, carry laser-activated light beams that in turn carry all the things that big cable underneath does. Bell has high hopes for the new technology, and hints this may be one of the biggest communications breakthroughs since Guglielmo Marconi (inset) sat on a hill in Newfoundland and tapped out the world's first wireless transmission.



Federal minister of communications, Jeanne Sauve, her Ontario counterpart James Snow, A.J. de Grandpre, chairman of the board of Bell Canada and British Consul-General G. Finlayson chat away with U.K. government officials yesterday in a two-way video phone call from Yorkville that Bell arranged over its new fiber optics system.

By GARTH TURNER
Business Editor

The picture wasn't that great, and the sound was kind of fuzzy at times, but it was still a moment of triumph yesterday when a clutch of Bell executives and politicians talked to a row of British politicians via the world's first video telephone conference call.

The "historic" moment, as federal communications minister Jeanne Sauve was later to term it, took place in the Hazlet Avenue fiber optics lab of Bell Canada.

Fiber optics, you ask? Well that call, complete with color picture on a four-foot screen, pulsed its way across the Atlantic on a hair-thin strand of glass fiber — the same type of fiber that Bell has wired into 35 homes in the Yorkville area to handle normal phone calls.

Bell hopes fiber optics will be the big thing in our communications system in years to come. In this system information is converted into an electrical signal and then into a modulated light beam by means of a laser. The beam shoots along the glass fiber to an electric eye which generates the light back into electricity and sends it along to a receiving device.

It sounds complicated, but Bell says the system has great advantages. Fibers are small and efficient. They can do the work of many times more copper wire, and do it with less interference and fewer pieces of hardware along the way.

The call yesterday was made to officials of the British Post Office, which runs the phone system in that country, and which has also been dabbling in the exotic technology. The system proved politician-proof, operating almost flawlessly through a host of speeches.

For her part Sauve said Canada needs to press on with optical fiber research, in order to stay on top of the hotly competitive field. She pledged the support of the federal government in doing that.

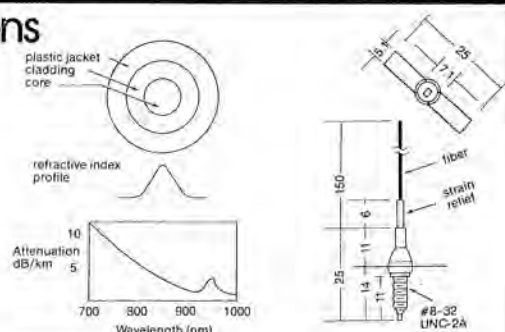
The federal department of communications will be joining hands with the phone company in testing Ottawa's new super-computer Videotex system (renamed Telenet) later in the same area of the city.

For the next two years Bell will be operating the fiber phones in Yorkville, a project which has so far cost the company almost \$2 million. The fibers laid are able to transmit voice, data and video signals on a single fiber in both directions.

Optical Communications

PLASTIC COATED OPTICAL FIBERS — GRADED INDEX
Tentative Specifications NT 7-2-C

These fibers are designed for use with high radiance LED's, lasers and silicon photodetectors in large bandwidth, single fiber channel optical communication systems. The fibers consist of a doped silica core with a graded refractive index, surrounded by a pure silica cladding. A plastic jacket is extruded onto the silica fiber to provide a non-fragile structure. The plastic coated fiber may be used directly in a benign environment. Alternatively it is suitable for incorporation into multi-channel ruggedized cable formats. The fibers are designed to be compatible with Northern Telecom's high radiance LED's, lasers, single fiber bulkhead connectors, and small area silicon P-I-N photodetectors.



A24/TORONTO STAR, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1978 ••

Video conference call scores a first

The world's first two-way video conference call between Toronto and London took place yesterday using a revolutionary communications system destined to change the lives of Canadians.

The voices and images of Canadian and British officials were transmitted partly through hair-thin glass fibres — a technology in which Canada is a world-leader.

The conference call was transmitted on to a 3-foot-by-2-foot screen which, hooked to a touch-tone telephone, is capable of carrying conventional television programs.

At the touch of one button an early

morning game show popped up on the screen. At the press of another a camera monitoring the Don Valley Parkway, gave both Canadian and British viewers a look at Toronto rush-hour traffic congestion.

The system can be developed to permit shopping at home, or to give a commuter an armchair view of traffic conditions as he finishes his breakfast.

But it also brought with it the old headache of Bell Canada and its monopoly. Already the battle lines are being drawn. Yesterday, Bell Canada said that with the coming of the new technology, its monopoly should carry over into

cable television distribution lines. But today CNETP Telecommunications said: "The last thing Canada needs now is 'the dead hand of monopoly, as envisaged by Bell — in this vital field.'"

"We're talking as if we were actually just across the table. It makes the world a pretty small place to live in."

The fibre-optic system converts electrical signals to light beams that travel through tiny glass strands.

The same principle is behind another experiment launched yesterday, a two-year trial in the use of fibre-optics for home telephones.

Bell Canada has installed two-way

optical-fibre voice channels in 35 subscribers' homes in the Yorkville area, the world's first such test in a residential setting.

A. Jean de Grandpre, chairman of the board of Bell Canada, said yesterday that the natural monopoly Bell has enjoyed for the last 60 years should carry over in apply to new technology such as fibre-optics.

"Either you have a natural monopoly that is (government) regulated or you have competition," he said at a news conference. "You can't have both. This country . . . cannot afford to have two superhighways."

Putting the Page On Line

In this wired world, we can connect with whomever we want, when we want, how we want. And we can go on paper. And the call comes back. Talking paper.

Facsimile makes sound from paper, and transmits it anywhere over existing telephone lines in two to six minutes. Facsimile is de and re materialization. Between the pages is a sound code which signifies the page. This means interactive correspondence, image exchange, and sequential collaboration. With lasting, reproducible documentation.

The facsimile transceiver does a reading that's copied at the other end.



The Call For Action

Everyone is familiar with the action document. It is the document that needs to be fast in release to initiate action. Or interaction. The document dialogue.

Who's speaking?

We use a variety of communications channels. Each has advantages and disadvantages. But the action/interaction document is unique . . . and has special requirements. So what are your alternatives? And how good are they?

The Mail?

Now you know better than that. Half the world is waiting for mail. *Action documents can't wait.*

Telephone Alone?

A verbal medium. The action document needs to be transmitted in its original written or graphic form.

Messenger?

Across the street or across the city? Maybe. But not around the world. And are they trustworthy?

Why Not walk across the Street?

We all like doing it live. But you can only spread yourself so thin.

Objects?

Fine, if you know exactly what you've got to say. And are willing to wait months for an answer.

Facsimile?

Exact copies transmitted in two to six minutes over the phone. No disadvantages we can think of.



Facsimile is . . .

Accurate: It's right there on paper.

Attractive: Deep, dark blacks and interesting scan lines.

Flexible: Even a whistle can go on paper.

Confidential: No third party involvement.

Convenient: Use it wherever there's an ordinary phone.

AND FAST: Fast enough for interaction.



Insert: Simon Moor

FACSIMILE PROJECTS

Cooking Canada's Turkey

The 'festive bird' took flight, dialed, scanned, and was analog encoded to sound in a 5-way interconnect between two New York locations, two Toronto locations and Hollywood, Florida.

At Worldpool Toronto, sixteen thanksgiving participants dined on line, sending collaborative greetings and time-critical information to artists in New York and Florida. The New York end included Liza Bear, Michael McClard, Robin Winters and Colleen Fitzgibbon; in Hollywood, Kyra & G.L. Sullivan, Willoughby Sharp and the students of Broward Community College. Over 40 facsimiles were had by all.

Send/Receive

After the guests & turkey, myself, Simon Moor and Michael Kieran engaged in a 10-generation telefacsimile sequence designed to begin the experiments with equipment alterations and audio input on copy. To our knowledge, this was the first multi-generation collaboration attempted on this sort of equipment.

The facsimiles and documentation/software that resulted are available in magazine form from Rumour Publications.



ANALOG

Word is a word for sounds and pictures. According to Ernest Fenollosa:



It is clear that these three joints, or words, are only three phonetic symbols, which stand for the three terms of a natural process. But we could quite as easily denote these three stages of our thought by symbols equally arbitrary, which had no basis in sound.*

* E. Fenollosa: *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, Edited by Ezra Pound. City Lights Books.

Inversely, a sound can tell a thousand pictures.

Analog is an imitation that travels well. A means for transforming, transmitting and storing information. It moves the way the original moves. In terms of light and dark, high and low, soft and loud or whatever. On the phone lines, this imitation is relayed along wires and cables, amplified at each station it hits. Every time it's amplified, it picks up garbage, or noise. (Diagram 1)

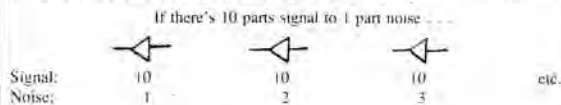


Figure 1: The triangles are amplifiers along the line. When amplified, signal stays the same, but noise increases.

Analog is as different as originals. This makes them bulky to store.

If analog's a problem, consider digital code. Bits are selected from the original, and assigned numbers. These numbers are given a binary weight. A binary weight indicates which particular numbers, of all to choose from, are ON and which are OFF. That sort of information never deteriorates.

The problem with digital thinking is that it assumes that bits make up the original. The whole is never digital, but digital imitation is remarkable. (Diagram 2)

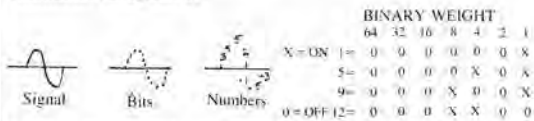
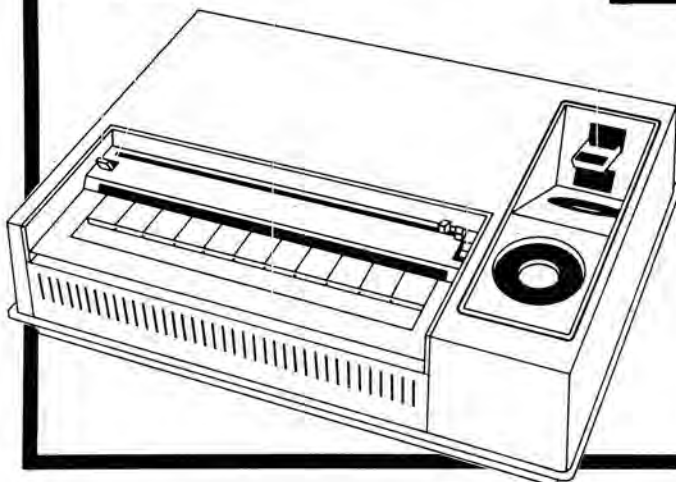


Figure 2: How a signal is approximated in digital code. The on/off's are plotted at the endpoint, reconstructing an outline of the signal.

On/off information is very compact, and fits into systems that provide cheap easy access. Like the home computer.

Telefacsimile transceivers make analogs of visual information on paper. These sound codes trigger copies on the other end. It is possible to go directly in and make your own sounds that trigger copies. By screaming, whistling, with electronic instruments . . . these are synthetic facsimiles.



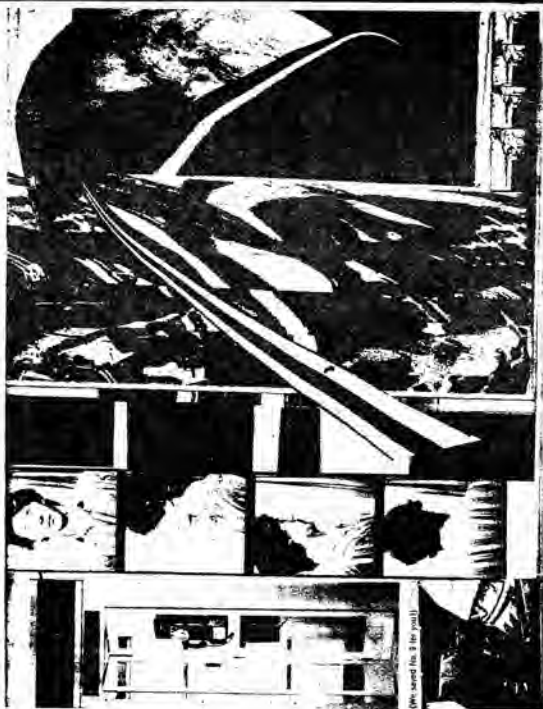
How To Borrow a Facsimile Transceiver

1. Phone Xerox of Canada.
2. Meet the salesman in your own home.
3. Arrange to test the Xerox 400-J telecopier-transceiver.
4. Ask to demonstrate it over a weekend.
5. Borrow the transceiver for the weekend.

How to Send a Telefacsimile

1. Call someone with a facsimile transceiver.
2. Put your image on the rotating drum.
3. Hook in the telephone.

WORLDPOOL PROJECTS: ANOTHER FIRST



Synthetic Facsimile

At Worldpool, myself, John Kuipers and Brian Richmond have been using synthesizers to trigger copies, and determine which sounds make which pictures. These experiments have resulted in beautiful, informative images.

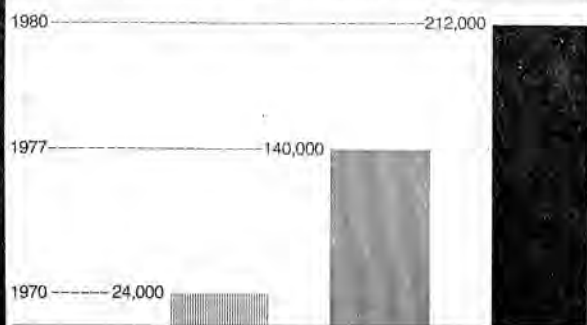
Hard-copy analogies of original sounds.

The Floppy Disco — R. & B. R. & D.

The blue-sky destination of facsimile is the floppy disco, built on the transmutation of sound to paper to sound again. Still on paper, but alchemically sound, we foresee the floppy disco as inevitable, and have been moving towards it.

First, tape the music. Bump the tape up to the correct frequency range with a variable-speed audio recorder. Now into the facsimile transceiver for your decorative hard copy. Which you reproduce infinitely with high-resolution photocopiers like the Xerox 9700. Now anyone with a telecopier can translate it back to sound, re-adjust the frequency . . . the beep goes on.

FACSIMILE UNIT GROWTH*



*STATISTICS FROM COMMUNICATIONS NEWS / YANKEE GROUP STUDY
Courtesy of Carl Jenkins, Xerox of Canada Ltd.

WORLDPOOL TOURS

TDMA Cocktail

Time Distributed Multiple Access is a system for satellite time-sharing which utilizes digitized burst sequences of batched information, as opposed to other conventional information 'sandwiches' that layer the frequency bands. This was only one of the information blockades between myself, Willoughby Sharp and Bill Bartlett on one end, and the Fourth International Conference on Digital Satellite Communications on the other.

Although often incomprehensible, the Satellite Convention was certainly interesting. Among the events was a special satellite facsimile demonstration. State of the art was handsomely presented by Teleglobe Canada when a page of *La Figaro* appeared at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, and was sped to same-day publication in Montreal's *La Press*. Ibid a page of Milan's *Couriera del Serra* in the *Globe and Mail*. I mean simultaneous multi-location publication. I mean instant photo-ready without shipping, distributors, postal paraplegia etc.



Amk B. Satellite used for Teleglobe Facsimile transmission. Photo courtesy Teleglobe Canada.

The All-Points Bulletin

Right now, the point is speed. But we know that the endpoint is dematerialization. I anticipate international collaborative bulletins published simultaneously with no physical base. Editorial determined on-location.

I don't need to carry this further. But envision how many locations . . .

With micro-processors to help with the sifting . . .

And hard-copies to enjoy forever, and give to your friends. Along with a few floppy discoses.

At Home With Your Facsimile

Energy is best measured between oppositions. Light and Dark. Up and Down. Fast and Slow. On and Off. Things between things are analogous to each other. Fast is light is up. Down is dark is slow. Or, let x equal . . .

This is when things stop being things and start being relationships and turn back to things again. Easy as pie. In the sky?

Not necessarily. American artists are on facsimile line in more than six locations. Here in Toronto, Worldpool; and a network of others who can access transceivers. Experiments are on-going. And linked to hardware that even experts never considered. And we are making hardware available.

On line. In touch. Independent. That's you with your facsimile transceiver.

2 Facsimile Hardware by Judith Doyle

a) Transceivers

There are two divisions of telecommunications hardware: transceivers and carriers. Transceivers, the discreet units which encode and decode information, include (a non-inclusive list) slow-scan, and fast scan microwave video transceivers, computers and dumb terminals which exchange alphanumeric information and make mutual, mutable and shared database feasible, acoustic amplifiers, couplers, dictaphones, remote phones, walki-talki's, ham radios, intercoms and C.B.'s for voice and sound, and facsimile transceivers which send copies of paper over telephone lines.

Telecopiers are portable typewriter-sized units renting presently for \$45 — \$100 per month from 3M, Xerox, Exxon and other business machine manufacturers. A sheet of black and white, 8 1/2" x 11" paper to be transmitted is clamped to a rotating drum and scanned by an electric eye; the light/dark information is analog-encoded to sound, sent over the phone, and decode simultaneously at the receiving end on heat-sensitive paper which costs about 5 cents a sheet. The copy resembles a black and white TV image in that scan lines are apparent.

b) Carriers

Information carriers are the second side of information hardware. Electronic information differs in form and substance from print, which is mechanically transported to its destination. Postal vehicles are a counterpart to the electromagnetic spectrum bandwidths¹, coaxial telephone lines, and new fibre optic cables which accommodate electronic transaction. As most of the usable electromagnetic spectrum is federally allocated, the most viable interactive communications carriers are the phone lines, particularly the upcoming fibre optic cable, which will accommodate several thousand times as many simultaneous signals as the coaxial cable presently in use. Multiplexing technologies will sandwich still more signals in redundant space², and packet switching will allow for computerized selection from a flow of information dense enough to fill a telephone directory daily.

c) Networks

Transceivers are becoming cheaper, more idiosyncratic, more popular, and more available. C.B., ham radio, and amateur TV networks are proliferating, incorporating new surveillance tools as rapidly as they can be perverted. The problematics of

¹The legislation, allocation and economics of the electromagnetic spectrum lend it the functional properties of hardware. It is interesting to note that microwaves (the amateur TV band-width) have not, as of yet, been legislated.

²Multiplexing fills the wasted space in a signal (pauses between words, for example) with a second signal.

hardware are located at the juncture of TV and telephone — the fibre optic cable system. Broadcast communications authorities recognize perverse, idiosyncratic, amateur sub-systems as unstable trends. Control is most effectively exercised in the carriers.

The network of individuals who possess facsimile hardware for uncommercial applications is shifty and unpredictable. There are six or seven indeterminate nodes in NYC; three in Toronto (part-time); two at Generative Systems, Chicago Art Institute/School of Art; one in Vancouver; one that comes up and down in Florida; and others that appear, are very active, disappear, resurface, or relocate. In this extrinsic way, a network is machinating.

Publications

set. One of the photographers, Taki Bluesinger, reinforced this idea by saying that the book was made not as information, but as a 'tribal expression' by the photographers, who "wrote the scenario and directed" this diverse effort. He emphasized the "Vancouver" or "West Coast" approach in the making of the book, which he defined as loose personal interpretations of local experiences. In fact they look like they could be anywhere, the results of which are intended for viewing by members of the Canadian established art circuitry.

This book represents to me another blow against 'appropriate' or 'relevant' work in favour of form over content, and artistic navel gazing. It illuminates for me the coercion of the government in artists' lives, and it shows how artists will present the benign side of the story anytime for money or promises of fame. Does "West Coast" mean "floating around in abstracted space, snapping impressions of already disintegrating concepts?" Like spoiled children these

photographers feel that everything belongs to them for their pleasure, to be manipulated at their will, the results of which are published in a very expensive colouring book for their friends in government and art. So it is true what they say about the West Coast: it's "beautiful", and you don't need a social conscience.

Is this really a solution to unemployment and de-industrialization, to mention only two serious issues in this country? Is this what artists do when given the money they always need? Retreat into a private world? Does this have any other purpose than to provide a medium for these artists to have their names on? This book leads to other books like this, and perhaps to one's own book like this in future, with one's own name on it, in bigger type. I for one cannot bear open-endedness and limitless inspiration when artists might be expected to exercise their consciousness in more directed ways. It's as if artists are not expected to touch the ground, in times of social crisis especially.

I would like to see some of these dream books supplemented by action books that point to the huge inequalities, illegalities and complacencies in this country. When will photographers use their form and technique not only for themselves but to help us all see some truth? When will these mutterings about "the cadence of light" stop so that we can look at who's doing what to keep people so mute in this land and others? There are already too many publications such as this one, dedicated to promoting careers in the shadowy, the unclear, the non-statement, the hazy metaphor, the visual for visual's sake. At this time in our history, outpourings such as this book are an embarrassment to hard-workers everywhere who are striving to at least remove the blinders put on by the co-optation of our vision.

When I think of who this book is intended for, it becomes even more obvious. No "layman" can read it. It's a self-aggrandizing book for strictly-controlled distribution to like-minded apolitical artists. ■

Rumour

THE RENT PARTY

May 19, 1979, Toronto

by Victor Coleman

Rumour Publications has moved its growing offices from Queen St. W. to 31 Mercer Street (one block South of King between Peter and John) where they're sharing the two-storey Pilkington Glass Showroom, built in the early Thirties, with Permanent Press: Paul Collins and Gary Shilling, graphic designers, Only Paper Today/The Eternal Network: Vic d'Or, prop., and Robert ('Long') Arn's Soft Arkiv, an artists' access computer retrieval experiment. The four companies intend to sponsor and present a varied program of low-profile and semi-private events as a revenue alternative to government cultural funding. To this end, an opening Rent Party was held on May 19. The following comments were recorded verbatim by your reporter:

Wired Punk: Hey . . . Wow . . . I haven't seen this much glass since the bloodbath at CEAC!

Wired Punk's Girlfriend: A lotta these people look a bit too clean, eh? Ya suppose it's some front for the

Jazz conspiracy?

Jack McClelland: These young people are the freshest new thing in the publishing industry since Gutenberg. But the costumes . . .

Andy Paterson (of 'The Government'): First thing Monday I'm gonna see about having some platforms made outta these glass bricks.

Vera Frenkel: You sure this is legal?

John Bentley Mays: This is the most stupendous, albeit out-of-the-way if you live in the west end and seldom come this far downtown, venue for an artists' collective I've ever encountered. If you ever need a Chairman of the Board . . . (inaudible whine).

Lou Applebaum: It's so refreshing to meet people who don't greet me with an out-stretched hand palm up.

AA Bronson: I'll give them six months at the most.

Stuart Murray: Dahling, people in Toronto just don't have Parties this

exciting; where did you rent your guests?

John Robert Colombo: You know, of course, that you'll never get anywhere publishing Americans such as Acker & Coleman.

Willoughby Sharp: Uhhh let's form a corporation next week and start the hard work of bringing the computer Home! Are you with me? Could you turn down that music?

Elke Town: I wish I had an office this big.

Robert Fones: I can have your shelves and bar ready by early 1980.

Rick/Simon: I'd be worried, if I were you, being this close to the Tower.

J. Kit Miller: You absolutely sure Pucci doesn't own this building?

Opal L. Nations: They've got ten buildings just like this one in Boston, mate.

Nancy Kosenka: I flew up from Berkeley this morning on a hunch.

Roy K. Kiyooka: Zitherhood is powerful.

Moe Koffman: I haven't seen this much mirror since working with Woody Herman.

AA Bronson: On second thought, I'll give them nine months with an option. ■

Victor Coleman, Toronto, is an editor of Only Paper Today.

ANOREXIAL

Judith Doyle

ANOREXIAL

Judith Doyle

"Although the chemical senses - taste and smell - may seem less important than other sensory systems in man, they have always had a central role in the behavior of other animals. Cells particularly sensitive to the chemical environment were among the earliest to appear, no doubt because the murky aquatic environments that were the scene of so much evolutionary history made chemical perception essential for survival. ...The study of taste and smell not only sheds light on one of the fundamental processes in nature; it can also be of help in combating insects and other pests that share with man a taste for certain foods. By understanding the mechanism of the chemical senses, man may be able to interfere with their operation, to anaesthetize them or even to exploit them."

Edward Hodgson; Taste Receptors; Scientific American, 1961.

I could not eat, but did not feel repulsed by food. The opposite, in fact, for food occupied my mind. It became a sort of incryption - a code which used a rudimentary part of language.

I wanted to use food with the spirit brought to flags, for flags and food share directness and economy. Once, at a party, a woman with a background similar to mine turned to me. "Being without money" she said "is like wearing gloves all the time."

By communicating with food, I felt as if I willingly wore those gloves. I was forced to convert what I had to say into something edible.

On coastal Samoa, boats leave each day to catch large shrimp which are exported to Europe, the British Isles, and North America. The nets pulled from the water contain many species of small fish. In order to separate the shrimp, the catch is spread over the decks by the crew, and when the shrimp have been put in pails, the rest are tossed to predatory birds which follow the boats. Perhaps by habit, the small fish were never considered worth eating though larger ones were expensive and often unavailable.

Then a micro-electronically controlled deboner was introduced into the village by a group of scientists. The result was two streams - one of scales and bones, the other of a finely-pulverized paste used to prepare various dishes. This paste was accepted by the community, and the scientists commended by government and people. The initial premise of the fishing expeditions had been changed.

One evening, I inadvertently left a piece of food out beside my refrigerator. The next night, very late, I turned on the kitchen light to find the food beneath a living surface. In a few hours, the cockroaches must have completed a life-cycle, and now the larger ones were outnumbered by insects no bigger than the head of a pin. What struck me as strange was the food itself- it seemed virtually unchanged.

I left it, and each evening when I turned the light on, it's deterioration appeared the same as it would have been without them. It dried and eventually disappeared, apparantly untouched by anything living.

Before I lost my appetite, I never considered using poison. Even the word seemed irreversible. I felt differently when I stopped eating. I felt that food should encompass a wide range of experiences, and I began to carry toxic substances, along with laxatives and other drugs which effected the effects of food.

Anorexia is primarily experienced by women, many of whom have been overweight at some point in their lives. Rarely are their lives dramatically altered by the weight loss, though the attitudes of their families and peers might be. The disturbing and unsatisfying changes effect them deeply.

"you know what they want me to do? Eat shit and shit food."

The tools and channels I use to transmit and receive information compose a new nervous system which is inherently collective.

I feel it is a system which represents me more adequately than my body can do.

An Elderly European man who spoke often and convincingly about "steel broom" politics was seated across from me in a small restaurant. He said "Supposedly, it was a woman who did this. Anyway, there was a dog, female dog, and this woman set about befriending it. At the time, she was in a basement, but she managed to save something to feed it. Each night, the dog would come closer to the window for the food. This took several weeks. And then one night, the woman (in one stroke) stuck her arm out the window and slit the thing's throat. After it was dead awhile, she pulled it in, but by now the other dogs had smelled it's blood, and part of how they trained these dogs was to starve them. So the other dogs approached the window. With the same razor, she cut the bitch into pieces, and while she climbed out, she fed the pieces to the other dogs. This was how she escaped."

For quite awhile I had nothing to say about his metaphors. There were such differences between us. Instead I spoke to myself. "You say you are not hungry, that your appetite is gone. But this is your sort of hunger - to hate food."

ANOREXIAL

by Judith Doyle

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RUMOUR

91 MERCER ST.
TORONTO ONTARIO
M5V 1H2

THEORETICAL FICTION



David Porter

Theory, displaced from the work of art, from its object, appears fictive. And fiction, without its natural ambivalence (the characteristic pre-eminence of events in sequence) seems first explanatory, then theoretical.

Somewhere between theory and fiction, a break has occurred. By placing the terms together, both become situated on their singular peripheries, in the mutual dislocation of this rupture. There is no definition for 'theoretical fiction', or rather, no torque of definitive

conditions implying a center. The conjunction (hence, conjecture) is to be found in the space between: an opening, or kinetic center of gravity, outside two bodies yet in roughly equivalent position, as in the shift of two gymnasts in mid-air.

The shift is temporary: the short, exhilarating force of falling bodies outside themselves, metabatic, out of control. 'Theoretical Fiction' is this unconditional issue from a break

J.D.

JUDITH DOYLE MODEL FOR A PROSE ALGORITHM

FOREWORD

The Architecture Machine Group at M.I.T. was originally formed to investigate computer-aided architecture. Increasingly, their efforts turned to the spatial management of data - in effect, to developing a perceptual architecture for information. Their systems, along with developments in telecommunications networking, and random-access information storage, point to the possibility of spatially-constructed fiction.

As the cost of memory plummets, concepts for manoeuvring through large bodies of information must be meticulously examined, for there are questionable inherent suppositions at work in most methods of information retrieval. For example, 'classified' information presumes an incontestable array of classifications, 'Sequential' information posits time as it's own thesis, with a humourless, intolerant posture regarding lies and omissions. Even contextual information, where the text is context, requires that the reader assume the text, secondary to the vertical configuration determined by the author.

The unique feature of spatially-constructed fiction is its sequential indeterminacy. New technologies provide new models for a more responsive information system where the user determines point of entry and motion through the text. Each reading is ideosyncratic; subject to additions, modifications, disconnections and breakdown. These systems imply the possibility of a *demanding* fiction, equipped with perceptive, decisive, and active mechanisms; in effect, a robot.

MODELS

1. WALK-IN TERMINAL

The 'Walk-In Terminal' designed by the Architecture Machine Group, provides a useful model for an *information interface* system. The user is seated in front of an 8" X 11" screen with advent video display and rear projection. At either side of this chair are two touch-sensitive monitors. One displays a 'world view map' - insignias, key phrases and pathways comprising an overview of the database. Selecting a point of entry from this map, the user controls a flow of moving pictures, and sound between stereo speakers. He or she may stop, start, slow, or reverse the flow of information, steering closer into detail, or sidetracking, negotiating the direction of their interests.

(In this flow, the user recognizes signs and traces - "Is this what you want? Or this?" - assembling a kind of composite photograph of desire from obviously incomplete co-ordinates; a *recognitive* activity)

2. ASPEN VIDEODISC

Another model by the Architecture Machine Group. The whole of Aspen, Colorado - it's streets, stores, alleys, etc - is recorded on videodisc (a way of storing 57,000 images per side with random access retrieval). The user (still in the control chair) wanders through the streets at will.

(The co-ordinates here are more obviously spatial - the appeal is in moving invisibly. Unlike the correlative 'flags' of the Walk-In Terminal, each frame is discrete and complete, for that matter, could be 'live'. A surveillance system?)

3. PERVERSE TELEPHONE NETWORK

A sub-network sending and receiving interactive pornography using new audio, video,

and facsimile transceivers and the existing telephone system. This network, with its open and shut nodes, is impossible to locate; the hardware shifts or falls apart, is easy to build or repair on principles of theft and bricolage, as it is composed of widely-proliferating surveillance tools. The network *per-se* is the telephone system. The individual participants are interchangeable.¹

(By participating in remote affiliations, the user is reduced to peculiar interests in disparate transmissions. Anything else ((anything unfit for the code)) can be eliminated. Can we call the voyeur 'non-interactive' and the pervert 'decompositional'? Signal and noise coalesce on this disjunctive surface ((with no body, no database)). The result is peripheral; a marginal remapping of the body's openings.)

A FEW TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Before, I indicated that the 'Walk-In Terminal' is a perceptive, decisive, active mechanism. We can locate its 'senses' at the points of juncture between the flow of information and the manual decision-making controls. Engaged in the flow, these navigational decisions have an immediate quality, so as to subvert 'selection between' into a cognitive moving-through. The activity is one of steering towards that which we recognize - first as a vague shape, but with increasing specificity.

Cues, clues, flags, and dynamic indications in the information flow are desire's correlatives; the mechanism interprets and perpetuates immediate motion through this heterogeneous drift.

2. The left-hand monitor in the terminal displays the same image throughout - a 'world view map' or overview of the database. Some imagery from the information flow is distilled into this static vista from which we choose an entrance. The reader, never trapped in the text, retains the option of returning to this decision; frustrated or dissatisfied, they may re-enter the algorithm from a fresh location.

Movement through the text enhances the map. Later, we will recognize some of it's figures as co-ordinates of our desire. ("Yes, I remember that, and it is what interests me.")

3. Pockets of cryptic, partial information are dispersed through the text; the consequence of our movement through these pockets is the text, which is distinguished by a certain opacity and density, ending in a new flow of partial information. The design is one of linked consequences, with links made by disjunctive motions.

4. The system is polyvocal, the text - subsequent; the voices it assumes are subsequent, for the text is disentangled from the mutual determination of sequence and point of view. Connections are contingent, interchangeable - like the Perverse Telephone Network. No doors are shut at the point of consequence, for the system is not designed "to mark decisive choices between immutable terms (the alternative: either this or that)."⁴ Rather, voices are particular and interfunctional, peculiar to desire and displacement.

5. Inserts, challenges, breakdown - a text without pre-determined sequence must prepare itself for all of these, for how can we determine this text's completion? At this point, the model of the network applies - impossible to locate, it's co-ordinates are conditional and very shifty. The text is immediately implemented in any given transmission; more than vulnerable to transgressions, it seems composed by them at every point. Effective and effectable, it is a fictive effect.

AFTERWORD

-SYMPTOMATIC MECHANICS

Correlative cues, clues and flags; indeterminate point of entry and breakdown; the contingent, subsequent motion resulting from this condition of recognition and emergency - these are some of the features of spatially-constructed text. The text may consist of stored language, imagery or sound, or a distributed network - its remarkable quality is the heightened ambivalence with which we enter; rather than locating information we have predetermined at the onset, we are moving through with an eye for the salience and protrusion of our immediate interests - in short, for difference.

What I am proposing is the inhabitation of new technologies with desire and indifference - two terms whose conjugality forms the basis of invention. Invention - an activity where features emerge, and are inhabited and misused with indifference to the intended function of the whole.

Symptomatic methods are not so much a model for fiction as for fictive instincts. Text resembles a disease, where the sum of the symptoms in their duration constitute the disease. Symptomatic mechanics displaces duration, allowing us to reconstitute the symptoms in our own peculiar time. This is not imaginative activity, where, in the narrative structure, we follow assumptions, imagining them as our own. Rather, symptomatic mechanics employ concentration and observation with all the senses, in order to recognize the symptoms of our own desire.

NOTES

1. Architecture Machine Group, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 9-511 77 Massachusetts Avenue Cambridge, MA 02139 (617) 253-5960 William C. Donelson

2. Dr. Robert Arn addressed this problem during the Computer Culture Exposition panel discussion on Freedom and Control vis. Micro-Electronic Technology, when he noted the freedom of privacy and the freedom to lie. Thus elaborate encryption algorithms both inhibit and maintain information control.

3. The intelligence of the network is its simulation, for its own perverse purposes, of the technological network, the communications technology network. Our desire is: to be peripheral, and yet inhabit anonymously. *Terminal Gallery: Peripheral/Drift*; Philip Monk, Parallelogramme/Retrospective 78/79

4. Machines attach themselves to the body without organs as so many points of disjunction, between which an entire network of new synthesis is woven, marking the surface off into co-ordinates, like a grid. The 'either...or...or' of the schizophrenic takes over from the "and then": no matter what two organs are involved, the way in which they are attached to the body without organs must be such that all the disjunctive syntheses between the two amount to the same on the slippery surface.

Anti-Oedipus/Capitalism and Schizophrenia; Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, Viking Press, 1972.

The Metaphor Machine

“My point is that illness is *not* a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness — and the healthiest way of being ill — is one most resistant to metaphoric thinking.” Susan Sontag, *Illness As Metaphor*.

Metaphors are first and foremost a literary device, a form through which artists express whatever nuances or specificities they choose. A metaphor can be revelatory or it can be just another limitation depending on how it's used, and so an understanding of metaphoric thinking has to be both critical and flexible. My critique is also scattered and intuitive, rather than definitive in any way.

The problem with metaphors is that they tend to take on a life of their own, the description becomes the thing itself, the parable becomes the real story. It's the mountain-out-of-a-mole-hill syndrome which turns a relatively meaningless analogy into an overly significant generalization. A metaphor which starts out as an arbitrary description develops a mythology of its own, and that mythology becomes a substitute, an interpretation of the reality itself.

Consider for example the function of the news media. Whether it's the exile of the boat people or the danger of exploding pop bottles, the newspapers, and television news in particular operates as a metaphor machine — generating fiction indistinguishable from facts. It manufactures hysteria, leaves only the vague impressions of real events, and doesn't actually reveal very much at all. It stimulates and informs just enough to make one listen and buy — both products and ideologies. It feeds a passive audience in the truest sense of the expression. And generally it only activates the public over right-wing issues, and does this regularly with great effect. When homosexuality is projected as the picture of moral decline, the result is a wave of queer-bashing. When Rastafarians are projected as dangerous criminal religiousos, the story is followed by a dramatic increase in racist violence.

Artists often misuse metaphors in an indirectly similar manner, although without such large consequences. In the same fashion as the media, the idea is to use the analogy of a sensational,

ambiguous, social phenomenon as your centerpiece, then build a mythology around it. This presumably gives an interesting angle on a complex social issue and creates a potent metaphor. But if the metaphor doesn't reveal anything (and especially something different from what mainstream culture has already presented us with) then the artwork, no matter how intelligently constructed, is a failure or an outright fraud. Judith Doyle's book *Anorexia* fails because it uses the disease as a convenient metaphor on which to hang a linguistic experiment, and distorts all the facts in the process. As another example, James Collins' photographs (“Watching Women”) take the viewer no further than the most banal, ‘romantic’, billboard message. His work is a fraud because, despite a highly developed sense of aesthetics, it amounts to a glorification of what already exists in countless misogynist advertisements.

But the converse is also true. It's possible to use the media's popular analogies to different ends. There is a current of media artists whose work revolves around inversions of pop culture, complete with grandiose allusions and ironic critiques. In his book, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto of Manhattan*, Rem Koolhaas speaks of the “reality shortage” which plagues modern society and proposes the construction of lucid, fantasy metaphors — a weapon against the boredom of a half-baked culture.

It's difficult to exactly prescribe a genuine, workable metaphor, but I think the key to the problem lies in revealing information not otherwise understood or articulated. The thoughts you know best, the strongest feelings, are never spoken except through a cheap metaphor which only tells half the story. An artist's job is to shape alternate mythologies, ones which belong to our own experience and which open up the field of vision instead of always cutting it up into manageable bites. And the best metaphors are the ones which uncover new territory, instead of limiting one's potentials to what is in the mainstream in front of us. ■

Tim Guest, Toronto, is a frequent contributor to “The Body Politic” and an associate editor of *CENTERFOLD*.

Books

At Ease With Disease

ANOREXIAL

by Judith Doyle. Rumour Publications, Toronto, 1979. \$1.00 (soft cover)

reviewed by Martha Fleming

The way in which Judith Doyle has used anorexia nervosa as a metaphor in her book shows a superficial understanding of the disease. Though with greater repercussions, doctors have often missed the same boat in their ‘diagnoses’ and ‘treatments’.

For many years behaviour modification has been an accepted ‘cure’ for anorexia. This treatment borders on the grotesquely Pavlovian in its use of shock treatment and other forms of torture. It attempts to rectify the attitude towards food, and utterly ignores the underlying socio-psychological circumstances responsible for the increasing incidence of this disease. All that behaviour modification succeeds in achieving is the creation of polarized attitudes to food — it trains anorexics to act in one way, though they feel the opposite.

Doyle's sketchy knowledge of the disease and her linear preoccupation with the most evident symptom — alimentary obsession — show her to be as unqualified as the behavioural therapists are to examine the complex nature of the disease. There are few things as misguided as an ill-informed metaphor.

Doyle talks about food as a mode of communication — “By communicating with food, I felt as if I willingly wore ... gloves. I was forced to convert what I had to say into something edible.” But the important focus is not *how*, but *what* anorexics are attempting to communicate through their aberration — that their psyches are in a state of extremus in the face of their adolescence, their puberty and the disengagement from their families. This Doyle does not touch on.

Her book appears, in an obscure way, to be about linguistics. And though anorexia has a great deal to do with expression, it is not in any way the kind of laterally communicative tool which Doyle has romanticized in her book — “I want to use food with the spirit brought to flags, for flags and food share directness and economy.” (cont'd, p. 58)

Anorexia Nervosa: A Patient Speaks

This serious disease is a feminist issue, and not a 'fad'.

Beth Lesser

Anorexia Nervosa is all too commonly written off by the medical profession as a "fad disease", a product of a peculiar convergence of cultural ideals and social pressures.

In the neverending search for elegantly thin proportions, the victims of this disorder — mainly young women and particularly those well off materially and intellectually — reject all indulgence and lead an aesthetic life of starvation and regimented behaviour, often punctuated by wild, impulsive bingeing and vomiting.

To many outsiders, involved or not in the field of medicine, anorexia must seem a trivial disease. Male psychiatric assistants have expressed a real resentment at having to spend their nights on the anorexic wards. They find the units populated by "spoiled brats", rich kids who have never known the realities of poverty and starvation.

But anorexia is a disease severe enough to cause the body great permanent injury. It can even prove fatal if ignored or unsuccessfully treated. Doctors are aware of the risk involved in attempting to help the anorexic gain weight. Not only will the course of treatment be a long and trying struggle — many anorexics maintain their symptoms over years and even decades — but if he loses the battle, he may lose the patient. Not many doctors, novice interns or busy seasoned residents, will give so freely of their time or take on such an unpromising challenge.

Physicians and psychiatrists frequently fail to diagnose the disease. Obsessional eating habits, weight loss and hyperactivity can be dismissed as "a simple diet". Even more commonly, the patient may appear healthy and be a normal weight due to compulsive overeating and purging. Because anorexia is so intractable a disease, doctors may find it more convenient to deny that the symptoms are present.

A vast ignorance about the disease itself must contribute to these problems of diagnosis and treatment. So much more attention is given to more traditional disorders such as schizophrenia. During the months I spent in one particular out-patient treatment setting, I felt the effects of this discrimination in a very personal way. The schizophrenic patients for instance, were segregated in special therapy groups geared to educating them about the disease and sharing in the experience of its symptoms. The eating disorder patients tended to be tossed anonymously into a general category "personality conflicts" group where one found it easy to avoid ever raising the subject of eating. Compounding the problem was the therapists' lack of knowledge. On too many occasions, I was the one to point out the recurrence of symptomatic behaviour and prompt them on how to proceed with my treatment.

In the course of my own treatment for anorexia I have seen therapists of almost every possible persuasion, as an inpatient and an outpatient, in both Canada and the U.S. And, in each situation I feel I have suffered from a serious avoidance of innovative research and a deep prejudice against the disease and its victims. I have come to believe that anorexia is a feminist issue, not merely a "fad disease" or "eating disorder".

The anorexic parodies the traditional woman's role by cooking, cleaning and serving others, always remaining passive, always being "good". Yet the while she is in silent revolt, eliminating every feminine characteristic of her physical appearance. As the pounds melt away, so do hips and breasts. At some point menstruation stops and often sexual feelings and fantasies as well. On the surface she works hard, achieving high marks in school or great perfection at work, always answering the demands of others. Inside, she tries to become invisible, in order not to burden, not to upset, not to exist.

Traditional treatment methods such as behaviour modification are often immediately successful in a hospital setting. The patient gains weight necessary for discharge. But too often, she has given in to authority only to please others. Upon release she returns to old behaviours and in some cases might attempt suicide, over the tragic loss of control she feels she has suffered because someone made her gain weight.

Hilde Bruch, the greatest pioneer of this illness, has often warned of the dangers inherent in such commonly used treatments as behaviour modification and psychoanalysis. From my own experience, I must agree. Anorexia cannot be cured by a doctor; it must be conquered by the victim. The anorexic will remain caught in the syndrome until she can find some realization of her own worth as an individual, possessing valid feelings and a valid identity. Perhaps the only real cure is anger, a great release of the suppressed anger society does not want a woman to express. As long as treatment methods ignore this and attempt to manipulate the patient into set roles of behaviour, the symptoms will not be removed. The anorexic must actively rebel against the moulds she is pressed into by others.

With the aid of an affirming and warm female therapist who will not fear the rage or censor the emerging person, she must construct for herself an identity that is real and vital. No male therapist can ever fully identify with this process of rebirth.

The increasing incidence of anorexia is a problem for both the individual sufferer and a society that encourages the suppression of a full, female identity. My hope is that women in the field of medicine will take the lead and demand the time and money necessary for research in this disease.

This letter is reprinted from "Montages", the newsletter of the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, Toronto. Beth Lesser was a patient at the Clarke Institute, where she underwent treatment for anorexia nervosa.

Books

No anorexic could become detached enough from her obsession (we are talking about self-starvation) to consider food affectionately as "an incryption — a code which used a rudimentary part of language", or to "inadvertently (leave) a piece of food out beside the refrigerator."

In fact, according to Dr. Hilde Bruch, a U.S. psychologist whose innovative work with anorexics has been highly successful, their extreme hunger is the consuming element in their emotional disturbance. It is the key to their delusions of superiority. Their apparently superhuman ability to live through starvation gives them a feeling of control such as they have never had or dreamt of before. It ensures the attention they emotionally require. But Doyle has nonchalantly begun one of the eight short vignettes that comprise the book with "Before I lost my appetite . . ." — as if that were ever the case.

Eating disorders rarely have anything to do with the function of eating and digesting, but rather with the patient's extremely distorted attitude towards self, and the consequent mind/body dissociations. Anorexics desire as much to control bodily exhaustion as to control their hunger — they exercise constantly.

And control is the prime motivating factor of anorexia nervosa. In the advent of the disease, anorexics, whose worlds have been expanding logarithmically with age, responsibility and puberty, shrink to a manageable size. Demands made on them by peers and parents cease, and they become socially ostracized automatons. Fear of adolescence and a feeling of increased helplessness triggers this rigorous and regressive self-discipline. Anorexic starvation is not the innovative communication structure Doyle would have us think. It is not even a good analogy for one. It is a psychic aberration which grows out of emotional paralysis rather than a logical examination of alternatives to language.

To diverge briefly from Doyle's book, some current diagnostic information may help in understanding the disease and the consequent failings of the book. The parents of anorexic girls all appear to have given their daughters so much, materially and emotionally, that these girls feel that they do not have the right to self-determination, or the ability to lead their own lives. They feel they can never repay what their parents have

given them. The main reason why their confusion manifests itself in this way rather than any other is that they have rarely set any social interaction patterns according to their own individual needs. Consequently they have trouble differentiating between their needs and others' needs, as well as between what is an emotional need, what is a bodily need, what is a sexual need and so on.

The advent of sexuality in a child's life is the final and most definite break from the family. It represents her irrefutable individuality. The anorexic panics in the face of the choices and possibilities sexuality presents, and is disconcerted by her bodily changes to the point of severe perceptual distortions. Suddenly the body becomes a battle ground for control of her burgeoning life. Anorexics come to feel sure that their bodies can't and shouldn't assimilate food, and normal female functions repel them. In all cases of anorexia, menstruation ceases utterly and natural bodily curves all but disappear — in extreme cases they do.

Doyle says matter-of-factly, "Rarely are their lives dramatically altered by the weight loss." Yet according to Hilde Bruch in her book *The Golden Cage*, drastic changes in the electrolyte balance and other metabolic and hormonal changes make "the resolution of the precipitating psychological issues difficult if not impossible. The whole behaviour may be so severely disturbed that it borders on psychotic disorganization." Until recently, 10 per cent of all victims of anorexia have died of the disease.

The sensational aspects of such a disease — its victims' obsession with the primary element of human survival — makes it a subject of fascination and revulsion to those who do not suffer from it. Its attractions as a hot topic are obvious. It will remain attractive in the same way as schizophrenia is until such time as the reality of both mental illnesses is brought home to the romantics who abuse them.

Though what Doyle is trying to say about communication systems and their control might be of interest, her misunderstanding of the disease she uses as a metaphor cancels the weight of her message. People will read this book because of an interest in anorexia nervosa, not because of an interest in linguistics.

If you are interested in anorexia nervosa, I suggest you read *Eating Disorders* and *The Golden Cage*, both by Dr. Hilde Bruch. If you are interested in systemic linguistics, read Roland Barthes. Judith Doyle should stop using *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Maclean's* as reference material for her metaphors, long enough to think clearly about what it is she wants to say on the subject. ■

Martha Fleming, Toronto free-lance writer, is also the video curator at Art Metropole and an associate editor of *CENTERFOLD*.

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Judith Doyle, Anorexial.

Who/what creates the identity of the body (text), distributes (represses) its functions, organizes (controls) its behaviour: the givens of the body, its limits a priori.

Polyvocal, the body does not know its identity nor function; anorexial, the machine breaks down. It turns on, it turns off.

The obsessive does not know causality -- "That's it!" is its intensive response. Loss of the subject, loss of identity; loss of causality/narrative, character development. Intensive moments, intensive . . . traces, writings, inscriptions.

The obsessive, hysteric looks for an issue, not for its freedom; from the edge, looks in and moves out. It maps a network, machinates a body. Symbiotic and peripheral, it builds a machine on the larger social machine, repeating Its structure, using Its tools, Its cast off or unprotected pieces/processes, perverting Its logic, developing and intensifying Its obsessions. Inscribing a code, a system on its ciphered body, it syphons a flow.

Doyle's Anorexial is a machine, a node in this network, our reading, an impulse that creates the network, and our subjects, traces of the effect. In its effect, it is an effect.